

**THE TRAVAILS OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN ADEBAYO'S STAY WITH  
ME AND EZEIGBO'S THE LAST OF THE STRONG ONES**

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**CERTIFICATION**

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## **DEDICATION**

This research work is dedicated to God Almighty, for his favor, mercy and provision all through my degree program in the University of Benin, Benin City. I would also like to dedicate this work to my mother Mrs. CHIZOBA ORIABURE for her constant support and advice.

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## ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the challenges faced by African women in Abayomi Adebayo's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The research explores themes of patriarchy, infertility, polygamy, political exclusion, economic disenfranchisement, and the psychological trauma experienced by women within traditional and colonial African societies. Through the protagonist Yejide in *Stay With Me*, the study highlights the societal pressure placed on women to conform to gender expectations, particularly in marriage and motherhood, and the devastating consequences of infertility. Similarly, *The Last of the Strong Ones* presents a broader communal struggle, showcasing the collective

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Purpose of Study

This study aims to examine the travails faced by African woman through Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adomora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Exploring the themes of struggles and oppression, aiming to empower these women to reclaim their identities and promote understanding of women's autonomy among men

### 1.2 Scope of Study

The two novels selected are Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay with me* and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. This study focuses mainly on the recurring themes of infertility and psychological trauma in Adebayo Abayomi's *stay with me* and political responsibility and decision making against women and the liberation and rebuilding women's identity in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *last of the strong ones*

### 1.3 Methodology

Creswell defines the research methodology as the system of collecting data for a research project. Therefore, this section presents the methodology that has been used to conduct this research.

This section presents the methodology used for this research, which is primarily qualitative. A qualitative design is an inquiry process aimed at understanding social or human problems, forming a holistic picture through words, and providing detailed views of respondents in a natural setting (Creswell,2). This research is a desktop study based on previously.

## Published Sources

To analyze the texts in line with the topic "The Travails of That African Woman: A Reflection on Women," this study will employ thematic analysis, focusing on recurring themes of struggle, identity, and resilience portrayed in Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Qualitative methodology will allow for a deep exploration of character experiences, societal expectations, and the depiction of gender roles within these narratives.

By examining character dialogues, internal thoughts, and narrative structures, the research will draw connections between the characters' challenges and broader issues faced by African women. Qualitative analysis will illuminate how these narratives reflect and critique social norms, cultural expectations, and the resilience of women in the face of adversity.

Additionally, qualitative methods are effective in identifying intangible factors that may not be readily apparent in the research issue (Mambo, 13). As this study employs qualitative methods, it doesn't involve fieldwork but focuses instead on a literary analysis of imaginative short fiction.

### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

The theory used in this study is African feminism. Propounded by Molaria OgundipeLeslie- A Nigerian scholar who introduced STIWANISM, a feminist framework that focuses on social transformation, particularly for African women. She critiques Western feminist perspectives for failing to address African realities and emphasizes the need for African women to be involved in nation-building.

### **1.4.1 African Feminism**

It is a justice that aims to create a discernible difference between women who were colonised and those who were deemed the colonisers, and a social movement that aims to raise a global consciousness which sympathises with African women's histories, present realities and future expectations.

### **1.4.2 Concept of Feminism**

Different scholars have defined the term feminism. Bersey and Moore define feminism as a "specific kind of political discourse; a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" (Bersey and Moore 116). Sadek defines feminism as the movement for the social, political and economic equality of men and women. It is maintained that women and men are treated differently by society and that women have been isolated from participating fully in all available social arenas and institutions. Feminism is the movement seeking reorganisation of the world on the basis of gender equality in all human relations. It is a movement which rejects every differentiation between individuals upon the grounds of gender and that seeks to abolish all gender privileges and burdens, and which strives to set up the recognition of the common humanity of women and men as the foundation of law and the custom (Kramarae and Treichler 158).

Mcfadden says that feminism is the rejection of patriarchy and is also a celebration of freedom for women everywhere (Mcfadden 3). Feminist theory seeks to analyse the conditions which shape women's lives and to explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman. Feminists refuse to accept that inequalities between women

and men are natural and cannot be avoided and that they should be questioned.

### **1.4.3 African Feminism**

African women's writing emerged in the 1970s mainly with the aim of overturning and avoiding pejorative male representation of African womanhood. Feminist writers and activists sought to demonstrate that they were relevant to the African context and in particular that they did not want to imitate their Western feminist counterparts (Mekgwe 28). Therefore, African feminist literature concerns itself with the liberty of all African people. Although it has taken the overriding notion of emancipation from the global feminist movement, African feminist discourse shows concerns that are situated in African cultures, questioning the features of traditional African cultures without criticising them because these might be viewed differently by different classes of women (Mekgwe, 29).

According to Sadek, unlike Western feminism, African feminism does not work against men but rather accommodates men (Sadek 172). Chukwuma also notes that African feminism is not anti-male neither is it anti-mother. Male is not 'the other', as, according to Nnaemeka each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself. Each needs a complement of the other, despite the possession of unique features of its own." Chinweizu (as cited in Chukwuma, 20) is in agreement with the interdependence of men and women and argues that:

Because every man has a boss, his wife or his mother, or some other woman in his life, man may rule the world, but women rule men who rule the world. Thus, contrary to

appearance, woman is boss, the overall boss, of the world. (p. 2)

The above quotation indicates that African men are complemented by women and that women are ready to work together with men to achieve their desired goals. African feminism seeks to involve men in the transformation process, which leads Mekgwe to supporting the perspective that if African feminism is to succeed as a humane information project, it cannot accept separatism from the opposite sex. Avoiding male exclusion becomes one of the defining features of African feminism. For example, Amaka in Nwapa's *One is Enough*, after the failure of her marriage, tells her mother:

No mother I have said goodbye to husbands.

Her mother replied that is better. Goodbye to husbands not goodbye to men. They are two different things?"

