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# Private property and gender relationship in select African novels

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**Abstract:** The economic system and society conspire to oppress the female, since it is the socialization process that defines the worth of the individual in society. The exclusive control of private property and ownership of tools of labour by patriarchy perpetuates the continuous gender war as seen in select African novels. Private property gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political and domestic struggle between the sexes. Private property and gender relationship in select African novels is examined through the Feminist theory with particular reference to Marxist Feminist theory, Stiwanism and Motherism. Feminist writers argue that women's subordination is not as a result of their biological disposition but of social relations, so, they set out to institute the female presence through private property ownership and the women's contributions to the social, business, political and educational spheres of their nations. Some authors celebrate the intellectual and spiritual powers in the females to redeem mankind. These dynamo women revolt against taboos and other anti-socio-cultural practices that tend to undermine them and establish themselves in wide spread virtues that are beneficial to humanity. The paper establishes that ownership of private property by the women gives rise to gender relationship, economic, social and political equality since private property has hitherto, being the bane of patriarchal stronghold.

**Keywords:** Private Property, Structural Control, Patriarchy, Oppressive Social Systems, Inheritance, 'Other'

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## 1. Introduction

The cultural processes in which men and women are differently represented and the nature of gender identifies have greatly influenced private property and gender relationship. The economic organization of households and the systems of education create class structure between the sexes which place the woman at economic and material disadvantages. Therefore, social and economic realities play important parts constructing gender roles. Sheila Rowbothan in *Woman's Consciousness Man's World*, recognizes that "the working class women experience the double oppression of sexual division of labour at work and in the home and that Marxist historiography had largely ignored the domain of personal experience and particularly that of female culture" (Selden&Widdowson:217). The structural control patriarchy exerts in relation to women reproductive functions adds up to the complex relations between gender and the economy.

Looking back at the rich ancestry of African women, it is seen that they were highly regarded for their intellect, prowess, wealth and prosperity that significantly enhanced

the society. Queen Nzingo (1583-1663) ruled the kingdom of Ndongo in what is now Angola from 1624 until her death. She fought wars with the Portuguese and negotiated series of complex diplomatic alliances with both European and other African states to preserve her power and her kingdom. Because of her leadership, military prowess (she led troops into battles), and heroic struggle she is still celebrated in her nation as a symbol of independence and strength (Gates & Yacovone: 23). Private property and gender relationship was therefore not an issue.

Similarly, in traditional Hausa culture of Nigeria, Queen Amina of Zaria, was famous for her remarkable exploits in wars during her thirty-four year's reign. In the words of Iyabo Olojede in *Women and social change in Nigeria*, Queen Amina conquered the entire town around her territory up to Kwarafa and Nupe, and compelled the people to pay tributes to her (82). Her prominent political position obligated the Sarkin Nupe, to send forty eunuchs and ten thousand pods of kola nuts to her as part of their tribute. Zaria is named after the Queen's sister Zaria all in honour of the Queen. This was prior to the Islamic reforms of 1804,

which introduced the jihad and later the purdah, and imposed restrictions on the socio-cultural, political and economic activities of the women.

In the same vein, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the people determination to go to war, no matter how grieved is predicated on the pronouncement of a woman, Agadiwanyi. Not even Okonkwo, the protagonist and the strong man of Umuofia can initiate war for the people to obey.

In Biblical history, God ordered Moses to apportion land to the daughters of Zelophehad who died in the wilderness without male children: "You shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them" (Numbers 27:7). The Bible further says "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter" (Numbers 27:8). If therefore, God Almighty, the owner of Heaven and earth, allotted landed property to women, one wonders at the wisdom of patriarchy! This paper shares Virginia Woolf's recognition that "gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed" (Selden&Widdowson:207). The possession of private property is reconstructed and challenged by feminists writers as they designate physical, spiritual and material property to the female gender.

