Bodies for Labour, Voices for Resistance: A Marxist Feminist Analysis of Oppression and Defiance in Ogadinma and And They Didn’t Die

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Submission date: 12-Aug-2025 03:24PM (UTC+0700)
Submission ID: 2690355736
File name: IJAR-53268.docx (32.51K)
Word count: 5483
Character count: 32615

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Abstract

Using Marxist feminist theory, this paper explores the links between class and gender issues in *Ogadinma* by Ukamaka Olisakwe (2020) and *And They Didn't Die* by Lauretta Ngcobo (1990) by analysing how capitalist and patriarchal systems intersect in postcolonial African societies. Both texts demonstrate that women are central to structures that force them to labour hard, control their bodies, and limit their access to financial and social independence. By carefully analysing the texts with questions such as (1) Which class-related issues do both men and women face in the selected texts? and (2) Do their class circumstances influence the authors' approaches differently? This study aims to investigate how men and women navigate various forms of socioeconomic oppression. The analysis reveals that female protagonists face intersecting oppressions rooted in marriage, kinship, and state institutions, all of which commodify their labour and restrict their agency. Although men may benefit from gender hierarchies, they still endure economic hardships, which cause psychological issues and force them to adhere to traditional patriarchal roles. Their portrayals of resistance show that it develops gradually and manifests through subtle acts of rejection and efforts to unite within the community. The theory draws on Marxism and feminism, enriching the discussion in African literature about frameworks of inequality and various forms of resistance. It highlights how Marxist feminist theory helps explain the gendered effects of class issues and

emphasises the vital role African women writers play in theorising gender, work, and agency in literature.

KEYWORDS: Capitalist, Marxist Feminist, Oppression, Patriarchal, Socioeconomic.

Introduction

Class struggle remains the primary factor in social stratification and individual agency in postcolonial African societies. The gendered forms of economic and social oppression perpetuated from the legacy of colonial rule are cast in harmony with indigenous patriarchal structures and capitalist exploitation. African women writers use literature as a critical medium with which to interrogate how systemic inequalities affect both men and women, across different social classes. These literary interventions serve as representations and critiques, challenging the assumptions of dominant ideologies related to gender, class, and power (Nfah Abbenyi, 1997; Stratton, 1994). In the context of this tradition, the novels *Ogadinma* by Ukamaka Olisakwe and *And They Didn't Die* by Lauretta Ngcobo, both offer portrayals of the class struggle that are deeply gendered and this is in two contexts—one historical and the other cultural, since the authors work with two distinct but overlapping historical and cultural contexts, post independence Nigeria and apartheid era South Africa, respectively.

Theories of class conflict based on Marxist ideas suggest an opposite relationship between employers and workers. While fundamental to the classical model, however, it has the

limitation of overlooking how class relations are influenced by gender (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978; Harvey, 2005). From this perspective, Marxist feminism addresses this gap by linking economic exploitation with patriarchal oppression—such as unpaid domestic labour, reproductive responsibilities, and societal expectations—to demonstrate how women remain oppressed under capitalism (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016). A framework of this kind is especially significant in the African context, where socio-economic marginalisation is often reinforced by colonial legacies, customary practices, and limited access to formal labour markets and education for women (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

In *And They Didn't Die* by Lauretta Ngcobo, the compounded oppression faced by black South African women during apartheid, a regime that enforced racial and economic segregation and upheld patriarchal standards, is explored. First, since the protagonist Jezile is a mother, she faces restrictions in her legal, social, and family life that ultimately limit her autonomy and devalue her labour as a worker in the informal agricultural economy. On the other hand, Ukamaka Olisakwe's *Ogadinma* explores the postcolonial Nigerian setting, where cultural conservatism, economic dependency, and patriarchal authority work together to subdue and disempower the female protagonist. In this context, although these critical texts differ, they illustrate how women's lives are structurally determined, with women being reduced to automatic instruments for economic and reproductive functions, which prevents them from exercising self-determination (Arndt, 2002; Lewis, 2002).