Even though she is divorced, she still needs men in her life. Sadek is not surprised at this phenomenon since most African women are also committed to the institution of the family and certainly do not want to do without their men. However, they do not want to be maltreated and are readily interested in working out guidelines that defend women and get rid of the preconceptions against them.

Apart from power dominance, African women voice the importance of their roles as mothers and career women and they characterise African feminism as family orientated, arguing that African feminism entails the creation of space for women to participate in the management of the well-being of their societies (Attanga 308).

Similarly, Oyewumi argues that African feminism does not focus on male dominance with female subordination or on fighting battles with men or on fertility rates and

poverty, but also challenging the status quo, describing the ways patriarchies in Africa prevented them from realising their full potential. On the Africa continent, millions of women and girls have been and are being prevented from reaching their full potential as human beings, whether that be the possibility of being writers, artists, doctors and other professions outside traditional roles assigned to women. The African feminist approach then is one that makes an attempt to educate, empower and elevate these women to a position where they can own their power not against men, but alongside them (Azodo 201).

Furthermore, Attanga indicates that Africa in itself is very diverse and therefore talking about "African feminism can also be interpreted to mean feminism in Africa" which essentialises Africa by implying that all African women live under the same condition and face the same challenges. Attanga is of the opinion that feminist scholars should be careful not to treat Africa as a single entity because women of the North face different problems to those in the South of the Sahara. For example, Moroccan women face problems that relate more to Arab women in the Middle East as opposed to Black women living South of Sahara. The diversity of Africa and its women's experience complicates an attempt to formulate and theorise an African feminism.

Additionally, Davies (as cited in Da Silva's) points out that African feminism is also about the necessity to overcome the gender disparities brought by colonialism. According to Attanga and Nnaemeka African feminism is very dependent on temporal scale shaped by political eras. These eras are pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial

Africa and as a result of these eras, there are African feminisms. Thus, African feminism should not contain a monolithic view of the continent, but rather a pluralism (African feminisms) that encompass the fluidity and dynamism of different cultural beliefs, historical forces, localised cultural beliefs and localised women movements (Attanga and Nnaemeka).

Akin-Aina clarifies that African feminisms are still changing continuously based on the context in which they are wrought. It is crucial that African feminists pay close attention to the continent's history following colonisation but also the present struggle under neocolonialisation and neoliberalisation; all these periods contribute to changes to African feminisms. Thus, Nnaemeka states that to meaningfully explain the phenomenon called African feminism. It must be documented in an African environment. African feminism must not be treated in a reactive sense but as proactive. It has life of its own that is rooted in the African environment. It has a specific place of origin, which is Africa. African feminism must be built on the indigenous for any development to make progress in Africa. Ake (as cited in Nnaemeka) highlights that:

We cannot significantly advance the development of Africa unless we take African societies seriously as they are, not as they ought to be or even as they might be; that sustainable development cannot occur unless we build on the indigenous. (p. 376)

This means if African feminism is built on what is indigenous; it creates feelings of ownership that opens the door of participation and democracy amongst women and men. African feminism needs to be understood contextually because issues that may be of concern to women in one place and time may be completely different for other

women in another place and time. According to Tegomoh, expectations of women can be different in different settings. What is considered feminine and appropriate in one setting is considered inappropriate or indecent in other. Therefore, being a feminist can be challenged from many standpoints because of the religious and cultural diversity on the continent. "Feminist activists are seen as rebels, vandals, home breakers, as disrespectful with no sense of being a woman in them. They are generally frowned upon because of the way such women carry themselves" (Tegomoh 27). Tegomoh further highlights that the negative reception of feminism by African scholars is because of its failure to address the many specific African historical and cultural contexts. It attempts to globalise African women's experience and ignore cultural factors. African women initially rejected feminism perceiving it as a Western ideology imported to Africa to ruin the family structure. Therefore, some African thinkers have rejected the word completely, considering it as "unAfrican" and declaring "feminist as sexually unattractive and humourless man hatters, trouble makers, Westernised and sexually disreputable women who pose a threat to tradition culture and society" (Horowitz, 50).

Moreover, Kama has indicated that in Kenya for example, the electorate has continue to have a negative attitude to the term feminism and they would find it difficult to associate with those who refer to themselves as such. This may lead women who describe their position as feminist not to say so publicly for fear of being labeled as against men or as radical women who stand against family values. This could be a reason why some African women distance themselves from the notion of feminism

even if their works support it. According to Alkali, Talif, Yahya and Jan, it is surprising that many African female writers declare that they are not feminists, as if it were a crime to be a feminist. Ogundipe-Leslie (as cited in Alkali et al.) finds it very difficult to understand why African women such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and even Mariama Ba distance themselves from supporting the theory of feminism. There is a contradiction between what they have written and the theory they seek to deny, which might show that there is misunderstanding of what feminism is or that they are afraid of the stigma against those who associate with it (Selasi).

Although African women generally do not want to be associated with Western feminism, some scholars find African women to have taken the path that is taken by their counterparts in the West. Frank (as cited in Verba) places African women writers into Western feminist frames by speaking of their work as a more radical extension of the Western feminist tradition. Frank indicates that Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emechata and Ama Ata Aidoo's novels are more radical, more militant than their Western counterparts are. To Frank, the path that is taken by African women writers is more intense than the one taken by Western writers.

Notwithstanding, the rejection of the term feminism in Africa has inspired some women to come up with alternatives that better describe the conditions of an African context.

Ogundipe-Leslie pronounces that when sexuality became a part of the feminist agenda, you would have thought that it would be something that brought unity amongst women, however, it created more divisions because it distracted African feminism

from the focus of economic empowerment of poor women of the South and too much attention was paid to African women in matters of sex. African women and diasporic African women rejected the term feminism, as they argued that feminism is in reference to white middle class women and not inclusive of other experiences of women and class (Ogundipe-Leslie).

