
CASE CONFLICT IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S DEVIL ON THE CROSS AND FESTUS IYAYI'S VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the manifestation and dynamics of case conflict in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1980) and Festus Iyayi's *Violence* (1979), with a focus on economic inequality, gender oppression, ideological manipulation, and the development of resistance and consciousness. Employing a qualitative, comparative literary analysis, the paper integrates textual evidence from both novels under thematic categories: economic and class conflict, gender conflict, ideological conflict, and resistance and consciousness, and leans on Marxist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks to interpret the social, political, and psychological dimensions of conflict. The analysis reveals that economic disparity and structural inequality serve as primary sources of tension, while patriarchal and ideological systems reinforce oppression and obscure the mechanisms of exploitation. Again, both writers' narrative strategies - Ngũgĩ utilizes satire and allegory, and Iyayi employs social realism – vividly expose systemic injustice, and the lived experiences of the oppressed. The paper argues that Ngugi and Iyayi, through their major characters, Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* and Idemudia and Adisa in *Violence*, demonstrate that conflict catalyzes awareness, ethical reflection, and forms of resistance, whether overt or subtle. This paper concludes that literature not only reflects societal inequities but also serves as a medium for critical reflection and socio-political engagement, and that class, gender and ideology are the wheel upon which case conflict spins in African literature. The paper recommends among others, that the case conflict in African Literature should be approached from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective to uncover how historical, political, cultural, economic and religious underpinnings engender Class, gender and ideological conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Case Conflict, Postcolonial African Literature, Economic Inequality, Gender, Oppression, Ideology, Resistance, Consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

African literature has historically functioned as a powerful medium for interrogating social realities, particularly the contradictions that emerged in postcolonial African states after independence. Not long after the exit of the colonial administrators, and the transfer of power to the Africans, the hopes, aspirations and yearnings for ideal leadership became shattered by Africans who steered the ship of state, the leaders, thus, ushering in an era of disappointment and disgruntlement among the led. Many African writers became deeply concerned with the failure of political independence to translate into economic justice and social equality. As a result, literature became not merely a creative enterprise but also an intellectual and ideological weapon used to expose injustice and advocate social transformation. Writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Festus Iyayi belong to a generation of African authors whose works reflect a radical commitment to examining class struggle, corruption, exploitation, and the betrayal of nationalist ideals by the post-independence ruling elite.

One of the most significant thematic concerns in African radical fiction is what may be described as case conflict, that is, conflict arising from structural inequalities embedded within social, economic, and political systems. This type of conflict often manifests as class antagonism between the wealthy ruling class and the impoverished masses. In Marxist-oriented African literature, such conflicts are not presented as accidental but as inevitable consequences of exploitative economic structures. According to Karl Marx, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels 14). This assertion provides an important foundation for understanding the ideological motivations behind the works of Ngũgĩ and Iyayi, whose novels present fictional worlds deeply shaped by material inequality and social injustice.

Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* stands as one of the most radical critiques of neocolonial capitalism in African literature. Written originally in Gikuyu as *Caĩtaani Mũtharaba-Ini*, while the author was imprisoned for his political activism, the novel represents Ngũgĩ's commitment to literature as a tool for social liberation. The text explores the economic betrayal of the Kenyan people by their own leaders who, rather than dismantling colonial structures, merely inherited and perpetuated them. Ngũgĩ argues that postcolonial African elites often function as agents of foreign capitalism, thereby continuing the exploitation

initiated during colonial rule (Ngũgĩ 1982). Through satire, allegory, and revolutionary symbolism, *Devil on the Cross* dramatizes the moral bankruptcy of a society in which wealth accumulation becomes more important than human dignity.

The central narrative follows Jacinta Wariinga, whose personal struggles mirror the broader social realities of exploitation and gender oppression. Her experiences of unemployment, sexual harassment, and economic marginalization reveal how capitalist structures disproportionately affect women and the poor. Ngũgĩ uses her transformation from victimhood to resistance to symbolize the possibility of revolutionary consciousness among oppressed groups. As Gikandi observes, Ngũgĩ's fiction consistently seeks to "recover the dignity of the oppressed through narratives of resistance" (212). This perspective underscores the ideological dimension of the novel as a text that not only represents conflict but also advocates resistance against oppression.