Although the subordination of women in African feminist literature has been widely studied, the challenges faced by men, especially working-class men, also need to be addressed in terms of class. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), who theorised Hegemonic Masculinity, the burdens associated with male gender roles create pressure to act as a

provider and protector, leading to psychological stress, feelings of worthlessness, and even violence when these pressures become overwhelming. Like the male characters in *Ogadinma* and *And They Didn't Die*, characters also confront economic disenfranchisement and social frustration, but often in ways that merely serve to reinforce patriarchal structures. Nonetheless, these portrayals highlight that, while men benefit from gender privilege, they are not immune to the harsh realities of class oppression.

Furthermore, both novels portray state and social institutions, the family, marriage, and the law, as active agents in perpetuating gendered class hierarchies. Through societal norms and institutional practices, the economic exploitation of women's unpaid labour, whether in the workplace or fields, as housewives and agricultural workers respectively, is systematically justified. This expectation for men to take on economic roles under precarious conditions initiates a cycle of domination and disempowerment simultaneously. The class and gender struggles in these texts appear interconnected and cannot be separated but must be understood relationally (Crenshaw, 1991; Lugones, 2007). This interconnected nature of these oppressions emphasises women's particular vulnerabilities and men's contested positions within a capitalist-patriarchal order, which can be analysed both theoretically and literarily.

Therefore, this paper examines the dynamics of class struggle in *Ogadinma* and *And They Didn't Die* through the lens of Marxist feminism. The thesis aims to understand the socio-economic experiences of both male and female characters as depicted by the authors and focuses on how these characters cope with, resist, or are subdued by the systems that exploit them. Two research questions guide the study: (1) What class struggles do the male and female characters in the selected texts face? and (2) How do the identified class struggles impact men and women, respectively, from the authors' perspectives?

Marxist Feminism

A critical theoretical perspective of Marxist feminism examines the intersection of class and gender oppression, specifically analysing how such oppressions manifest for women living in patriarchal capitalist societies. A theory of Marxist feminism is based on classical Marxist thought, which it revises through feminist critique and questions the role of economic systems not only to exploit labour but also to sustain gendered divisions, which facilitate that exploitation. In Marxist feminist theory, we understand that women's unpaid reproductive and domestic labour is vital to capitalist economies but remains structurally invisible and uncompensated (Federici, 2012; Vogel, 2013). According to Marxist feminists, this omission was, moreover, a typical oversight of classical Marxism's tendency to neglect waged labour and the proletarian nature of industry in particular. Marxist feminism enables us to view social reproduction as the foundational level of exploitation, offering a deeper understanding of how power is exercised through economic relations and gendered ideologies alike.

However, unlike liberal feminist approaches that typically focus on equality within the existing system and unlike radical approaches that view patriarchy as an autonomous system of oppression, Marxist feminism emphasises the interconnectedness of capitalism and patriarchy. To illustrate this, Nancy Fraser (2016) argues that historically, capitalism has depended on gendered regimes of labour organisation, with women bearing the burden of reproducing labour power through child rearing, domestic maintenance, and caregiving in the private sphere. This reproductive labour is vital for the reproduction of the workforce but receives neither wages nor formal recognition, thereby perpetuating economic dependence and systemic subordination. A further critique of capitalist accumulation is offered by Silvia Federici (2012), who also condemns the appropriation of women's bodies and their unpaid domestic work, which she describes as 'primitive accumulation' in contemporary forms.

The concept of ‘double burden’ is central to this framework, as women bear the heavy responsibilities of paid labour in the public sphere and unpaid domestic chores in the private sphere. In African societies, gendered expectations still compel women to handle household tasks and carry emotional duties as they enter the labour market with insecure job prospects (Amadiume, 1987; Steady, 2006). Here, the patriarchal family is not only a cultural unit but also an economic institution that reinforces women’s subservience and maintains it within kinship and marriage systems. As illustrated in *Ogadinma* and *And They Didn’t Die*, marriage becomes a space of female regulation and economic exchange that contributes to the reproduction of value along gender and class lines.