Alkali et al. indicate that later on the term womanism, after Alice Walker's term, was adopted instead of the term feminism. It has been considered by some African women as black centred, unlike the Western feminism. Ogundipe- Leslie clarifies that black women argued that womanism is more inclusive of people and it focuses on differences between women themselves. Womanism is the lived experience of women of colour and is also based on the struggle of the African women. Alice Walker prefers to use womanism and defines it as "a black feminist or feminist of colour... commitment to survival wholeness of entire people, male and female...not as separatist, except periodically, for health ... love struggle, love the forks and loves herself..." (Amadiume 20). These quotations serve as an introduction to the appreciation of women recognition in giving their voice. The objective is to give women a voice and place in affairs that are directly affecting them.

In addition, according to Panirao, womanism is a movement towards harmony and progress. It is a liberating movement focused on women of colour, it also aims at the essential wholeness of any race. As a move towards gender equality, it is tolerant because it promotes the elevation of both male and female. The author concluded that womanism is an answer to the plea of women of colour to address issues that the

white feminist movement fails to include, especially those issues imperative to the daily life experience of the women of colour. Akung points out that the needs of black women are not the same as those of white women, womanism desires that man and women are complementary and must be in harmony in the home and society at large (Akung 27-28)

Moreover, Ogundipe-Leslie is one of the women who dissociate themselves from the word feminism. Ogundipe-Leslie "African feminism for me, therefore, must include the issue around the woman's body, her person, her immediate family, her society, her nation, her continent and their locations within the international economic order that determines African politics and impacts on the women". She later preferred using the term STIWANISM because of issues that revolve around using the term feminism. Attanga explains that the general feminist's approach of STIWANISM, from the acronym STIWA – Social Transformation in Africa Including Women, was found to advocate for correction of negative aspects of African cultures, without necessarily employing the Western feminism models. "STIWANISM is designed to discuss African women's needs and agendas in context of strategies fashioned in the environment created by indigenous culture (Andima & Tjiramanga 81). The founder, Ogundipe-Leslie, declares that African women need to participate as equal partners in social transformation in Africa and they need to be conscious not only of the fact that she is a woman but that she is both an African and a third world person. According to Andima and Tjiramanga, African women need to be aware of the context in which their feminist manner is made. This implies that they must be conscious of their

African customs so they aspire to act according to their own African customs and beliefs.

Motherism is another branch of African feminism. Ode defines motherism "as an African feminist theory that sees the relationship of women in terms of reproduction and child care" (Ode 90). It considers that it is mothers' responsibility to bring up a child in an African family. In Africa, a woman lives for her child (Alkali et al. 13). They want to be present in the child's growing life and be there for him/her. Acholonu supports the theory of motherism, which refers to the ability of the women to nurture a child into adulthood and that she ought to be the person to care for the child as it is the mother who gave it life.

The weapon of motherism is tolerance, mutual understanding and love of all sexes. A motherist can be someone who is committed to the survival and maintenance of mother earth. Acholonu makes it clear that a motherist can be a man or woman; it does not have sex barriers. Therefore, she dismisses the term patriarchy and opts for patrifocality because to her men and women are complementary in traditional society. Acholonu feels that Buchi Emecheta, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie and Ama Ata Aidoo "misunderstood feminism to be synonymous with violent confrontation, militancy and aggression", maintaining that "Alice Walker's brand of womanism is unsatisfactory because her womanist is first and foremost lesbian" (Acholonu 92). Critics like Selasi and Alkali et al. are not in agreement with Acholonu's claims; if Acholonu understood feminism the way it was supposed to be then she would not have come up with

motherism, which she wishes would replace some of the theories in existence, because the feminist work of the women she criticises is not violent, confrontation, militant as she claims.

Nnaemeka is of the belief that African feminism is indigenous and opens doors for inclusion for both men and women. Nnaemeka sees the brand of feminism that is unfolding in the African context and calls it nego-feminism (Nnaemeka 372). "Negofeminism is the feminism of negotiation, second, nego-feminism stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared value in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance." African women's willingness to negotiate with and around men even in difficult times is common and there are men willing to listen and work together with women. There are men of good will and we cannot treat them as monolithic. Ba dedicates her novel *So Long a Letter* to men of goodwill to indicate that there are good men out there and there are bastards too. African women are more inclined to reach out and work with men in achieving their goals; through negotiation, accommodation and compromise.

Nnaemeka Though there are several African feminism theories they are marked by contradiction, exclusion and uncertainly, all of which signify the difficulty of proposing single theoretical frameworks for people with different cultures and histories (Nkealah 21).

For this reason, it may be difficult to choose a theory that can be used throughout the continent.

This study evaluates the reaction of women writers to the status quo of women in societies. Africa is diverse with diverse cultures and traditions, thus the reaction of these women writers is determined by these difference. African women fiction writers raise and address issues of misrepresentation and representation of women, the education of women, accesses of women to the economic means of survival, motherhood, women in the domestic sphere, women's roles in politics and revolution, sexuality and the direct treatment of women by men, and men by women (Verba, 19). As aforementioned, women react due to different issues affecting them. Akung 281 points out that in the case of Nigeria, feminist novels came as a reaction to the negative image of women as presented in male authored works; the image of women in male- authored works has been conditioned by male ambition. So it becomes a problem for the women to create a parallel image to correct the image that is negatively presented by men (Akung 281). For example, in Amadi's *The Concubine*, the woman is presented as voiceless with no power of her own and is limited.

Akung continues to say that the female has risen from ignorance and naivety to experience and selfhood; she is no longer defined by the man, but rather defines her role in the society. This is seen in the creation of assertive female characters, like in Nwapa's *Efuru*. *Efuru* refuses to allow traditional beliefs to stand between her and her love by marrying without a bride price. She allows assertiveness of the female voice and launches women into the commercial economy as a means of economic independence (Akung, 20). So women voiced their pains rhetorically in order to end patriarchy in their societies. However, this observation calls for further research about

this phenomenon as there is a general dearth of literature focusing on this critical area of feministic rhetoric.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

This section reviews previous scholarly works related to the depiction of the African woman's experiences, focusing on Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*, to provide critical insights and establish a foundation for the current study.