In pre-colonial era, though there were subordinating socio-cultural practices that debased women: like female circumcision, widow inheritance, forced marriages and high pride prize, and other discriminatory practices against women, one would agree that these were the social realities of the period and the women were part and parcel of that reality of ignorance. For instance, most mothers gave their consent to female circumcision for, according to them; it was a thing of pride to the family and also prevented promiscuity in society. In their witlessness women leaders were complacent about these demeaning issues. But in all ages there have always been women who stood out to lend a voice and a cry to the state of affairs of the women. These legendary women helped to create a historical backdrop for contemporary women.

The duality of colonial space put a knife between the man and woman in Africa and in particular Nigeria, when the colonial masters laid out educational programs along gender lines. But prior to this era there were strong women like Queen Daurama of Daura, and Moremi of Ile-Ife, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Madam Udoudoma of Opobo, Nana Asmau Dan Fodio of Kano, Margaret Ekpo of Calabar, and a lot many others. They were not only wives, mothers and princesses, but military generals, diplomats, teachers, merchants, warriors, political and religious leaders (Oko:1). To a great extent therefore, African, (Nigerian) women played very invaluable roles in the art of nation building. They did not only assist their male counterparts but prominently and efficiently handled very many activities which later became gendered during the colonial period. Thus, what mostly prevailed in the West as gender discrimination or imbalance did not feature in African feminist history as women were part and parcel of the

decision making bodies of their respective regions; and they all worked in complementary relationship with the men. In support of the above statements, Dennis Ityavvar declares that: 'the African woman was unaware of gender problems in society until the advent of colonialism' (55), when the self-esteem of the African woman became restricted.

Some male writers foreground the concerns of the male: women play secondary positions as characters as their female bodies are disparaged on the pages of the novels. They appear on the scenes as capricious seductive mistresses captivating in their passions, goddesses of beauty, sex machines, mindless entities, or old spinsters. They were presented as positive and dynamic as Satan. Women were foregrounded wherever the issues of sex and evil were concerned. Simone de Beauvoir agrees with Virginia Woolf that the woman is 'an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the male who is the dominant being in the society ... the woman must break the bonds of patriarchal and society to define herself if she wishes to become a significant human being on her own right and to defy male classification as the Other' (Bressler:104). The war perpetuated against the woman to put her in a state of denial over the centuries is now being challenged globally by the women of all cultures, races and religion.

In literature, African female and some male writers too, seek to apportion private to the woman in her own right, reclaim the her voice, to put forward her opinions, responses and writings, to the men who have suppressed her; defined what it means to be feminine and thereby devalued and trivialized what it means to be a woman. In sympathy with the women's plight Lloyd Brown writes: "African women writers are the voices unheard, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies in predictably male-oriented studies in the field" (55). Inherently, African world view includes among others the oppressive social systems such as patriarchy, racism and colonialism which are some of the challenges for the African feminist writer. But with education and better awareness, the female writers among them: Kamala Markandaya, Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Nawal el Saadawi, Zoe Wicomb, Efua Sutherland, Calixthe Beyala, Mariama Ba, Wanjira Muthoni, Akachi Eziegbo, and a host of others, are writing their names in the sands of times and populating the literary scenes with the woman's perspective; women with private property.

Presently, the African women may not be said to be on the same footing with their men, but with the global advocacy on the rights of the women gathering momentum through feminist critical ideologies in literature, the variously motivated anti-feminist hostilities have led to the conception of African alternatives to Western feminism. Many of such notions stem from Nigerian women: Chikwenye Ogunyemi conceived *Womanism*, Molaria Ogundipe speaks of *STIWANISM* (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa), Obioma Nnaemeka conceptualized the idea of *negrofeminism*, Catherine Acholonu invented *Motherism* (Okonjo:39). Generally, African feminism shares the same basic principles with the West, but it emphasizes mutual co-

existence between the genders, and believes in motherhood (Chukwukere:101). The Western concept of Feminism to some extent emphasizes independence and individualism. Private property within the context of this work includes spiritual, intellectual, economical, social, political endowments of the women.