Similarly, Iyayi's *Violence* presents a powerful depiction of class conflict within the Nigerian socio-economic landscape. As a novelist deeply influenced by Marxist thought and his involvement in academic union activism, Iyayi uses fiction to examine the harsh realities faced by the working class in a capitalist society. The novel portrays the struggles of Idemudia and his wife Adisa, whose lives are defined by poverty, unemployment, and social neglect. Iyayi presents violence not only in its physical form but also as a structural condition produced by inequality. In this sense, violence becomes a metaphor for the suffering imposed by unjust economic systems.

Iyayi's portrayal of urban poverty highlights the contradictions of a society where wealth exists alongside extreme deprivation. The novel demonstrates how economic power determines access to healthcare, housing, and basic human needs. According to critics, Iyayi redefines violence as "the silent suffering produced by social injustice and economic exploitation" (Ogunyemi 67). This broader conception of violence aligns with Marxist interpretations of structural oppression as a form of systemic aggression against the poor.

A significant similarity between Ngũgĩ and Iyayi lies in their shared commitment to socialist realism and their belief in literature as an instrument of social change. Both writers reject the notion of literature as mere entertainment and instead position it as a form of ideological engagement. Ngũgĩ himself argues that literature must actively participate in the struggle against oppression, insisting that writers have a responsibility to align themselves with the oppressed classes (Ngũgĩ *Writers in Politics* 34). Iyayi similarly believed that literature should expose injustice and promote social consciousness.

Another important dimension of case conflict in both novels is the intersection between economic inequality and gender oppression. Both authors demonstrate how women often experience a double burden of class and gender exploitation. Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* and Adisa in *Violence* illustrate how economic hardship can force women into vulnerable positions. Their experiences highlight the gendered dimension of class conflict, showing that social injustice often operates along multiple axes.

Furthermore, both novels situate their conflicts within the broader context of neocolonialism. Frantz Fanon argues that postcolonial societies often reproduce colonial hierarchies through local elites who replace colonial administrators without changing the exploitative system (Fanon 152). This observation is particularly relevant to Ngũgĩ's portrayal of Kenyan businessmen who celebrate their ability to exploit their fellow citizens. Likewise, Iyayi's depiction of corrupt contractors and indifferent politicians reflects similar dynamics within the Nigerian context.

Despite the ideological similarities between these two writers, their narrative techniques differ significantly. Ngũgĩ employs satire, symbolism, and elements of oral storytelling traditions to construct a revolutionary allegory, while Iyayi adopts social realism to present a psychologically detailed portrayal of everyday suffering. This difference reflects their individual aesthetic strategies while reinforcing their shared ideological commitment to social critique.

Ultimately, this study argues that Ngũgĩ and Iyayi present case conflict not merely as a literary motif but as a reflection of real socio-economic contradictions within African societies. Their works demonstrate that where injustice exists, conflict becomes inevitable. More importantly, both writers suggest that awareness of injustice is the first step toward resistance and eventual transformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The portrayal of African nations' sociopolitical and economic realities is the central concept of African literature. According to Akingbe, "a work of African art that fails to address issues of socio-political or historical significance is frequently considered to be outside the scope of African aesthetics" This indicates that African literature is socially relevant, thereby distinguishing it from other forms of literature, such as the Western concept of art for the sake of art. As a result, any literary work that does not conform to this trend cannot be included in the African literary canon. This concept has always been present in the works of significant African authors, some of whom are mentioned above.

This equivalent pattern has likewise been given to the contemporary essayists, for example, Helon Habila's *Hanging tight for a Heavenly messenger*, as a contemporary novel, gives a genuine impression of Nigerian socio-political circumstance in 1986-1998, the tactical system of Babangida\Abacha. The book is referred to as a *faction*, which means that it is both a fictional work and an amalgam of events from real life (fact)..

However, it is at this point of the reflection of socio-political and economic issue of a society that African literature coincides with Marxism. "This is evident in the statement of Afolayan (2): 'Since the African novel has essentially evolved out of the writer's mandate to reflect socio – political and economic experiences; the postulates of Marxism may assist in its interpretation . This means that Marxism, as a literary theory, sees the work of literature not as an independent aesthetic object as believed by the formalists, New Critics, structuralists, etc, but as a product of a particular society at a particular time. That is, Marxism sees works of art as a reflection of socio-economic reality of a particular place and time. Therefore, literature, to Marxism, can only be understood by relating it to the environment that produces it. This is also evident to what Afolayan says: 'Marxist criticism operates on the assumption that literature can be properly understood only within a larger framework of social reality '" (2).