The scholarship by Odewumi) offers a detailed examination of women's empowerment in traditional Igbo society, with a specific focus on Akachi AdimoraEzeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The study underscores the role of Igbo women as influential figures before and during the colonial era, highlighting their political, social, and economic contributions. It demonstrates how organizations like Umuada and Alutaradi empowered women in patriarchal settings by providing platforms for collective action, such as during the 1929 Aba Women's War. The analysis also discusses the disruptive influence of colonialism on pre-existing systems of female empowerment and explores unique cultural practices like "woman marriage" and *Ikombara*, which afforded women social and economic agency.

In contrast, the current research, which examines *The Last of the Strong Ones* alongside Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me*, adopts a broader African feminist lens to analyze the multifaceted struggles and triumphs of African women. While Odewumi's work focuses on empowerment through traditional structures and colonial resistance, the current research delves into the intersection of personal and communal

travails, such as infertility, patriarchal pressures, and socio-political upheaval, as depicted in both novels.

The present study extends beyond Igbo-specific traditions to encompass a comparative analysis of African women's experiences across diverse cultural and temporal contexts. Both studies share a commitment to uncovering women's resilience and agency in the face of patriarchal oppression. However, while Odedjimi's work emphasizes collective and structural empowerment, the current research broadens the scope to include individual emotional and psychological struggles, thus offering a more holistic view of African women's lives.

Furthermore, Omolola Ladele's scholarship on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* provides a critical exploration of the intersections between gender, space, and political agency, underscoring the significance of reconfiguring public spheres to accommodate women's voices and roles in shaping societal transformations. Ladele highlights how Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges both colonialist and patriarchal ideologies by presenting women as active participants in public discourse and as agents of socio-political change. By emphasizing concepts such as inclusivist public spaces, Ladele aligns her analysis with feminist theorists like Obioma Nnaemeka and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, demonstrating how African women writers seek to dismantle gendered and spatial hierarchies.

This resonates with the present research, which also examines the African woman's agency, but it diverges in scope and focus. While Ladele foregrounds spatial politics and collective agency in public spheres, the present study on *The Last of the Strong*

Ones and Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me* is grounded in African feminism and focuses on the personal and communal travails of African women. It investigates themes of motherhood, resilience, and identity, particularly in the private and domestic realms, where women's struggles and triumphs are most pronounced. Furthermore, while Ladele emphasizes the historicity of Umuga's conflict with colonial forces and the collaborative resistance of men and women, the current research leans more toward interrogating patriarchal oppression and the emotional toll on women within familial and communal spaces.

Both studies, however, converge on the need for a reimagined societal structure that validates women's contributions as central to the collective good, highlighting the transformative power of women's narratives in redefining cultural and social norms. Additionally, the scholarship provided focuses on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's activism in her poetry, emphasizing her commitment to nation-building and social reform through the lens of the Resource Mobilization Theory. This work analyzes themes like corruption, gender inequality, and cultural decay, positioning Adimora-Ezeigbo as a national patriot and advocate for societal transformation. The study also highlights her critical engagement with societal issues and strategies for fostering change, such as technological innovation, cultural framing, and moral guidance for leaders.

In contrast, the current research on *Stay With Me* by Ayòbámi Adébéyò and *The Last of the Strong Ones* by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo takes an African feminist perspective, centering on the travails of African women. While Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist stance is briefly acknowledged in the reviewed scholarship, the focus remains on her activist

approach to societal issues rather than her specific contributions to feminist discourse.

The present study diverges by emphasizing the intersection of gender and societal norms, exploring the lived experiences of African women, and addressing systemic oppression from a distinctly feminist lens.

Moreover, the reviewed scholarship employs the Resource Mobilization Theory to understand activism, whereas the current research applies African feminism, which prioritizes communal values, cultural identity, and the resilience of African women in confronting patriarchal structures. Despite these differences, both studies acknowledge Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary contributions to addressing societal challenges and fostering progress, albeit from distinct theoretical and thematic perspectives.

However, the review by Josephine Olufunmilayo Alexander provides a nuanced understanding of *Stay With Me* by Ayòbámi Adébáyò, highlighting themes of societal pressure, cultural expectations, and the deep psychological impacts of infertility and child loss within a patriarchal society. The narrative's focus on Yejide and Akin's struggles portrays the systemic and interpersonal consequences of rigid cultural norms, especially as they pertain to gender roles and family expectations.

In comparison, the present research examines similar themes through the lens of African Feminism, particularly focusing on the travails of African women as depicted in *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. While Alexander's review emphasizes *Stay With Me*'s intricate narrative and the emotional devastation caused by societal expectations, this research expands the scope by

placing Yejide's experiences alongside those of other African women, exploring collective resilience and resistance against patriarchal systems.

Both the review and this research underscore the psychological and emotional toll of childlessness in a patriarchal setting. However, the present research shifts towards African Feminism, not just critiquing the systems but also highlighting women's agency in navigating and challenging societal pressures. It contrasts Yejide's constrained choices with the collective agency depicted in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, thus offering a broader commentary on African women's lived experiences and resistance. While Alexander's review engages deeply with the narrative's emotive power, this research utilizes that foundation to interrogate the broader implications of gender, culture, and resilience in African literature. Also, the study titled "Everyday Stories and Untold Tales of Infertility: A Literary Examination of Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me* explores the gendered burden of infertility in African societies, analyzing societal narratives and their implications through feminism and masculinity theories. The research highlights how societal and cultural norms disproportionately blame women for infertility while largely exonerating men. It emphasizes the role of literature in exposing these issues, focusing on the stigmatization and dehumanization of women who are unable to conceive.

In comparison, the present research, "The Travails of the African Woman: Reflection of Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*," also addresses the challenges faced by African women, but it situates infertility within a broader discourse on African feminism. While the reviewed

scholarship focuses primarily on infertility as a lens to critique gender inequalities, the present research extends the analysis to include the multifaceted struggles of African women, such as patriarchal oppression, cultural expectations, and resilience. Both studies rely on feminist theory to critique societal norms, but the current research adopts a more intersectional lens by incorporating diverse aspects of African women's lived experiences beyond infertility.