This paper probes the character and characterization of women with private property and how ownership of such property has given rise to healthy gender relationship in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Akachi Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*, and *The Last of The Strong Ones*, Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, Nurudin Farah's *The Crooked Rib*, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, through the Feminist theory, with emphasis on Marxist Feminism; whose primary task is "to open up the complex relations between gender and the economy" (Selden&Widdowson:217). The paper will also incorporate Motherism which focuses on the family including the land, and STIWANISM (Social Transformation for the Women in Africa). In all, the emphasis is among others, the complementary relationship with the men.

Feminism may not have "no 'mother narrative' from which it derives his charter" (Collier&Ryan:180), but it has grown to refer to a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing and defending, a state of equal political, economic, cultural and social rights for women equivalent to those of the men. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunity in education, employment and property ownership. Feminism may not be one "grand narrative" depending on the historical movement, cultures and countries with different causes and goals, nevertheless, the movement has continued to be known all over the world to be concerned with women issues.

## 2. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

Rukmani, the wife of Nathan and the protagonist of the work, acquires reading and writing skills from her father to the astonishment of her mother, husband and neighbours. She transfers the same knowledge to each of her eight children and grand-child. She weaves, spins, plaits and mats (90). In time of adversity she sets herself up to read and write for others on a fee. At the death of her husband Nathan, once a successful farmer, she adopts another son and goes back to her children and acquires private property to improve their lot. She overcomes her dependency on her husband domestically and tribally.

## 3. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Akachi Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*

Ezeigbo celebrates the strength of character of Chieme

whose husband Iwuchukwu shows the way out of her matrimonial home for the lack of certain quality of womanhood; she does not menstruate and, therefore, incapable of having children. Chieme recovers from her shock knowing that her situation is irredeemable, she trains to become the best chanter Umuga and the whole vicinity had ever seen and known. She says: "Having accumulated wealth and made a name in my profession, I become *Loolo* and choose the name *Omesaramnaya* – the one who brought fame to her father ... I have participated fully in the activities of Umuada in this village and in the whole town" (85). Chieme is well travelled, she owns private property and builds a large house and become a mother to her nieces and nephews. Chieme moves out of culture's definition of private property ownership and the image of the woman as universally powerless.

## 4. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Akachi Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*

Ezeigbo in *House of Symbols* spotlights the ordinary village women that possess so much strength and might that they are effective in all spheres of developmental relevance including nation building. Ezeigbo says: 'I create strong women characters, not just as role models alone, but because many of them exist now and in the past. They are real! They are real!' (Oloko:89). She creates strong women who appreciate the realities of the past, the present and who own private property and express public and private concerns about the future in the likes of Okwudiba, Ezenwanyi and Eaglewoman

Okwudiba: (Let the word remain), is a representative and a custodian of old order and also a direction into the new ideals. She straddles the world of the dead and the world of the living; a respectable and wise woman, a great seer and a spiritual healer with the ability to impart or transfer knowledge from one generation to another. She is a great story-teller, a recorder of the history and cultural heritage of her people. She orders her life with confidence and assurance. She is the last of the strong ones who dwells at peace with man and nature before the coming of the colonialists.

Okwudiba says of herself: 'I, Okwudiba remember with a story-teller's infinite memory, I have lived too long to see a generation in a haste to abandon the ancestors and trample on age-long traditions. To live to see these sights is a punishment to the soul' (9). An old but eloquent Okwudiba, a traditionalist (Amaala), is concerned about the assault on cultural and religious norms. Her great age transports her from the realm of corporeal perception to that of transcendental. She laments: 'the stench of abominable acts corrupts my nose and spreads foul air everywhere. Overwhelmed by fumes, I lie prostrate, like a lizard afflicted with a bellyache' (1). Now virtually a matriarch spirit awaiting her inevitable apotheosis, Okwudiba's repulsion by the gradual displacement of traditional values by the secular

decadence of the insidious Western culture are expressed in terms of stench and fumes, reminiscent of Biblical apprehension of sin. 'Dead food like bread' among others to her also depicts the strange culture intruding on tradition. While honey to her symbolizes tradition in its natural curative form, "Honey is my cure for stomach troubles and cough. I cherish it" (93). She warns that this may contaminate the naturalness of our diet. This is of Motherist interest.