He also goes ahead to add that because it seems that the African novelist is given to the portrayal of social reality, which evinces the realistic sociopolitical situations of the Third World, Marxism has much to offer the modern African novel (2). This means that since African literature shares the same value with Marxism, which is the reflection of social situation in the work of art, there is a connection between the two which is inseparable. For instance, Ngugi 'has been influenced by Marxism, above all, he displays his Marxist ideology, in his fiction through his penetrating analysis of social fact, his rejection of capitalism, and his support for the popular masses in their struggle against the corrupt capitalist bourgeoisie and neo colonialism (Abis 3). Criticism of capitalism has been the major concern of Karl Marx. Although it is not stated in Ngugi's essays that he is a Marxist, as noted by Paolo Abis, his rejection of capitalism and support of the masses in his literary works suggest his support for Marxism. This then makes Kgalemang to also state that 'The Devil on the Cross is an indication of the devastating effects of capitalism' (4). Abis further states that 'Ngugi sees capitalism as an unfair system where the loss of the masses is the gain of a few', a system that is the root cause of political and economic problems that affect postcolonial African countries (3). Uwasomba (102) also avers that "*Devil on the Cross*

shows the class struggle between the poor and the rich, the exploited and the exploiters" (102).

This view is further reinstated by Victor, where he states that "Iyayi traces the socio-political malaise in the society to the door step of the rulership and members of the bourgeoisie who in their unbridled greed for wealth and luxury deny the common man the basic means of survival and any vestige of self-respect" (96). Cornel further argues that Iyayi 'projects the socio-economic exploitation and deprivation in society owing to class consciousness. Few individuals control the money and means of production; hence, the labourers find themselves living at the mercy of the unfeeling bourgeoisie (310). Sani also hints that "Iyayi rehabilitates the image of the working class as the primary historical force, and is to be politically reckoned with in society (39). Chilwa opines that 'Drawing from the Marxist interpretation of society, Iyayi identifies and unmasks the evils of capitalist society and proposes the ideals of man's social and spiritual liberation" (3).

Chilwa further states that 'Festus Iyayi sees the Nigerian capitalist society as committing various forms of violence against the masses. To him, capitalism is violence, and violence should be answered with violence. He advocates a mass revolt which hopefully would usher in a new socio economic order (12).' This notion is also evident in the view of Sani (39) where he states that Iyayi in *Violence* portrays the working class not as passive but as individuals who believe in struggling for their freedom, who are conscious and are prepared to face their problems courageously. Uwasomba additionally expresses that 'Devil on the Cross uncovered the situation of the majority and the laborers in the present-day political set-up in Africa in consonance with the conviction of Ngugi that African scholars ought to address themselves to the emergency or struggle between the developing African bourgeoisie and the African masses. This indicates that capitalism is a socioeconomic system in which a small number of individuals have the opportunity to exploit, oppress, and dehumanize the majority of people for the purpose of acquiring wealth and luxury.' Subsequently, the main method for ousting this harsh decision framework is through the demonstration of viciousness.

Again, Dukor opines that:

Marxism not only revealed the reasons for colonialism, imperialism, lopsidedness in the world economic order and disparity in incomes among individuals, societies and nations; it also provide the colonized and third world countries and the less privileged (or the proletariat) in all societies with the theory and consciousness for revolution and social action (20).

This suggests that, as a result of exploitation, Marxism reveals the true essence of European colonization and imperialism, particularly in Africa. However, Marxism does not stop there; It also raises awareness of the internal contradictions of colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, and neocolonialism among Africans, particularly the less fortunate. As a result, this has always been the core of African fiction. Abis points out that Ngugi's "*Devil on the Cross*" ultimately aims to inform the working class of Kenya about the corrupt nature of capitalist society and to support them in their political struggle for independence and freedom (3). Ngugi also, following Marx's presumption, focuses on the economic conditions and circumstances of social classes that make up a society's social structure. To use Marxist terminology, he always moves from the economic base to the ideological superstructure (Antonio 22). Chilwa (1) adds, "The complex task of the literary artist in search of social change in a modern materialist society is illustrated by Festus Iyayi's literary aesthetics and social vision." His critical realism presents social ideals for the Nigerian worker's social and economic emancipation and depicts his exploitation and humiliation.

