


# Gender complementarity: Panacea for Communal Leadership in Nigeria (A Gender Discourse of Akachi Ezeigbo's *The Last of The Strong Ones*)

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 15 Apr 2023; Received in revised form: 12 May 2023; Accepted: 22 May 2023; Available online: 02 Jun 2023</p> <p>©2023 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p>  <p><b>Keywords— gender complementarity, leadership, equity, community</b></p>	<p><i>The paper examines the idea of gender complementarity as a solution for communal leadership, using the representative novel, The Last of the Strong Ones for elucidation. The novel depicts the life of the imaginary Igbo community of Okperi's residents and their struggle for leadership and self-determination. The paper looks at how men and women collaborate in positions of leadership to keep the community's stability. The paper emphasizes the value of gender complementarity as it promotes inclusivity and equity by taking a feminist approach. The paper makes the case that female and male collaboration and advice are essential for communal leadership to succeed. The protagonists in the novel show how gender complementarity enables them to appreciate and recognize each other's contributions and skills, resulting in a more dynamic and inclusive leadership structure, as well as promoting gender parity in leadership roles and subverting gender stereotypes. Overall, by highlighting the beneficial effects of gender complementarity in collective leadership frameworks, the paper contributes to the conversation on gender and leadership.</i></p>

## 1. Introduction

Nigeria's Igbo people have a rich cultural heritage and a long history of community living and government. Men and women usually shared leadership roles in traditional Igbo culture, with each gender contributing in a unique but complementary way to the decision-making process. Women were typically in charge of the community's internal affairs, such as health, education, and social welfare, while men were typically in charge of matters pertaining to the community's foreign affairs, such as trade and diplomacy. Despite the long-standing legacy of gender complementarity in Igbo society, the beginning of colonization and the subsequent adoption of Western techniques of administration led to the marginalization of women in

leadership and decision-making roles. Women have continued to face major obstacles to their participation in politics and leadership positions today, as a result of this marginalization. With growing acknowledgment of the need for gender complementarity in leadership and governance, there have been several recent attempts to address this imbalance (Ezeigbo 2005)

The Last of the Strong Ones by Akachi Ezeigbo serves as a potent example of the value of gender complementarity in communal leadership. The story



of a group of women who are compelled to assume leadership responsibilities in the absence of the males because they have all left to fight in a war is told in the novel, which is set in a traditional Igbo community. The novel underlines the distinctive contributions that women can make to leadership and governance through their experiences, and it emphasizes the significance of gender complementarity in ensuring successful and long-lasting community development.

According to the concept of gender complementarity, both men and women have distinctive skills and abilities that can be used in concert to accomplish common objectives. This idea is based on the knowledge that gender differences offer opportunities for mutual enrichment and collaboration rather than being a cause of inequality. In many African civilizations, where traditional gender roles are frequently defined by complements rather than conflict, gender complementarity has been a major issue. The *Last of the Strong Ones*, a novel by Akachi Ezeigbo, presents the idea of gender complementarity as a solution for communal leadership.

For generations, various African societies have utilised the concept of gender complementarity. The concept holds that gender roles in society are diverse but complementary and that cooperation yields the best outcomes. Men are viewed as household heads who must provide for their families in many African civilizations, while women are in charge of managing the household and raising the children. However, the equality of men and women is not threatened by this division of labor. Instead, it is believed that both sexes may utilise their individual skills to produce the finest outcomes. (Ibeanu and Ibeanu 2015)

Community life in traditional African communities places a high value on communal leadership. Typically, a council of respected elders serves as the community's leader (USAID, 2016). However, women have typically been restricted to supporting roles and their contributions to communal leadership have been disregarded. The crucial part that women can play in communal leadership has recently received more attention. The idea of gender complementarity has gained popularity as a means of utilizing both men's and women's skills to establish effective leadership in the community.

The plot of the novel takes place in a fictitious Igbo community where men typically hold the majority of the leadership positions. Ojebeta, the main character, defies this expectation and emerges as a strong and capable leader, demonstrating that women are capable of holding leadership positions as well. Ojebeta's

leadership philosophy is centered on the complementary roles of men and women, and she exploits both genders' abilities to construct an amicable and welcoming community, as well as providing a fascinating description of communal leadership in a traditional Igbo society, the paper also emphasizes the value of complementarity between the sexes in attaining good governance and community growth. We will investigate the numerous ways that gender complementarity is displayed in communal leadership, through an analysis of the novel, as well as the advantages that this strategy can have for society as a whole.

## 2. Literature review

The idea of gender complementarity and its function in leadership, particularly in African countries, has been discussed by a number of different authors. Oyeronke Oyewumi is one such author who discusses the Yoruba idea of "gender complementarity without hierarchy." In Yoruba society, according to Oyewumi, there is no hierarchy between men and women; instead, they each have distinct but complementary responsibilities. According to her, the Western models of gender relations that are founded on hierarchical power structures and binary gender roles can be usefully replaced by this gender relations model (Oyewumi 1997).

Ifi Amadiume is another author, who has written about gender complementarity in African societies. 'Male Daughters, Female Husbands', a work of literature by Amadiume, examines the place of women in pre-colonial African communities. She argues that women played significant roles in governance and leadership in many African communities, but that European colonizers frequently ignored or marginalized these efforts. According to Amadiume (1982), more sophisticated knowledge of gender roles in these communities will help us develop more inclusive and equitable leadership models. These authors' theories on gender complementarity can serve as a helpful framework for comprehending how communal leadership is portrayed in Akachi Ezeigbo's novel *The Last of the Strong Ones*. According to Ezeigbo, traditional male-dominated leadership styles are ineffective, and a more inclusive one that acknowledges the complementary responsibilities of men and women is required. The leadership of Nwamgba and Nwibe, who cooperate to accomplish the community's objectives, is an example of gender complementarity.