To Okwudiba, death is a form of thrilling release to a more ennobling experience. At the moment, she is at the threshold of death as she awaits the coming of Nnenna - the cripple child of Osia and Eaglewoman - the reincarnated Ejimnaka, (the Lioness); her late bosom friend. At the sight of Nnenna she cries: "Unbind me. Lioness let me join the ancestors. Without your coming my going is foreclosed ... Set me free my Lioness" (8). She insists on the child spending the night with her even against the parents' protests. In so doing she heals the child and spiritually imparts great wisdom and some mystic sparks into Nnenna the future woman before she passes on. She represents the spirit of the past with the temper of the present.

Ezenwanyi (Woman king): she straddles between the world of the spirits and the world of the living. Her name removes her from the feminine, and sets her apart as authoritative and powerful. As the priestess of the Oracle, she plays the same role as Chielo, the priestess of the Hills and Caves in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, who dared Okonkwo from the thresholds of her sacred grove (86). Ezenwanyi bridges the gap between traditional religion and Christian religious practices by combining both in healing the sick and in the spiritual cleansing of the community. Ezenwanyi's home, the house of symbols is a place where people come and receive insight into the meaning of existence. Here, there are traditional role reversals and socialization processes; the traditional male-oriented image of Angels is completely shattered:

Painted conspicuously on the front wall of the building is a life-size image of a female, full-bodied, with the wings of an Angel. Eaglewoman's eyes dilate in astonishment. She tells herself that this is the first time she has ever seen an Angel imaged in the form of a woman. She has seen only the images of male Angels. All angelic names she has ever heard are male too: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael as well as the fallen Angel, Lucifer (25).

Ezenwanyi criticizes the male-oriented reading of God the Creator (Chukwu or Chineke): 'by limiting the creator to Father, they do great injustice to the Creator. The Creator is all things: they seem not to realize this' (47). This explains why some feminist theologians reject the Bible on the ground that it is a book written by men to promote and protect the interest of men. Besides total rejection, some feminists have called for a re-writing of the Bible and have taken steps to

carry out this by the latest version of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, otherwise known as the 'Feminist Bible' The women go ahead to reverse the Lord's Prayer to read 'Our mother in heaven' (Okunola:10). This idea, though may be a dangerous precedent, since the Bible warns that the word of God should not be altered in any way or form (Rev. 22:18-19), but it is an out-cry against sexual/gender hierarchy. According to Uzodinma Nwala 'religion is a form of social consciousness, reflecting one form of a people's understanding of realities of life, society and nature' (1). Here, religion becomes a major space through which change and continuity in human existence is expressed. Ezenwanyi's role is essentially that of restorer of hope and this is of feminist interest.

Ezeigbo empowers Ezenwanyi to see the inventions of the future, a psychic zone that would otherwise be ascribed to the male:

I saw clearly the image of strange looking vehicles racing about while I sat in them as the sole occupant, except of course, the drivers who sat in the front the drivers deferred to me their faces bear celestial happiness. What struck me most was that the drivers were neither completely like white people. They either had white faces with black bodies or black faces with white bodies (31).

The mixed breed here speaks of a future world without colour differentiation and racism and an harmonious co-existence with all humanity.