In *Violence*, Iyayi presents the stark contrast between the living conditions of the dominant and the dominated, the rulers and the ruled, and the wealthy and the poor in contemporary Nigeria from the perspectives of Joy and Julius. Chilwa goes on to say that Iyayi doesn't just write about the political and economic situation in society passively; rather, she also suggests a revolutionary alternative as the only way to free the masses from the shackles of bourgeois exploitation. As a result, he asserts that *Violence* provides a realistic depiction of an oppressed world and a glimmer of hope for escaping capitalist exploitation (1).

Literature, according to Marxist literary criticism, is the embodiment of an ideology that either fights for equity or the right of the poor by protesting against the exploitative acts and motives of the rich or serves the interests of the bourgeoisie by creating false consciousness in the mind of the working class. Abis also says that Ngugi "decides to line up with the masses in their struggle for liberation" because he is "fully aware of the social and economic struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, the elite and the masses, which is at the core of the capitalist system". This also coincides in the statement of Olaniyan and Quayson that: Literature in such circumstances is fully implicated in the class struggle. It can either evince a consciousness that seems to conserve the society on behalf of privileged interests exude a revolutionary consciousness congruent with the objective interests of the oppressed class which is engaged in the struggle to change the social status quo (472).

However, African novel has been dedicated to the course of liberating the poor and the oppressed from the shackles of bourgeois exploitation. It aims at creating a conscious awareness in the mind of the oppressed to the social reality of the socio-political and economic system of their societies. The tendency for this is to urge the poor to rise and fight for what belong to them. In this case, violence and revolution are essential elements in Marxist literature. Revolutionary writers like Ngugi and Iyayi for instance, are concerned with the predicament and welfare of the less privileged or the poor and they argue that through strike and violence, the masses could be liberated from the shackles of oppression. In this case, violence is a means of changing the social status quo. Nwankwo states that ‘violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man (8). Ngugi justifies that all violence are not all bad and evil; there are some violence that are good and honourable. In this case, he argues that any violence that is directed towards changing corruption, oppression, exploitation, alienation, and other social ills are good and acceptable.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Marxist literary theory, which provides a useful framework for analyzing the representation of class conflict and socio-economic inequality in literature. Marxist criticism is based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who argued that material conditions shape social relations and cultural production. According to Marxist theory, literature is not created in isolation but reflects the economic structures and ideological tensions within society. One of the central assumptions of Marxist literary theory is that society is divided into classes with opposing interests. The bourgeoisie control the means of production, while the proletariat sell their labour to survive. This relationship inevitably produces conflict because the ruling class seeks to maximize profit while the working class seeks fair compensation. As Marx explains, capitalism is characterized by the extraction of surplus value from workers, leading to exploitation (Marx 325).

This concept is particularly relevant to *Devil on the Cross* and *Violence*, both of which portray societies where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few while the majority struggle for survival. The conflicts depicted in these novels can therefore be understood as literary representations of Marx’s theory of class antagonism.

Another important Marxist concept relevant to this study is ideology. Louis Althusser defines ideology as the system of ideas through which the ruling class maintains dominance by

shaping how people perceive reality (Althusser 162). In both novels, institutions such as religion, politics, and business function as ideological tools that justify inequality. For example, in *Devil on the Cross*, the businessmen justify exploitation as entrepreneurship, while in *Violence*, the wealthy normalize inequality as part of economic reality. These representations illustrate how ideology can mask injustice and prevent resistance.

The concept of reification, developed by Georg Lukács, is also relevant. Reification refers to the process by which human relationships are reduced to economic transactions. In Iyayi's *Violence*, human dignity is often subordinated to economic necessity, as seen in the way labour is commodified and personal relationships are strained by poverty. This demonstrates how capitalism transforms human values into market values.

The paper also draws from Frantz Fanon's theory of postcolonial class formation. Fanon argues that the African bourgeoisie often becomes a transmission line between foreign capital and local exploitation (Fanon 153). This concept is clearly illustrated in Ngũgĩ's portrayal of Kenyan elites who collaborate with foreign interests.