Contrastingly, the reviewed work incorporates masculinity theory to analyze how patriarchal expectations also impact men, a perspective less emphasized in the current research. This additional layer highlights the reciprocal harm of rigid gender norms on women and men, an area that could enrich the current study's scope. Both works, however, converge in their aim to challenge patriarchal narratives and advocate for a more equitable representation of gender roles in African societies.

Meanwhile, the scholarship by Ariadna Serón-Navas examines Ama Ata Aidoo's transformative feminist legacy and its influence on Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*, with a focus on "cross-generational sororities" and the thematic interplay between motherhood and resistance to patriarchy. It emphasizes Aidoo's contribution to African feminism, which aligns gender liberation with anti-colonial and nationalist struggles, while also highlighting Adebayo's role in advancing a renewed African feminist consciousness that transcends generational and cultural boundaries.

In comparison, your present research also utilizes African feminism but expands its scope by juxtaposing Adebayo's *Stay with Me* with Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* to examine the unique struggles and resilience of African

women. While Serón-Navas centers her analysis on literary lineage and thematic evolution in motherhood and feminist resistance, your research explores the broader travails of African women, incorporating cultural, historical, and feminist dimensions. Both studies converge in their focus on women's resistance to patriarchy and the transformative power of African feminist thought. However, your research contrasts by engaging deeply with the intersection of African feminism and the socio-cultural dynamics shaping African women's lives across different historical and narrative contexts, moving beyond literary inheritance to broader socio-political implications.

In conclusion, this research stands out by uniquely exploring the intersection of African Feminism and the representation of the multifaceted struggles of African women in Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Unlike other scholarships that often focus on single thematic issues such as patriarchy or motherhood, this study provides a holistic analysis of how African women navigate personal, cultural, and societal challenges. By grounding the analysis in African Feminism, it highlights the resilience, agency, and collective empowerment of African women in distinctly African socio-cultural contexts. This research is worthwhile as it not only enriches existing feminist discourse but also amplifies the nuanced voices of African women, offering insights that are both academically significant and socially relevant.

#### 1.6 Thesis Statement

This research explores the experiences of African women through the lenses of African feminism, focusing on women education and women participation in politics

and the emotional struggles of childlessness in Adebayo Abayomi's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last Of The Strong Ones*

## CHAPTER TWO

### WOMAN'S EDUCATION AND WOMAN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

#### 2.1 Introduction

Women's participations as well as their contribution in the society are often not sufficiently highlighted because most literatures on their exploits in the societal development are relatively silent. This oftentimes makes an independent observer hastily conclude that women have contributed next to nothing in this very important aspect of human life.

Part of the history that the writer wanted us to remember was that the decision for the progress of the community lies on the heads of both the women and the men. These are selected people from the community who were assigned with the decisions of the community. She projected that we have four main actors of Umuada and Alutaradi who were called the Oluada.

They were chosen from the four villages of Umuga as the voice of the women, among the sixteen inner council committee members known as the Obufofo that were also selected from the four villages. Though, in the choosing of these traditional caretakers, it tilted towards the direction of the men who were twelve while women were four. Yet, the women were not bothered because at least, they were represented in the group of decision makers - the Obufofo who monitored closely the activities of the community.

The research tries to assert that women were not observers as was originally projected but active participants in the decision taking of the council of Obufofo and therefore

needed a little space to be fully involved in the affairs of the society such as in the villages, town unions and so on.

In the novel used for this study, the Oluada met from time to time to discuss issues concerning them that will lead to the development of the community and then relate it to the Obufo whenever they had a meeting. It was in one of those meetings that one of the members of Oluada commented on the intrusion of the Kosiri.

## **2.2 Understanding Patriarchy and the Oppression of Women**

Patriarchy, deeply entrenched in many African societies, dictates gender roles that often subordinate women. This systemic oppression manifests in various facets of life, including marriage, childbirth, and inheritance rights. Both *Stay With Me* by Ayobami Adebayo and *The Last of the Strong Ones* by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo critically examine these patriarchal structures, highlighting the societal pressures and expectations placed upon women.

### **Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me***

In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's journey underscores the societal pressure to bear children, reflecting the patriarchal notion that a woman's worth is tied to her fertility. Her desperation to conceive leads her to extreme measures, including visits to spiritualists and traditional healers. This reflects the patriarchal structure that views a woman as incomplete without a child:

"I was armed with smiles for my lips, an appropriate sheen of tears for my eyes and sniffles for my nose. I was prepared to lock up my hairdressing salon throughout the coming week and go in search of a miracle with my mother-in-law in tow." (Adebayo

23)

This line illustrates Yejide's internalization of societal expectations and her willingness to conform to them, even at the expense of her own well-being.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*

Similarly, *The Last of the Strong Ones* explores how women navigate patriarchal structures. Adimora-Ezeigbo presents a narrative of resistance, where women refuse to be passive recipients of male dominance. The protagonist, Ejimnaka, faces discrimination and oppression but remains defiant against societal constraints. Women's struggles are not only personal but extend into political and social realms. For instance, when the community faces external threats, Ejimnaka's resilience becomes a symbol of collective strength:

Ejimnaka was buried but there was no burial chant for her because the warrant chiefs instructed them not to the land." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 157)

This passage highlights the community's collective resistance against external oppression, with Ejimnaka's defiance serving as a catalyst for change.

### 2.3 Education and Women's Participation in Politics

Education serves as a critical tool for women's empowerment, enabling them to challenge oppressive systems and assert their rights. However, access to education remains a challenge for many African women due to cultural and economic barriers. In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's education provides her with some level of financial independence through her salon business. Yet, this independence does not protect her from patriarchal control. Despite her financial stability, her husband's family dictates

her reproductive choices, highlighting the limits of economic empowerment without structural change:

I did not like knowing that if for some reason Akin stopped giving me money, I would not even be able to afford a packet of chewing gum." (Adebayo 72)

This line underscores the precariousness of Yejide's financial independence and the overarching control exerted by patriarchal structures.