Women are so spiritually endowed that the diviners and priestesses are able to summon people (male and female). 'But when it comes to spiritual matters, a woman who has divine power is dreaded and respected. Feared, even' (*House*:30). Commenting on the role of priestesses, Flora Nwapa says: '... they mediate between the supernatural and the natural worlds, between the divine, (deities) and the humans' (Olaniyan&Quayson:527). Ezenwanyi fuses the seminal aspects of both the Christian and traditional functions for her services to humanity. Ezeigbo creates her as physical and moral agent of regeneration in modern African society. She facilitates the healing of Nnenna, Ejimnaka, the long-awaited reincarnated friend of Okwudiba by linking Osai and Eaglewoman to the ancient one. This is of womanist interest.

Aziagba, Eaglewoman's mother, though an *amaala*, she will not surrender her twins to the traditionalists to throw them into the evil forest. She rather joins Christianity to save her children. This is of Motherist interest. Her daughter, Ugonwanyi alias Eaglewoman represents the future African woman with private property. She is a wife, a mother, a philanthropist, a politician, vibrant and assertive woman, who at age eight knows that Nathaniel Okeke, the man she is betrothed to, is not her husband. an industrialist; she owns a variable bakery, snuff shop and a sew institute. Eaglewoman strives for a complementary relationship that is based on

mutual respect, and understanding with Osia her husband. She bears the psychological burden of her daughter's disability with grace; which is the consciousness of the Motherism. She is reminiscent of the female archetype in Proverbs 31 – the 'Virtuous Woman' (10).

As a registered member of NCNC and a Vice Chair Person of the Party's Working Committee, she determines to search out a man of integrity to represent the community in the Eastern House of Assembly. As a vehicle of transformation, she can rightfully be called a STIWA. Her maternal aura pervades the entire narrative, and this is of feminist interest. 'People are attracted to her as light would attract moth' (Oloko:157). Eaglewoman as Nnenna's mother is the womb through which another generational transformation is born. She is very sensitive to the fact that: 'Consciousness is power' (566), and she grooms the youth into this awareness.

*House of Symbols* becomes a representation of cult of women ancestors. Ezeigbo's female characters are bold, articulate, intelligent and proactive. These are the women determined to make positive impact in the society with their private property. They initiate change and they feel obliged to face the future on the basis of complementary relationship with the men. Ezeigbo's female characters are, in the main, people with advanced consciousness. Like all feminist writers, Ezeigbo sulks at the evil of non-consensual marriage, especially at the forced marriage struck on behalf of a child who is barely aware of the grave implications of such a union, or who is seemingly incapable of preventing it.

## 5. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*

Likewise, in Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah presents Ebla, the protagonist of the work, an orphan girl and a villager, who "could not read or write" (8), but will not see her hand given in marriage without her consent to old Giumaleh, in exchange for camels (9), as arranged by her grand-father. To reduce women to an article of trade or exchange is a confrontation to the feminist. In the town of Belet Wene, where Ebla runs to meet her cousin Gheddi, he also marries her off to a T.B. patient Dirir the broker, for a thousand shillings to enable Gheddi pay off the police's fine for smuggling. Marriage without the consent of the girl is of feminist concern. Ebla grieves: "a moron-male costs twice as much as two women in terms of blood compensation. As many as twenty or thirty camels are allotted to each son. The women have to wait until their fate gives them a new status in life; the status of marriage. ..." (15). This disparity in the value of sexes, is also of interest to the feminist. The widow, a character in the novel also laments that 'women are just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband' (80). Of concern to the feminists are exploitation of the woman and the treatment of the woman as articles of trade.