Additionally, the concept of structural violence provides an important theoretical extension. Johan Galtung defines structural violence as harm caused by social systems that prevent individuals from meeting basic needs. This concept helps explain Iyayi's depiction of poverty as a form of violence. The suffering experienced by Idemudia and Adisa is not caused by individual failure but by systemic injustice.

Marxist literary theory also emphasizes the concept of class consciousness, which refers to the awareness of one's position within the class structure. Both novels portray characters who gradually develop awareness of their oppression. Wariinga's transformation in *Devil on the Cross* and Idemudia's frustrations in *Violence* illustrate the development of such consciousness.

Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is relevant. Gramsci argues that the ruling class maintains power not only through force but also through consent, achieved by controlling cultural narratives (Gramsci 12). Both Ngũgĩ and Iyayi challenge this hegemony by presenting counter-narratives that expose injustice.

The relevance of Marxist theory to this study lies in its ability to explain:

The roots of social conflict

The relationship between wealth and power

The role of ideology in maintaining inequality

The emergence of resistance movements

By applying Marxist analysis, this study demonstrates that the conflicts portrayed in both novels are not merely personal disputes but reflections of broader structural contradictions. This framework is therefore appropriate because both Ngũgĩ and Iyayi explicitly engage with socialist ideas and present literature as a tool for social transformation. Their works align with Marxist views that literature should not only interpret the world but also contribute to changing it.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section of this study seeks to examine the nature and dynamics of case conflict in Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi's *Violence*. Both novels, though set in different socio-historical contexts, portray postcolonial African societies grappling with systemic inequalities. The analysis recognizes that conflict in these texts is not incidental or purely personal; rather, it emerges from structural, ideological, and social conditions that shape human relationships and societal institutions.

To systematically explore the manifestations of conflict, the discussion is organized under four major thematic subheadings: Economic and Class Conflict, Gender Conflict, Ideological Conflict, and Resistance and Consciousness. These subheadings were deliberately chosen to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of case conflict as depicted in the texts:

1. Economic and Class Conflict: This subheading addresses how material inequality drives tensions among characters, and how both authors depict wealth, labour, and poverty as sources of structural friction. Textual evidence under this heading demonstrates how economic deprivation fuels social alienation and moral corruption.

2. Gender Conflict: Here, the analysis explores how gender relations are deeply shaped by economic structures and societal norms. Both Ngũgĩ and Iyayi illustrate that women's vulnerability is often exacerbated by poverty and patriarchal control. This subheading also highlights the intersection of class and gender, showing how economic oppression amplifies gender-based exploitation.

3. Ideological Conflict: This section examines how ideas, beliefs, and social narratives maintain or challenge systemic inequality. The novels demonstrate how capitalist and patriarchal ideologies justify exploitation and conceal structural injustice. Textual analysis under this subheading explores both explicit ideological statements and subtler forms of internalized social norms.

4. Resistance and Consciousness: The final subheading focuses on the emergence of awareness and resistance in the face of systemic injustice. Both novels portray the

development of class consciousness and personal agency, showing how recognition of inequality is often the first step toward challenging it. Textual evidence here captures moments of both psychological and active resistance.

Economic and Class Conflict

Economic and class conflict forms the foundation of case conflict in both Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi's *Violence*, as both authors demonstrate that material inequality generates social tension, psychological strain, and moral corruption. In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ dramatizes the systemic exploitation of workers through the grotesque spectacle of the Devil's Feast, where the elite openly confess their dependence on others' labour. One speaker declares, "We are the modern thieves. We steal with machines, banks and companies" (Ngũgĩ 100). This statement transforms theft from an individual act into a socially sanctioned process, illustrating how capitalism institutionalizes exploitation. The enumeration of machines, banks and companies highlights the mechanization and bureaucratization of theft, showing that modern economic domination extends beyond personal greed to structural power.

Ngũgĩ further exposes the moral inversion of capitalism when another character boasts, "The more you steal, the more they call you a successful businessman" (Ngũgĩ 103). Here, successful is ironic, as accumulation is separated from ethical responsibility. By presenting the elite's perspective, Ngũgĩ foregrounds the ideology of exploitation, revealing how wealth accumulation is socially celebrated even when it is fundamentally parasitic. This ideological critique is complemented by his spatial imagery: "Inside there was plenty. Outside there was hunger" (Ngũgĩ 95). The contrast between abundance and deprivation underscores the physical and symbolic separation between classes, emphasizing that the structure of society itself produces inequality.