Marxist feminism emphasises the materialist basis of gender oppression. Unlike dominant perspectives where gender identity is seen mainly as discursive or symbolic, Marxist feminism anchors its analysis in socio-economic structures that contribute to the formation of gender roles and relations. According to Heidi Hartmann (1979), this represents an unhappy marriage between Marxism and feminism because feminist issues are often hierarchically subordinate to class analysis, yet it offers promise for a productive synthesis, namely, recognising patriarchy as a set of material social relations intertwined with capitalist economic organisation. This synthesis is especially illuminating considering how colonial histories, global capitalism, and indigenous patriarchies have combined to produce complex forms of gendered exploitation in the African context.

Additionally, Marxist feminism examines the ideological apparatuses that make gendered exploitation seem 'real' and 'normal'. Theorists such as Louis Althusser (1971) argue that the family, religion, and education constitute the ‘ideological state apparatuses’ that reproduce the conditions necessary for capitalism's preservation by providing both ideological and material conditions for its continuation. In literature, these are dramatised through characters’ lived experiences: illustrating how women are taught to accept submissiveness and self-sacrifice,

while men are conditioned to desire rulership and dominance, often through providing bread and economic stability. For example, Ogadinma socialises the titular character into obedience and silence, while in *And They Didn't Die*, Jezile's experiences reflect the ideology and power of traditional customs that subjugate women. Such literary representations offer valuable insights into how ideological and economic forces intertwine to sustain enduring systems of gendered class oppression.

In terms of materiality, Marxist feminism in African literature also explores intersectionality. Although Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term 'intersectionality' to describe how multiple systems of oppression such as race, gender, and class overlap, Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) argues that these systems are shaped by the demands of capital. In African societies, this often manifests as patterns of oppression rooted in ethnicity, rural versus urban divisions, colonialism, and cultural practices. Marxist feminist readings of African texts therefore need to attune themselves to the local idioms of class and gender and how these are situated within the broader context of global capitalist processes.

Furthermore, Marxist feminist theory can critique capitalism from a feminist perspective on masculinity. Although Marxist feminism often emphasises women's oppression, it does not ignore the fact that working-class men are also exploited in similar ways, especially when they fail to perform the economic roles associated with hegemonic masculinity. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), Ratele (2013) indicated, these failures can lead to psychological distress, domestic violence, and patriarchal control as forms of compensatory power. In *Ogadinma,* as well as *And They Didn't Die*, male characters lacking economic capital ultimately resort to controlling women's bodies and choices, this illustrates how patriarchy and class domination can coexist, rather than one simply leading to the other.

Nevertheless, Marxist feminism offers a strong and nuanced perspective on the complex and intersecting forms of oppression that shape the lives of both men and women in African societies. The theory emphasises the material basis of gendered subjugation, enabling us to question the socio-economic backgrounds of literary narratives. Marxist feminism will be employed as an analytical tool in the analysis of *Ogadinma* and in *And They Didn't Die* to demonstrate how class struggle is gendered and institutionalised, how it is resisted within these texts, and how it contributes to the discussion of the political economy of gender relations in African literature.

Discussion and Analysis

Class Struggles Faced by Male and Female Characters in the Selected Texts

In the Marxist usage, class struggle is more than merely economic deprivation; it is the convergence of labour, power and social value throughout the social and civil architecture. In *Ogadinma* by Ukamaka Olisakwe and *And They Didn't Die* by Lauretta Ngcobo, women and men alike are exploited on the basis of class, but their experiences differ according to gender, culture, and historical moment. This section also shows how every conflict is a gender stratified conflict by comparing the hardships of both genders and proving how class exploitation has been very much gendered.