Since "girls are like materials, just like objects or items on

the shelf of a shop" (84), Ebla decides to sell herself to Awill, without a bride price: "all I need is the Sheikh's fees and two witnesses" (85), she says to legitimize her relationship with Awill. She elopes with Awill to Mogadiscio, where Awill rapes her before marriage. When she realizes that Awill is cheating on her from the photograph in her hands, which shows Awill and a half naked white girl with "Awill's hand ...resting on her breasts" (128), Ebla in retaliation marries another husband Tiffo. In reality Ebla marries two husbands concurrently without regrets. She justifies her action based on the Koran: 'a nose for a nose, an ear for an "ear, that is what the Koran says"' (115). She claims equality with Tiffo when he confesses that he is married and Ebla also affirms that she too is married: "We are equal" (145). It is unthinkable for an Arab male writer to empower a woman with such fits, but this foretells the future of women even within the Arab world. This is of interest to Motherism but motherists would frown at situations where young girls become unruly and populate society with bastard children. Ebla disassociates herself from her cousin's wife Aowralla, who surrenders herself to child-bearing and feeding the cattle. She also distances herself from Ashaone one of her mentors who goes through years of torments as a childless woman in a polygamous family; and her patience fetches her one building from her late husband's will. All same the author endows a woman with a strong spirit to confront and reinterpret the cultural norm that set her aside as the "other", thus her becomes the "subject" and not the "other".

## 6. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*

Equally, in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, Alkali recreates Li, the protagonist of the novel, as an astute and focused woman. Li defies her husband's threats and insists on following her heart's desire; to acquire education. She represents the women boldly grabbing their destiny and setting the stage for a better future of private property. Li father's attitude towards her reveals the extent of gender discrimination, marginalization and oppression women undergo in a patriarchal society. But his disregard for Li and her spiritual powers leads to his getting involved in an accident and his eventual death. This is also a society where so much emphasis is placed on marriage and motherhood to the extent that women are used as sacrificial lambs. They are given out in marriage at very early ages without their consent, like Li's mother. Li knows that her emancipation will only come through education; it will endow her with the ability to read and write and be the most educated girl in her vicinity; it will fetch her good job and be able to build a proper house for her family, thus improving her community. Her reformation stance is of interest to STIWA. With the new perspective, she forgives her husband who neglects her for another woman. With this consciousness, she views marriage as partnership which should be based on mutual respect and

support for each other. She determines to go back to her maimed husband “and side by side we will learn to walk” (105), as he limps on a walking stick. With Li’s acquisition of private property through education and building an edifice for her family, she projects into the future for a harmoniously relationship with the father of her child and the urge to bring up more children. Her decision is of interest to Motherism.

She differs from her mother the voiceless one. She disassociates herself from Awa, her elder sister, who will wait in the village for the town to come to her. She also distances herself from the ancient one, Grandma, who in her dying days has no wisdom to impart to another generation other than the irritating story of her baser instincts and her physical desires: “My breasts were the size of backyard pumpkins and my buttocks the envy of the village maidens. The men could not resist me. You know I have been married fourteen times ...” (35). Li’s strength of character brings traditional role reversals and socialization processes too. Li is addressed as the ‘man of the house’ by the ancient one, her grandfather, after Sule the only son moves to a ‘stranger country that nurtured him to manhood’ (100). The renaming of Li by the ancient one nullifies patriarchal gender stereotype.

## 7. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*

In like manner, Sembene Ousmane in *God’s Bits of Wood* positions the women of Bamako, Thies, and Dakar, though illiterates as the strength of the Railway Workers Strike of 1947. This strike is also symbolically a struggle of the women for equality and right to be treated as decent humans too by their male counterparts. Women like Ramatoulaye who owns a large compound, blind Maimouna, spiritually empowered, a historian and great singer, HoudiaM’Baye, Mame Sofi, N’deye Touti, and Penda, all private property owners, are far removed from gender stereotype. Though the police kill Penda the leader, at the gates of Dakar, it is of note that her courage surpasses the courage of men: “that’s more than men can do!” (209), and another woman immediately takes the lead to the great admiration of the male counterparts.

The women source for food and water; they combat the police and scorn their hypocritical religious leaders. Their share number at Dakar crumbled the colonial masters. The author allows gender equity, as the women address a meeting of men and women; an act that was unfamiliar and disturbing to the men. And the men confirm that: “In future though, we (men) will have to reckon with them (women), in whatever we do” (226), since the women have become bread-winners too. These contemporary out-going and out-spoken women fight to dissolve patriarchal gender inequality. They differ from ancient Niakoro “a leftover from a vanished time, slowly being forgotten” (3), who hates the strike action and wants the people to remain in their status quo. Her savage memory is trapped to lots of betrayals; her loss of her

husband and her first son in the first terrible strike.