Iyayi approaches economic conflict from the perspective of the oppressed, showing how systemic inequality affects everyday life. He observes that Idemudia, the protagonist, "worked harder than most men, yet he remained poor" (Iyayi 23) and that "every day he sold his strength but could not buy comfort" (Iyayi 25). These statements illustrate the contradiction between labour and reward, demonstrating that under capitalism, effort does not necessarily translate into improvement in living conditions. Iyayi's phrasing sold his strength reduces human labour to a commodity, emphasizing that the economic system extracts value from workers while providing minimal benefit in return. Moreover, Iyayi highlights the psychological dimension of economic deprivation when he writes, "Nobody noticed the poor

unless they caused trouble” (Iyayi 41). Poverty, therefore, not only limits material well-being but also erases social visibility, reflecting the deeper consequences of class oppression.

Both writers also employ material and spatial imagery to convey the pervasiveness of class conflict. Ngũgĩ’s dichotomy of inside and outside (Ngũgĩ 95) illustrates the physical separation of classes and the invisibility of the poor to the affluent. Similarly, Iyayi portrays housing as a reflection of social limitation: Their room was too small for their dreams (Iyayi 29). Here, the metaphor of constrained space underscores how poverty restricts human potential and aspiration, making economic oppression existential as well as material.

The novels further link economic status to social and moral valuation. Ngũgĩ emphasizes the moral consequences of wealth inequality through Wariinga’s reflection: “Money was the root of respect” (Ngũgĩ 21). By equating social recognition with financial status, Ngũgĩ suggests that capitalism dehumanizes both the rich and the poor by subordinating ethical worth to material accumulation. Iyayi presents a parallel observation when he notes, “Those with money were attended to first while the poor waited” (Iyayi 63), highlighting the institutionalized nature of privilege and showing how inequality permeates not only wealth but access to basic services.

Moreover, both novels reveal the psychological and social effects of economic subjugation. Ngũgĩ’s depiction of Wariinga’s humiliation, alongside the arrogance of the elite, illustrates the internalization of class hierarchy: the poor are made to feel their dependence and inferiority, while the rich reinforce their dominance through visibility and ostentation. Iyayi mirrors this dynamic through Idemudia’s experience of structural neglect, suggesting that the poor are rendered invisible until they disrupt the system. These complementary portrayals reveal that class conflict operates on multiple levels: material, psychological, and social.

Gender Conflict

Gender conflict in Ngũgĩ’s *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi’s *Violence* emerges primarily from the intersection of economic inequality and patriarchal domination. Both novels show that women’s vulnerability is structurally produced: their social and economic marginality exposes them to exploitation, subjugation, and emotional labour. In these texts, gender conflict is inseparable from class conflict, revealing how poverty amplifies patriarchal power and shapes women’s lived experiences.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga’s experiences exemplify the gendered consequences of economic dependence. Ngũgĩ writes, “She lost her job because she refused to sell her body” (Ngũgĩ 18), a line that highlights the coercive economic power embedded in patriarchal

relationships. The verb 'sell' explicitly connects sexual exploitation to material survival, illustrating how capitalism and patriarchy intersect to reduce women to objects of economic exchange. This exploitation is compounded by societal victim-blaming, as Ngũgĩ observes: “They said she had asked for trouble because she was beautiful” (Ngũgĩ 34). Here, beauty is weaponized as a social justification for male dominance, shifting accountability from exploiters to the exploited.

Similarly, Iyayi portrays the economic and emotional pressures on women in *Violence* through the character of Adisa. He writes, “She stretched every coin until it cried” (Iyayi 36), using a metaphor to convey the relentless and intimate labor women perform in maintaining household survival. The personification of money as crying emphasizes the emotional burden of poverty, showing that gender conflict is not only sexual or social but profoundly psychological. Iyayi reinforces the intersection of gender and class when he notes, “A poor woman must work twice as hard to be respected” (Iyayi 50), demonstrating that women’s social recognition is contingent upon both their gender and economic contributions.