In contrast, *The Last of the Strong Ones* presents education as a pathway to political activism. The female characters are educated and use their knowledge to fight for their rights, challenging colonial and indigenous patriarchal structures. Their engagement in politics is an act of resistance, showing that education is not only for personal uplift but also a means of collective empowerment. The community's collective action against external oppression underscores the power of educated women in societal transformation:

The eleven men that were summoned never returned to Umuga.

(Adimora-Ezeigbo 157)

This passage illustrates the community's collective resistance against external oppression, with educated women playing a pivotal role in challenging patriarchal structures.

#### **2.4 Political Responsibility and Decision-Making against Women**

The Political Marginalization of Women in *Stay With Me*

In *Stay With Me*, Ayobami Adebayo highlights the systemic exclusion of women from political and decision-making processes, particularly in the private sphere of marriage

and family life. Yejide, despite her financial independence through her salon business, has no real autonomy over her reproductive choices or marital stability. The decision to introduce a second wife into her marriage is made without her consent, reinforcing the notion that women's voices are secondary to patriarchal interests.

Yejide, pull her close. (Adebayo 27)

This command, given by Yejide's in-laws, symbolizes how women are expected to comply with decisions made by men and elders, even when those decisions profoundly affect their lives. The lack of consultation and respect for her agency mirrors broader political realities where women are often excluded from key decision-making roles in governance and policy-making.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates how societal expectations dictate that women should remain silent and accept decisions made on their behalf. Even when Yejide protests, her resistance is dismissed as emotional rather than rational:

What is she saying? Baba Lola asked the new wife for an interpretation. She says he is a bastard, Funmi translated in a whisper, as though the words were too hot and heavy for her mouth (Adebayo 31).

This passage shows how women's words are filtered through male-controlled narratives, denying them direct engagement in discussions that shape their futures.

The Political Strength of Women in *The Last of the Strong Ones* unlike Yejide's passive victimization, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* presents women as active political agents, despite systemic barriers to their involvement. The novel focuses on women who defy societal norms by asserting their

authority in communal decision-making. However, their influence is often met with resistance from the male-dominated political system. One striking example is Ejimnaka's role in resisting colonial oppression. Despite her strategic thinking and leadership, the men in power disregard her contributions, illustrating how African women have historically been sidelined in governance.

The eleven men that were summoned never returned to Umuga. (Adimora-Ezeigbo 157)

The disappearance of these men, a result of colonial political interference, underscores the dangers of leaving decision-making solely in the hands of men. The novel suggests that women's political participation is not only necessary but crucial for the survival and progress of society.

Additionally, Adimora-Ezeigbo critiques the lack of political responsibility toward women's welfare. The warrant chiefs, who serve as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the local people, fail to protect women's rights, prioritizing their own interests instead.

Ejimnaka was buried but there was no burial chant for her because the warrant chiefs instructed them not to the land. (Adimora-Ezeigbo 157)

This passage highlights the erasure of women from historical and political narratives, reinforcing their exclusion from structures of power. However, Ejimnaka's legacy and the resilience of the women in the novel challenge this exclusion, demonstrating the necessity of female political participation.

## **2.5 Liberation and Rebuilding Women's Identity**

In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's journey toward self-liberation is fraught with resistance from patriarchal structures that seek to define her solely by her ability to bear children. The novel portrays her struggle to break free from societal expectations and reclaim her own sense of identity beyond motherhood and marriage. Her initial attempts at conformity, including visits to spiritualists and engaging in extreme rituals, reflect the pressure imposed on women to meet unrealistic standards of femininity.

Moomi told me that before asking God to give me a child, I must ask for the grace to be able to suffer for that child. She said I wasn't ready to be a mother yet if I was fainting after three days of fasting. (Adebayo 24)

This passage highlights the ingrained belief that a woman's identity is inseparable from her ability to endure suffering for the sake of her children. However, Yejide's gradual disillusionment with these expectations marks the beginning of her journey toward self-liberation. Her final act of leaving her marriage and rebuilding her life independently signifies her ultimate break from patriarchal control. The weight of societal shame does not deter her; instead, she finds a new sense of self beyond the confines of her prescribed role.

This is it then – fifteen years here and, though my house is not on fire, all I'm taking is a bag of gold and a change of clothes. The things that matter are inside me, locked up below my breast as though in a grave, a place of permanence, my coffin-like treasure chest (Adebayo 43).

This moment encapsulates her emotional rebirth. By leaving behind material possessions and embracing internal strength, Yejide reclaims her identity on her own terms.

#### Rebuilding Women's Identity in *The Last of the Strong Ones*

In contrast to Yejide's personal liberation, *The Last of the Strong Ones* explores collective female empowerment and the rebuilding of women's identity within a communal and political framework. Adimora-Ezeigbo's female characters defy traditional limitations, asserting their agency in leadership and resistance against both colonial and indigenous patriarchal forces.

The novel presents women as central to the survival of their community, positioning them as custodians of culture and history. Through their defiance, they reconstruct a narrative where women are not merely passive participants but active shapers of their own destiny.

The war had taken their sons and husbands, but not their spirit. They stood together, rebuilding what had been lost, knowing that their voices would no longer be silenced (Adimora-Ezeigbo 192).

This passage symbolizes the collective strength of women in reclaiming their agency. Unlike in *Stay With Me*, where personal liberation is the primary focus, *The Last of the Strong Ones* emphasizes the necessity of female solidarity in overcoming systemic oppression.

Furthermore, the novel challenges the erasure of women's contributions in historical narratives. By centering female voices, Adimora-Ezeigbo redefines identity not just as

an individual pursuit but as an intergenerational movement toward equality.

Their names may not have been written in the records of men, but they lived, they fought, and they would be remembered in the songs of their daughters.