Ousmane also presents a forthcoming and an intelligent, vibrant, versatile eight year-old young girl Ad’jibid’ji, with strong spiritual perception, whose interest in education is keen. She reads and keeps records of all books in Bakayoko’s library and in the process learns the white man’s language. She is not left out in politics. Ad’jibid’ji regularly attends the “the gathering of the men” (4). She leans between the laps of Niakoro and Fa Keita, the ancient ones, to learn primordial wisdom as she caters for their welfare. She is also tutored under the watchful eyes of Ibrahim Bakayoko, the protagonist and the spirit of the strike. Ad’jibid’ji’s temperament shows that male and female show similar capabilities, characteristic and goals. The author fashions her to be of interest to Motherism and Stiwanism.

## 8. Private Property and Gender Relationship in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*

Similarly, in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*, Saadawi fashions Firdaus a (successful prostitute), and the protagonist as unbending private property owner; who would rather die for the crime she commits than “sending an appeal to the President to be pardoned” (101), as the law enforcement agencies plead with her to do. Marxist Feminists regard prostitution as a form of labour but categorize it under a corruption of wage labour. Marx asserts that “prostitution is only a specific expression of general prostitution of the labourer ([www.feministissues.com](http://www.feministissues.com) 35). Thus Marx sees prostitutes as oppressed workers reinforcing and perpetuating an exploitative capitalist scheme. This amazon female character kills the pimp (Marzouk) who violets, exploits and confronts her with the words that ‘a woman on her own cannot be a master, let alone a woman who’s a prostitute’ (95), yet he continues to use her as ‘body machine’. He confiscates the larger part of her efforts and sweats and frequently beats her up. More so, this pimp controls a number of other prostitutes. He seems almost above the law. The author says:

He had friends everywhere in every profession, and on whom he spent his money generously. He had a doctor friend to whom he had recourse if one of his prostitutes became pregnant and needed an abortion, a friend in the police who protected him from raids, a friend in the courts who used his legal knowledge and position to keep him out of trouble and release any of his prostitutes who found herself in gaol (sic), so that she was not held up from earning money for too long (94). Marzouk sees the women to be helpless, weak, ignorant

and inferior. This pimp is aided and abetted by the same government to who Firdaus is asked to apologize; the government that once put her in prison because she 'turned down one of those important men' (90). Firdaus's imprisonment for her refusal to tolerate sexually harassing behavior without complaint is a confrontation to the feminists. Firdaus severally rejects a second marriage for prostitution because: 'the imprint of my husband's shoe was still there on my body' (92). She opts out of the institution of marriage that brutalizes her as an object, claims her voice and her humanity. Aduke Adeboye laments that: "the African woman, traditional or modern is a slave of some sort" (100). This is what the feminists seek to challenge.

Firdaus rejects the master/slave relationship between her father and mother where her father beats "his wife and made her bite the dust each night" (12). She detaches herself from a mother who sits at the feet of her father "with a tin mug in her hand as she washed his legs with cold water" (17). Firdaus abhors her mother's pride as "pumpkin womb" (Alkali:56), but losses the children one after another to diarrhea (sic) (WAPZ:24). When one of the female children dies: "my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his feet, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep" (18). The physical and mental abuses constitute some of the main quarrels of the feminist against patriarchy. Though always mistreated as a young girl, she vows to lift up her hand on anyone who wants to subject her to such enslavement.