In this paper, the value of collective leadership in the face of external dangers constitutes the novel's major themes. The slave trade and colonialism are both at work in the Igbo civilization portrayed in the book, and the people are fighting to preserve their way of life. They must cooperate and make decisions as a group, if they are to survive. However, the male-dominated traditional form of leadership is ineffective, because of their disagreements and inability to decide as a group, the men's leadership is ineffectual.

One of the prominent themes in the novel is the clash between tradition and modernity. The story is set in a time when Nigeria is transitioning from a traditional society to a modern one. The people in the village are torn between preserving their customs and embracing the changes that come with modernization. This is evident in the conflicts between the young people who want to adopt Western ways and the elders who want to hold onto their traditions. For instance, when Okudo returns to the village after studying in the city, he is seen as a symbol of modernity and progress, which is at odds with the traditional ways of the community. He is often in conflict with his father, who represents the traditional values of the community. Okudo's father complains that his son has become too westernized and has lost touch with the culture and traditions of their people. He says, "You have forgotten the language of our people. You have become so westernized that you no longer understand our ways" (Ezeigbo, 1996).

The oppression of women is a subject that the novel also examines. The novel explores the predicament of women in patriarchal countries where males are in charge and women are seen as less valuable. Women are frequently subjected to forced marriages and denied basic rights including access to an education. The character of Nwanyibuife, who is coerced into marrying Okudo's father against her will, exemplifies this. She is portrayed as a victim of the patriarchal society, which denies women the freedom to select the partners they desire. Nwanyibuife confides in Okudo, "I have always been a victim of men's decisions. I have no control over what happens to me because I was coerced into this marriage against my will," (Ezeigbo 1996).

The theme of identity is also explored in the novel. The characters struggle to define their identity in a changing society. They are torn between their African heritage and the influence of Western culture. For instance, Okudo struggles to find his place in the community because he has been exposed to Western education and ways of life. He feels torn between his

African identity and the Western values he has been taught in school. He says, "I feel like I don't belong here. I have been exposed to Western education and ways of life, and I feel like I am no longer part of this community" (Ezeigbo, 1996). This struggle for identity is also evident in the character of Adamma, who is torn between her African identity and the Western lifestyle she has adopted. The theme of cultural preservation is also explored in the novel. The characters in the book are struggling to preserve their culture and traditions in the face of westernization. The elders in the community are determined to pass on their customs and values to the younger generation, but they face resistance from the young people who are eager to adopt western ways. This conflict is evident in the character of Okudo, who is torn between his desire to embrace western values and his obligation to uphold the traditions of his people. In a conversation with his father, Okudo says, "I understand the importance of our traditions, but we cannot ignore the changes that are happening around us. We need to find a balanced way of preserving our culture while also adapting to the changes in the world" (Ezeigbo, 1996).

Another theme that is explored in the novel is corruption and abuse of power by those in authority. The book highlights the corrupt practices of government officials and traditional rulers who use their power to exploit the people. This is evident in the character of Chief Nwabunor, who is portrayed as a corrupt traditional ruler who uses his power to oppress and exploit the people in his community. He is involved in shady deals and uses his position to amass wealth and power. In a conversation with his friend, Chief Nwabunor says, "I have to make money while I am still in power. Who knows what will happen when I am no longer in charge?" (Ezeigbo, 1996). Similarly, the novel also examines the issue of the value of education. The importance of education in fostering social mobility and economic empowerment is highlighted throughout the book. The book's characters recognize the value of education and are prepared to make sacrifices to give their kids the education they deserve. The character of Okudo, whose father is prepared to sell his farm in order to pay for his son's schooling, demonstrates this. The cycle of injustice and poverty in the community is said to be broken through education. The father of Okudo tells his son, "Education is the secret to prosperity. You may accomplish everything in life with education, as stated by Ezeigbo 1996).

### 3. Conclusion

A compelling case is made for the value of gender complementarity in communal leadership in *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The novel shows how complementing male and female collaboration can result in a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous society. Leaders can build a more equal and productive society by appreciating and recognizing the distinct strengths of both genders. In the context of Igbo society, where traditional gender roles are strongly engrained, this viewpoint is especially pertinent. The novel questions these conventions and offers a vision of a society that is more inclusive and equal. As a result, the novel provides insightful information about how gender complementarity can change leadership and advance a more equitable and peaceful society. It is crucial to understand the role that gender complementarity plays in attaining good governance and community development as societies throughout the world continue to struggle with issues of gender equality and the inclusion of women in leadership positions. Societies may attain a more balanced and equitable approach to governance and safeguard the wellbeing of all of their members by respecting the distinctive contributions of both men and women and encouraging collaboration and cooperation between them. *The Last of the Strong Ones* serves as a motivating example for future initiatives to advance gender equality and women's empowerment and acts as a potent reminder of the value of gender complementarity in communal leadership.

The novel thus examines several issues that affect African societies. The conflict between tradition and modernity, the mistreatment of women, the struggle for identity, the value of cultural preservation, the misuse of power by those in positions of authority, and the significance of education are all highlighted in the novel. Ezeigbo offers a riveting commentary on the difficulties facing African societies as they make the shift from traditional to modern ways of life through the characters and their experiences. The book serves as a potent reminder of how crucial it is to protect cultural history while simultaneously accepting change and advancement, through gender complementarity.

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