In this context, the use of the word commodifies the female body within Ogadinma's system, where all her life decisions are shaped by this framework that reduces her to a commodity in the name of familial duty and cultural norms. Ogadinma was husband-hunted after her father's friend sexually assaulted her, was sent to Lagos, and was deceived into a marriage arranged by her father, aligning with the economic logic of patriarchy. Her lack of agency in this decision exposes how women are treated as commodities, as Marxist feminists argue, interchangeable products within a male-dominated economy and social reproduction

(Federici, 2012). In this context, marriage acts not as a personal union but as a structure that maintains class, with the female body used to sustain the family and economy. She also performs unpaid domestic labour, and her husband further subordinates her at home by contributing little while asserting dominance at work. She suffers without recourse from the state, which, as part of a broader class system, operates through gender disenfranchisement.

Jezile in *And They Didn't Die* confronts the intersecting forces of racial capitalism and patriarchal oppression. Jezile, a Black woman in apartheid South Africa (1921-1994), was born and raised in the poorest rural area of South Africa, situated at the bottom of multiple social hierarchies: Black and lowest rung. Her path to economic disempowerment begins with her being refused entry into formal employment, leaving her dependent on subsistence farming and temporary migratory labour, which offer very low pay and physically demanding work. Additionally, her reproductive choices are regulated by the state under apartheid laws and patriarchal family customs. The pass laws, which controlled Black mobility, lead Jezile to visit her husband in Durban without a permit, resulting in her arrest. According to Lewis (2002), the law not only segregates along racial lines but also uses the black woman's body for exploitative labour. Jezile's imprisonment and the forced removal of her child from her are acts of state-sanctioned reproductive violence, emblematic of Marxist feminism as outlined by Fraser (2016), illustrating how capitalist domination of women's bodies occurs.

In both texts, the unpaid and undervalued reproductive labour of women becomes a central site of exploitation. For example, Ogadinma, who manages the household, cares for her children, does not work outside the home and relies financially on her husband, is denied the chance to leave an abusive partner because she lacks leverage. Similar to Jezile, the state and family institutions undermine her contribution to household survival through agricultural work and caregiving. In both cases, the women's labour is extracted for both production and

reproduction without compensation or institutional support, which aligns with what Bhattacharya (2017) describes as the capitalist dependence on social reproduction.

The issues related to class are also examined through male characters in the two novels, but from different viewpoints. Ogadinma's husband, Tobe, is a civil servant whose modest income contrasts with his self-perceived sense of authority over his wife, reflecting his failed upward social mobility. He has linked his masculinity to his role as provider, and when his authority is challenged, along with his limited material power, he resorts to physical violence. This aligns with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is based on economic support and dominance; thus, making working-class men more susceptible to structural inequalities and internalised patriarchy.

Jezile's husband, Siyalo, is similarly confined in *And They Didn't Die*. As a migrant labourer, he remains physically absent from the domestic space and works under exploitative conditions within the urban economy. He embodies masculinity insofar as his ability to send remittances sustains his family, but in doing so, he loses the emotional connection and familial authority. It is not only his absence that makes Jezile vulnerable, but also the disposability he internalises under capitalist labour systems. Siyalo is disconnected from his household and profoundly alienated from fatherhood; he functions as a cog within the economic machinery. Therefore, whilst patriarchal systems benefit men, they burden those unable to perform their socially sanctioned roles.