Firdaus also distances herself from the likes of her uncle's wife, who pressurizes her husband to marry her (Firdaus) off to an old sick man, Sheikh Mahmoud, for a high dowry so that she (her uncle's wife) can pay her debt and buy some underwear (37). This is of feminist interest. A situation where the girl child is sold off in marriage without her consent is an affront to the feminists. Feminists advocate that morality and conscience should compel people to lead decent and productive lives.

Firdaus envisions herself as a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer or a judge a great leader or Head of State (25), in a culture where gender inequality is the order of the day. She reevaluates her self-esteem and determines never to be put down. She is simply the future Arab woman cut out for excellence. In spite of her dashed dreams she clings to and bears her secondary school certificate like a trophy wherever she goes. But she shreds off the whole sheaf of bank notes the rich Arab Prince paid to her for her trade. She proudly says: "I 'm ridding myself of them once and for all, removing every trace their piasters had left on my fingers ... ensuring that not a single vestige of these men would remain at all" (Sadaawi:98). Symbolically, she cleanses herself of all the men; their filthiness and their monies from prostitution.

Sadaawi regrets that men like El Akkad and other contemporary men of letters in the Arab world have not travelled very far from the positions held by their ancestors about women hundreds of years ago. She quotes El Akkad'

words: 'women are devoid of a brain with which to think... men should therefore lock them up in the home between four walls for being creatures without mind and religious piety or morals. "... Idolators (sic) who have never known what it is to believe". In the same vein, Tolstoy's comments: "woman is the instrument of the devil. In most of her states she is stupid. But Satan lends her his head when she acts under his orders" (Olanian&Quayson:520). Sadaawi, on the other hand, recreates Firdaus as the future woman who rejects these stereotypes, focuses on what she desires and achieves same in spite of patriarchal excesses.

## 9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper establishes that from antiquity women have always had private property that set them apart and place them in high economic positions some men could not attain. Through the feminist theory namely Marxist Feminism, Stiwanism and Motherism have the strength of character to ensure equal opportunities for self-development and achievement of their goals while enhancing partnership in relationships which are not exploitative. They own property either economically, educationally, spiritually or socially, politically or physically, as presented in the select African novels.

The younger generations of women are revolting against gender stereotype, discrimination, and inequality by an outdated and inhumane patriarchal system. to own private property. The Bible says: "To everything there is a season ..." (Ecc 3:1), the time and season when women played the second fiddle are fizzling out. Samuel Taylor Coleridge says; "great minds possess both male and female characteristics" (Bressler:104). The African woman now seeks to destroyed all masks to reveal what is hidden behind it spiritually, intellectually, economical, socially, politically and otherwise. Rukmani, in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, acquires reading and writing skills from her father and becomes a reader in the neighbourhood to the astonishment of of the male female and children. She transfers the same knowledge to each of her eight children and grand-child. Chieme in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, rises above her barrenness to become one of the most established persons in Umuga. Eaglewoman in Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* is not only a wife, a mother and an a politician; she owns a bakery, snuff shop and a sewing institute. Ebla in Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* totally rejects being sold off as an object for the benefit of others, but rather elopes with Awill, the man of her choice. She is in possession of both her body and spirit and when Awill becomes flirtatious; she marries a second husband, Tiffo and has the strength of character to support her unlikely life-style with the Koran: 'a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear'. Li in Alkali's *The Stillborn*, equips herself educationally. She reforms her environment and rebrands her family by building an edifice for them. And thereafter decides to move back to her estranged husband. In Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, the women possess the will-power to fight and defeat not only the demon of racism



between the white employers and striking railway workers but also the demon of patriarchy. Firdaus in El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, prefers death for the crime she commits to apologizing to a government that once put her in prison for her turning down one of their 'important men'. The authors create full and complete women with private property, who are resilient, resourceful, industrious, respected, and influential in their respective communities.

Irrespective of the plethora of names given to this feminist fight, it is all aimed at emancipating the woman from all forms of stereotypes from patriarchy, so that the woman can reestablish themselves as private property owner which enhances gender relationship socially, politically, educationally, and economically in every culture.

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