Both authors also explore women’s potential for resistance. In Ngũgĩ, Wariinga achieves a transformative form of agency, asserting, “*She* decided she would educate herself and depend on nobody” (Ngũgĩ 216). Education here symbolizes liberation and autonomy, suggesting that intellectual empowerment can disrupt both patriarchal and capitalist oppression. Iyayi, in contrast, presents endurance rather than transformation as the primary mode of resistance: Adisa endured because there was no alternative (Iyayi 54). This statement reflects Iyayi’s social realism, showing that survival itself constitutes a subtle form of resistance under oppressive economic and social structures.

Through these comparative depictions, both novels reveal that gender conflict is deeply entwined with economic inequality and societal norms. Ngũgĩ emphasizes transformation and ideological awakening as a path to female empowerment, whereas Iyayi foregrounds the lived endurance of structural constraints. In both cases, textual evidence demonstrates that gender conflict is not an isolated issue of personal relationships, but a systemic phenomenon shaped by economic, social, and ideological forces, which both writers illuminate through narrative detail, metaphor, and character experience.

Ideological Conflict

Ideological conflict in Ngũgĩ’s *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi’s *Violence* demonstrates how systemic inequality is maintained through socially sanctioned beliefs, norms, and narratives. Both novels reveal that oppression is not only economic or physical but also psychological,

as individuals internalize societal justifications that normalize exploitation. Through satire, dialogue, and internal reflection, Ngũgĩ and Iyayi illustrate the tension between lived experience and ideological constructs, showing that conflict emerges not just from material deprivation but also from the struggle to perceive and challenge the logic that sustains injustice.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ exposes capitalist and patriarchal ideology through the speeches of the elite. One character asserts, “The poor are poor because they lack vision” (Ngũgĩ 112), reflecting a social Darwinist worldview in which structural inequality is reframed as personal failure. This ideological justification conceals the mechanisms of exploitation, making oppression appear natural or deserved. Similarly, another character cynically claims, “They called exploitation investment” (Ngũgĩ 105), demonstrating how language can manipulate perception, transforming morally dubious actions into socially acceptable concepts. Through these examples, Ngũgĩ illustrates that ideology functions as both a tool of control and a lens through which the oppressed interpret their experiences.

Iyayi explores ideological conflict from the perspective of the oppressed, highlighting the process of awakening to systemic injustice. Idemudia reflects, “Maybe the problem was not the people but the system” (Iyayi 46), marking a shift from blaming individuals to understanding structural oppression. This moment represents the cognitive struggle inherent in ideological conflict: the realization that social suffering is organized and maintained through institutionalized inequality. Iyayi further demonstrates the deceptive nature of language when describing employers: “They called it opportunity, but it felt like slavery” (Iyayi 43). The contrast between opportunity and slavery underscores the dissonance between official discourse and lived reality, showing how ideology masks the true nature of exploitation.

Both novels reveal that ideological conflict is inseparable from class and gender struggles. In Ngũgĩ, the elite’s claims of meritocracy and competition serve to justify their accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor. In Iyayi, ideological confusion compounds the psychological strain of the oppressed, as they must reconcile societal narratives with daily experiences of inequality. The process of recognizing this conflict through reflection, dialogue, or experience is central to the development of consciousness in both texts.

Resistance and Consciousness

Resistance and consciousness in Ngũgĩ’s *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi’s *Violence* represent the culmination of structural, ideological, and personal conflict. Both novels illustrate that the

recognition of inequality and exploitation is the first step toward challenging oppression, though the mode and scope of resistance differ according to the author's thematic and stylistic concerns. In these texts, consciousness is not merely intellectual; it is also emotional and moral, reflecting the interplay between lived experience and critical awareness.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga exemplifies the development of resistance through both psychological and practical transformation. After witnessing the greed and corruption of the elite at the Devil's Feast, she resolves to reject internalized fear and assert her autonomy. Ngũgĩ writes: "She refused to fear the rich again" (Ngũgĩ 210). Here, fear symbolizes the mental submission imposed by economic and social hierarchy. By refusing to internalize intimidation, Wariinga demonstrates that psychological liberation is an essential precursor to material and social agency. Later, Ngũgĩ emphasizes the transition from reflection to action: "The time for silence had passed" (Ngũgĩ 220). Silence, a metaphor for passive submission, is replaced with speech and engagement, signaling Wariinga's readiness to challenge injustice actively. These moments show that consciousness in Ngũgĩ's text is inseparable from ethical and practical resistance.