Significantly, such class-based gender roles are ideologically reproduced culturally through norms and expectations. The silence surrounding sexual violence and the prioritisation of family honour over a female's own autonomy, as seen in Ogadinma, demonstrate how deeply embedded patriarchal logics conceal class exploitation. In *Ogadinma*, her arranged marriage is justified by her father as a way to prevent her 'shame' or, more accurately, to rid her of

trauma, which is merely treated as a financial burden. In *And They Didn't Die*, systemic inequality persists even within a community that emphasises collectivism, highlighting men's authority and women's endurance. The fact that other women constantly criticise Jezile for her dissatisfaction illustrates how both genders internalise and perpetuate patriarchal ideologies (Althusser, 1971; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

In both texts, education appears to serve as a marker of class and as a form of potential resistance. Her being initially in school, along with her assault and marriage, exemplifies how education is withheld from women to maintain their dependence. Like Jezile, a lack of formal education denies her opportunities for social mobility or political activism. According to Marxist feminists, such denial of intellectual development constitutes another form of epistemic violence that prevents women from challenging exploitation. Both texts portray men and external authorities as the guardians of literacy and knowledge, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies.

Ogadimma and *And They Didn't Die further* illustrate how class struggle extends beyond wealth sharing to encompass gendered power dynamics. It is not merely poverty that is burdened upon the female protagonists; it is also inflicted through their roles as women, who perform physical, emotional, and reproductive labour that remains undervalued within the system. Although the male characters hold relative authority, they also bear the weight of expectations that connect their worth to marginal economic roles. In this manner, the class struggles depicted in both texts are gendered in their form and effects, shaping identity, agency, and survival along unequal yet interconnected paths.

4.2. Effects of Class Struggles on Male and Female Characters from the Perspectives of the Authors

This section examines the gender-specific class struggles faced by the characters in *Ogadinma* and *And They Didn't Die*, and how these struggles impact their lives, identities, and psychological well-being; focusing particularly on the way the authors depict these consequences. Ultimately, the aim is to explore the narrative and thematic choices of Olisakwe and Ngcobo, as the novels portray not only suffering but also resistance, survival, and transformation.

Both novels reveal that the most immediate effect of class struggle on female characters is the denial of autonomy. The combination of being uneducated, living in poverty, and having been socialised into silence and submission makes Ogadinma indefensible and susceptible to repeated violations. Commodification of women, along with discouragement of dissent, go hand in hand, resulting in her sexual abuse, coerced marriage, and domestic enslavement. Olisakwe's chosen narrative voice is mainly casual, emphasising Ogadinma's contained monologue and psychological distortions, all of which aim to highlight the psychological toll of financial and sexual oppression. Her exploitation has long-term effects which include trauma, alienation, and delayed feelings of self-worth. Olisakwe (2020) regards the woman's eventual decision to leave her husband as refusal rather than liberation in the traditional sense, but a refusal to remain in a void that offers no other options.

In the case of Jezile, both the physical and symbolic impacts of class struggle can be observed. Her imprisonment simultaneously strips her of reproductive agency and emotional contact with her child, which remains a theme throughout the novel. Jezile's body is a political site that Ngcobo portrays as 'literally and metaphorically scarred by the violence of the state and the indifference of patriarchal kinship structures'. However, Jezile gradually develops into a resilient figure; she engages in underground political activities, promotes girls' education, and challenges local chiefs. Thus, through Ngcobo's depiction, she suggests that although structural conditions may not change significantly, moments of empowerment

can arise through individual and collective resistance (Ngcobo, 1990). This aligns with Marxist feminist arguments that the revolution must begin in the sphere of social reproduction (and not solely at the state level), but through transforming the community (Bhattacharya, 2017).

In other words, class struggle differs but remains equally important for male characters. Given this reality, Tobe in Ogadinma, whose inability to control the economy or institutional space only leads to gaining more control within the domestic sphere. His abusive behaviour is both a symptom and a reinforcement of patriarchy as the authority. Olisakwe does not redeem Tobe; however, his violence is not presented as merely a consequence of marginalisation but as a deliberate assertion of power rooted in vulnerability. According to feminist critiques (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which see male complicity not only in supporting oppression but also in their own subjugation due to class, this serves as another reflection of their situation.