(Adimora-Ezeigbo 205)

Through storytelling, the novel affirms that women's liberation is not merely about resisting oppression but about reconstructing a legacy that future generations can inherit.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN AYOBAMI

#### ADEBAYO'S STAY WITH ME

##### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter critically evaluates the challenges faced by the African woman through the female protagonist in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*. Across the diverse tapestry of the African continent, the lives of women are woven with threads of both hardship and resilience. Navigating a society where patriarchy reigns supreme, their stories resonate with tales of struggle and triumph, oppression and liberation. Yet, amidst these challenges, the African woman's spirit shines through. Their strength and resilience are reflected in the ways they navigate adversity, rewrite narratives, and defy expectations. This exploration is not merely a catalog of hardships but a celebration of the unyielding spirit of the African woman.

The novel *Stay With Me* is a contemporary text that examines the expectations placed on the typical Nigerian wife. It tells the story of Yejide and Akin, a married couple desperate to have a child. Through Yejide's painful and poignant experiences as an African woman, wife, and mother, the novel explores the African woman's experiences with infertility, polygamy, deception, verbal abuse, and the psychological impact these challenges have on women. Despite these challenges, it also highlights the fighting spirit and resilience of the African woman.

### 3.2 Infertility

Infertility remains one of the most devastating challenges for African women, particularly within societies that equate womanhood with motherhood. In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's struggle with infertility becomes a defining aspect of her identity. The immense pressure placed on her to conceive leads her to seek desperate solutions, including visiting spiritualists and engaging in superstitious rituals. One of the most striking moments in the novel is when she is instructed to breastfeed a goat as part of a fertility ritual:

The goat must be white, he has instructed, and it must be pulled up the mountain single-handedly by the miracle seeker, arriving at the summit 'without wound, blemish or a speck of another colour'... Despite her initial scepticism, as Yejide relates, 'the goat appeared to be a newborn and I believed (Adebayo 45).

This moment encapsulates the extreme lengths women go to in their pursuit of fertility, driven by societal and familial expectations. Yejide's desperation mirrors the broader cultural belief that a woman's worth is inherently tied to her ability to bear children.

The stigma of infertility extends beyond the woman herself, affecting her relationships and social standing. Yejide's mother-in-law, Moomi, exerts relentless pressure on her to conceive, demonstrating how older generations perpetuate these expectations:

You have had my son between your legs for two more months and still your stomach is flat. Close your thighs to him, I beg you ... If you don't, he will die childless. I beg you, don't spoil my life. He is my first son, Yejide." (Adebayo 61)

Moomi's words reflect the communal expectation that a woman's primary duty in marriage is to provide heirs. The idea that Akin's future depends entirely on Yejide's fertility further emphasizes the societal devaluation of women who are unable to conceive.

### **3.3 Polygamy and Betrayal**

When infertility persists, African societies often resort to polygamy as a solution, placing the burden of childbearing on multiple women rather than addressing male infertility. In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's world is shattered when she learns that Akin has taken another wife under pressure from his family. This decision, made without her consent, reinforces the patriarchal notion that a woman's agency in marriage is secondary to reproductive concerns:

Akin, you knew this? You knew and could not tell me? You knew? You bloody bastard. After everything! You wretched bastard!" (Adebayo 102)

Her anger and devastation highlight the deep betrayal she feels, not just from her husband but from the societal norms that allow such decisions to be made without the woman's input. The introduction of Funmi, the second wife, intensifies Yejide's feelings of alienation and rejection.

Beyond personal betrayal, polygamy in African societies is often justified as a necessity for lineage continuation. However, it frequently results in psychological and emotional distress for women. Yejide's reaction to Funmi's presence illustrates the depth of this suffering:

I was not prepared for the confrontation. Even my insult was off the mark. Funmi did

not look like the mythical egbere. She was not short; she was not carrying a mat or weeping incessantly. In fact, when she turned to face me, she was smiling." (Adebayo 109)

This passage reveals Yejide's inability to process the injustice of her situation. The normalization of polygamy in her society leaves her powerless to resist.

### 3.4 Verbal Abuse and Psychological Trauma

The pressure to conceive, coupled with societal expectations, leads to immense psychological distress for Yejide. The emotional abuse she endures from Akin's family, particularly Moomi, compounds her suffering. When she eventually gives birth, the joy is short-lived as her children suffer from sickle cell disease, leading to unimaginable pain and loss:

His hand gripped mine with pain-induced strength that crushed my knuckles together. I welcomed the pain in my hand, aware that it was only a tip of what he was feeling. I hoped that by holding me, he could transfuse his agony into my body and be free from it." (Adebayo 182)

This moment underscores the deep emotional burden of motherhood in African societies, where women are expected to endure suffering for their children. Yejide's experiences with infertility, polygamy, and child loss culminate in a profound sense of isolation:

Throughout the novel, Yejide struggles with a profound sense of isolation. As she battles infertility, betrayal, and loss, she becomes increasingly disconnected from

those around her. Her identity as a wife, a mother, and a woman is constantly questioned and undermined by societal norms and personal tragedies." (Adebayo 215)

Her withdrawal from relationships and eventual decision to leave her marriage reflect the long-term psychological impact of these challenges.

### 3.5 Reclaiming Identity and Female Resilience

Despite the immense suffering Yejide endures, *Stay With Me* ultimately highlights the resilience of African women. Yejide's decision to leave Akin and start anew signifies her reclaiming of agency, rejecting societal norms that demand her subjugation. The novel challenges traditional African narratives that equate a woman's value solely with motherhood and marriage.

In comparison, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* presents a collective female resistance against patriarchal oppression. While Yejide's battle is personal, the women in *The Last of the Strong Ones* actively fight against colonial and societal oppression, refusing to be passive victims. The novel positions women as historical agents of change:

The war had taken their sons and husbands, but not their spirit. They stood together, rebuilding what had been lost, knowing that their voices would no longer be silenced." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 192)

This contrast between individual and collective resistance demonstrates the multifaceted ways in which African women assert their agency in oppressive environments. While Yejide's story focuses on personal survival, Adimora-Ezeigbo's

characters illustrate the power of female solidarity in reshaping societal narratives.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S THE LAST OF THE STRONG ONES

#### 4.1 Introduction

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* is a powerful novel that captures the struggles and resilience of African women within a deeply patriarchal society. Through the lives of its female protagonists, the novel explores themes of oppression, marginalization, and the systemic challenges that women face in both traditional and colonial settings. The novel presents women as active participants in their own liberation, challenging the structures that seek to subjugate them. The struggles they endure—ranging from political exclusion and forced marriages to economic disenfranchisement and cultural suppression—reflect the broader challenges faced by African women throughout history.