On the other hand, Siyalo is depicted with more nuance. He loves Jezile deeply, but as a social person, he is unable to support her or express his emotions. Instead of justifying patriarchy through his absence and powerlessness, Ngcobo uses these traits to critique the system overall: it has deprived both women and men of the richness of human relationships under capitalism. His emotional detachment symbolises the systemic violence of labour exploitation and spatial dislocation inflicted on black men, which is reflected in the family unit. The system utilises male labour while dismembering families, and Siyalo is not vilified but mourned as a victim of that system.

Likewise, both authors also show how class struggle hampers intergenerational progress. Unable to complete her education and without an income, the poor cycle foreshadows what may be the lot of her daughter. However, Jezile disobeys this cycle as much as she can; she

insists that her daughter attend school, despite resistance. There is no question that in both instances, education becomes a battleground over future class positioning and gender liberation. In this way, the authors thus gesture towards long-term societal change by empowering younger generations, even with caution and an awareness of the system's constraints.

Both of these texts also demonstrate that there is an internalisation of class struggles, not just resistance. She often blames herself for her predicament, which aligns with the concept of ideological interpellation proposed by Althusser (1971), whereby individuals internalise societal norms to ascribe to themselves an identity and value as human beings. Early on, Jezile and his self-doubt reflect how systemic oppression infiltrates consciousness before it is recognised and resisted. Both authors emphasise that emancipation is a process rather than a single event, and they depict it as fundamentally rooted in material transformation while also requiring profound ideological change.

Findings

Seeking to explore how class struggle is gendered in Ukamaka Olisakwe's *Ogadinma* and Lauretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*, this study employed Marxist feminist theory as its discursive tool. A comparative literary analysis that highlights the complex interplay of socio-economic deprivation, gendered power structures, and cultural expectations responds to the two key research questions guiding the investigation: (1) What class struggles do both men and women characters face in the selected texts? and (2) How does the recognised class struggle influence men and women, respectively, through the perspectives of the chosen authors? This analysis yields several significant findings that reveal how capitalist and patriarchal systems intersect to shape the lived realities of the characters in the selected novels.

The first significant finding in the two texts is that both depict class struggles centred on patriarchal institutions that commodify and discipline the female body. In *Ogadinma* and *And They Didn't Die*, marriage, kinship, and motherhood are not sources of feminine power or liberation but mechanisms for economic exploitation and control. After a violent incident, Ogadinma is compelled into marriage, and her silence is justified by the need to preserve social honour. Jezile's arrest and the delayed separation of her child from her reflect the state's role as an agent of racial capitalism and patriarchal control, attempting to regulate female mobility and reproductive autonomy. As a result, these elements support Marxist feminist arguments that women's unpaid and undervalued reproductive labour is vital to capitalist systems and often overlooked in public discourse (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016).

Second, the novels demonstrate that class struggle does not operate in a gender-neutral manner; instead, the effects of class struggle are experienced quite differently by male and female characters. Although both are economically disenfranchised, women find themselves caught in a "double bind" of contending with both class and gender-based subjugation. Like Ogadinma, physical abuse and emotional silence also seem to add to economic dependency. Despite being hardworking and politically aware, Jezile's hopes are ultimately thwarted by the web of race, gender, and class domination in which she is entangled. These stories suggest that, beyond material deprivation, class struggle also inflicts painful psychological effects on women, leading to social alienation and stifled agency.

A third major finding involves privileged male characters who, within a patriarchal system, are equally victims of class-based expectations that tie masculinity to economic provision. Both Tobe and Siyalo are depicted through their failure to fulfil society's expected roles, leading them to become violent and emotionally detached. The inability to meet economic ideals results in frustration, dispersal, and revengeful control over women as a form of compensation. These portrayals align with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) thesis that

hegemonic masculinity not only enables dominance but also causes harm when it remains unfulfilled or challenged.