#### 4.2 Patriarchal Oppression and Gender Marginalization

One of the central themes in *The Last of the Strong Ones* is the oppression of women under patriarchal rule. The novel presents a society where men dominate both private and public spaces, leaving little room for women to exercise agency. The protagonist, Ejimnaka, along with other strong female characters, constantly battles the limitations imposed on them by men.

A woman's voice, even when it held wisdom, was often dismissed as mere chatter. It did not matter how much she knew, how much she had seen, the world belonged to the men, and they would not let her forget it." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 72)

This passage highlights the deeply ingrained sexism that prevents women from being taken seriously in matters of leadership and governance. Despite their intelligence and capability, women are often reduced to secondary roles, their contributions overlooked or outright ignored.

Additionally, the novel critiques the societal expectation that women must always be submissive to male authority. Women who dare to question these norms are often met with resistance and even punishment.

A woman who spoke too loudly, who questioned too often, was seen as a troublemaker. The elders would shake their heads and say she was a disgrace to her lineage." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 88)

By showcasing the silencing of women, Adimora-Ezeigbo sheds light on how cultural norms are weaponized to keep women from challenging their oppression.

### **4.3 Political Exclusion and Resistance**

The exclusion of women from political participation is another significant challenge explored in the novel. Despite their intelligence and leadership skills, women are systematically denied access to positions of power. The colonial administration, as well as the indigenous male leadership, ensures that women remain at the margins of governance.

The eleven men that were summoned never returned to Umuga."

(Adimora-Ezeigbo 157)

This event underscores how decisions affecting entire communities are often made without female involvement. The fate of the men, decided by colonial forces, further

highlights the vulnerability of African societies under colonial rule. However, the women of Umuga refuse to accept their exclusion quietly.

If the men will not fight for us, then we will fight for ourselves. We have stayed silent long enough." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 163)

Here, Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays African women as active agents of change, refusing to accept oppression without resistance. This aligns with historical examples of African women leading anti-colonial movements, such as the Aba Women's Riot of 1929.

#### **4.4 Forced Marriages and Female Subjugation**

The novel also critiques the practice of forced marriages, which strips women of their autonomy and subjects them to lives of servitude. Ejimnaka, one of the central female characters, is nearly forced into a marriage against her will, reflecting the common practice of treating women as property rather than individuals with agency.

She did not love him. She did not want him. Yet, none of that mattered. The decision had been made, and she was expected to obey." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 110)

This passage emphasizes the lack of control women have over their own destinies. Marriage, instead of being a union of love and mutual respect, becomes a tool for economic and political alliances between men.

However, Ejimnaka's defiance represents a growing shift in how women perceive themselves and their rights:

I will not live as a prisoner in my own home. If they will not listen to my voice, they will hear my silence (Adimora-Ezeigbo 117)

Her refusal to submit highlights the growing awareness among African women of their right to self-determination. Through Ejimnaka, Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges the traditional narratives that confine women to roles of passive acceptance.

#### 4.5 Economic Disenfranchisement and Women's Struggles for Independence

Economic oppression is another critical challenge African women face in the novel. Women are denied financial independence, often forced to rely on their husbands or male relatives for survival. This financial dependency makes it difficult for women to escape abusive or oppressive situations.

A woman without a husband was like a tree without roots, they said. But she knew better. She knew that her hands, her sweat, could build a life as strong as any man's. (Adimora-Ezeigbo 132)

Despite the economic limitations placed on them, the women in *The Last of the Strong Ones* find ways to carve out independence. They engage in trading, farming, and other economic activities that allow them to provide for themselves and their children.

We may not sit in the council halls, but we will build our own wealth. They will not own us (Adimora-Ezeigbo 145)

This line underscores the resilience of African women in reclaiming their economic agency, despite societal restrictions.

#### 4.6 Cultural Suppression and the Erasure of Women's Contributions

The novel also explores how women's contributions to society are often erased from history. Despite their role in shaping their communities, they are frequently left out of

historical narratives.

Their names may not have been written in the records of men, but they lived, they fought, and they would be remembered in the songs of their daughters (Adimora-Ezeigbo 205)

This passage speaks to the importance of oral tradition in preserving women's histories. By ensuring that the stories of strong women are passed down, Adimora-Ezeigbo argues against the erasure of female contributions to African history.

Through storytelling, the novel affirms that women's liberation is not merely about resisting oppression but about reconstructing a legacy that future generations can inherit.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

This study has critically examined the challenges faced by African women in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Both novels explore the systemic oppression, societal expectations, and resilience of women in different historical and cultural contexts.

In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's struggles with infertility, polygamy, betrayal, and psychological trauma highlight the pressures placed on African women to conform to patriarchal expectations. Her journey illustrates how cultural norms often equate womanhood with motherhood, subjecting childless women to humiliation and rejection.

The novel also explores how polygamy is used as a tool to uphold male dominance, forcing women into painful emotional and psychological turmoil. Despite these challenges, Yejide's eventual decision to reclaim her independence underscores the resilience of African women in the face of adversity.

*The Last of the Strong Ones* presents a broader societal perspective, focusing on the collective struggles of women in a patriarchal and colonial society. The novel critiques gender marginalization, political exclusion, forced marriages, and economic oppression. Through the stories of women like Ejimnaka, Adimora-Ezeigbo highlights the role of African women as historical agents of change. The novel emphasizes female solidarity and resistance, portraying women as active participants in the fight against oppression rather than passive victims.

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