The fourth point concerns ideology and internal culture of subjugation as factors that support the ongoing class structure. However, Ogadinma and Jezile both internalise feelings of guilt, shame, and resignation that reproduce and contextualise their subordination, fixing their gaze on deterministic ideas about the future. The institutions they mention, such as family, education, and religion, are akin to the ideological state apparatuses that Althusser (1971) argues embed these hierarchical norms into the consciousness of individuals. It is clear that in both of these texts, women's subjugation is not solely enforced physically or economically but is also sustained through the production of ideas, through which women come to accept their suffering as natural and hear no dissent.

Despite these oppressive forces, a final observation is that both texts provide space for resistance, even if it is limited or flawed. Jezile's choice to become a political activist and to insist on her daughter's education, along with Ogadinma's eventual decision to leave her husband, serve as acts of defiance against the dominance of capitalist patriarchy. Although these acts occur within restricted settings, they act as calls for agency and collective change. While they lack utopian resolutions, the authors highlight the resilience of women and demonstrate how consciousness-raising and solidarity can be transformative.

This makes a significant contribution to the literature on class struggle in African literature by presenting it through a gendered and intersectional lens. These novels show that positive norms of masculinity that underpin male dominance, competing with norms of femininity that support male privilege, can also result in disempowerment. Furthermore, it is clear that despite gender privilege, men are often disempowered because they fail to meet the class-based expectations of masculinity. *Ogadinma* and, in particular, *And They Didn't Die*, both

support the core principles of Marxist feminist theory: that capitalism and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing systems, and that analysis of class struggle must be rooted in the lived, gendered experiences of the individuals involved because they are more than mere economic entities.

Conclusion

In this study, *Ogadinma* by Ukamaka Olisakwe and *And They Didn't Die* by Lauretta Ngcobo are regarded as comparative studies of gendered dynamics in class struggle within the context of postcolonial Africa, using Marxist feminist theory. The paper demonstrates that the oppression resulting from class in African societies is closely linked with gender oppression, where men and women experience social and economic marginalisation in different but structurally connected ways. These Marxist feminist theories, focusing on reproductive labour, ideological control, and intersectional oppression, together provide the theoretical framework through which literature can be rigorously analysed to understand how class hierarchies are reproduced and challenged through literary narratives.

It was clear that in both novels, women's lives are shaped by a patriarchal institution that commodifies their bodies, controls their choices, and appropriates their labour. Both protagonists, Ogadinma and Jezile, endure physical, emotional, and institutional violence rooted in cultural rationales that are further reinforced by economic dependency. Although their backgrounds are set in two distinct national contexts, their journeys follow a common pattern of silencing, disempowerment, and eventual rebellion. Despite the relative gender privileges of male characters, the Bourgeois Male, like others, is seen as fitting class-based expectations of provision and patriarchal authority. When these expectations are not met, they tend to react by withdrawing, becoming aggressive, or experiencing internal crises, which solidifies the gendered consequences of class struggle.

Notably, the study also showed that both authors portray resistance as the result of everyday actions such as leaving a violent marriage, insisting on a daughter's education, or joining a collective action. Despite their small scale, these acts of defiance embody the Marxist feminist idea of what is possible through the transformation of consciousness and material conditions. Neither text offers a fully emancipatory resolution; however, this highlights that agency, solidarity, and critique are essential in combating structural oppression.

This analysis enables African feminist literature to remain a crucial space for exploring the intersection of gender and class. Authors like Olisakwe and Ngcobo show that feminist ideas must be rooted in material realities, which are shaped by colonial histories, economic exploitation, and cultural patriarchy. Furthermore, by emphasising both male and female characters, this study challenges binaries of victim and oppressor, illustrating that systems of power operate along gendered and classed lines.

Further research could continue to examine the combined impacts of class, gender, and race in African literature, especially concerning contemporary neoliberalism, urbanisation, and digital labour. A deeper understanding of how class struggles persist and evolve within the African literary imagination could also be gained through comparative studies across linguistic, regional, and generational boundaries. Ultimately, however, this study advocates for employing Marxist feminist literary analysis both as a critique method and as a way to envisage alternative futures rooted in justice, equity, and shared liberation.

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