Iyayi, in *Violence*, presents a more cautious and gradual unfolding of awareness. The protagonist, Idemudia, reflects on the systemic nature of poverty and exploitation: "He began to understand that poverty was organized" (Iyayi 49). The phrase organized conveys the structural, deliberate nature of oppression, highlighting the cognitive dimension of resistance. Unlike Wariinga, Idemudia's resistance is initially internal and contemplative; Iyayi emphasizes the realism of social struggle, showing that recognition of injustice does not always immediately translate into active rebellion. Similarly, Adisa, representing women's endurance, demonstrates a subtler form of resistance: "Adisa endured because there was no alternative" (Iyayi 54). Endurance here is both survival and quiet defiance, reflecting Iyayi's view that resistance may manifest in persistence and self-preservation even within constrained circumstances.

Both novels, therefore, depict resistance as emerging from consciousness, but they differ in scope and expression. Ngũgĩ foregrounds transformational agency, showing how Wariinga's awareness leads to empowerment and potential societal intervention. Iyayi emphasizes realistic endurance, where consciousness illuminates injustice but does not always produce immediate social upheaval. In both cases, however, the texts agree that conflict is generative: it produces critical awareness, ethical reflection, and the possibility of action, whether through overt challenge or resilient survival.

Through integrated textual analysis, it becomes evident that resistance and consciousness operate on multiple levels: psychological, moral, and social. Ngũgĩ demonstrates how recognition of systemic corruption empowers the individual to act, while Iyayi emphasizes the slow, reflective development of awareness in response to structural violence. Together, the novels reveal that case conflict is not only a product of injustice but also a catalyst for resistance, showing that literature can both document oppression and inspire transformative reflection.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Findings

The comparative analysis of Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi's *Violence* reveals several significant insights regarding the nature and dynamics of case conflict in postcolonial African societies. Both novels demonstrate that structural economic inequality is a primary driver of tension. In *Devil on the Cross*, the elite's celebration of theft and greed, as expressed in the line, "We are the modern thieves. We steal with machines, banks and companies" (Ngũgĩ 100), illustrates institutionalized exploitation. Similarly, in *Violence*, Idemudia's lived experience "Every day he sold his strength but could not buy comfort" (Iyayi 25) shows the tangible consequences of poverty and labor exploitation. Together, these texts underscore that economic disparity is both a structural and experiential source of conflict.

Gendered dynamics further complicate the picture, as women's vulnerability is magnified by economic marginalization. Ngũgĩ depicts this through Wariinga's ordeal: "She lost her job because she refused to sell her body" (Ngũgĩ 18), highlighting the intersection of patriarchal and economic pressures. In Iyayi's narrative, Adisa experiences the strain of material deprivation: "She stretched every coin until it cried" (Iyayi 36). The texts collectively suggest that gender oppression in postcolonial societies is inseparable from the socioeconomic conditions that sustain it.

The novels also reveal that ideology serves as a mechanism for maintaining inequality and conflict. Ngũgĩ exposes elite rationalizations, such as the claim that "The poor are poor because they lack vision" (Ngũgĩ 112), which naturalize structural injustice. Iyayi, in contrast, depicts the cognitive process of awakening through Idemudia: "Maybe the problem was not the people but the system" (Iyayi 46). In both cases, conflict is reinforced not only by material conditions but also by socially internalized beliefs and narratives that obscure exploitation.

Moreover, conflict catalyzes consciousness and resistance. Wariinga demonstrates transformative agency in Ngũgĩ's text, declaring, "She refused to fear the rich again" (Ngũgĩ 210), signaling a shift from psychological submission to ethical and practical empowerment. Iyayi portrays subtler forms of resistance, where Idemudia recognizes systemic oppression "He began to understand that poverty was organized" (Iyayi 49) and Adisa endures daily hardships with quiet resilience: "Adisa endured because there was no alternative" (Iyayi 54). These examples indicate that awareness of structural injustice is a precursor to active or subtle resistance, depending on social context and individual circumstance.

In integrating these perspectives, it becomes clear that Ngũgĩ emphasizes the systemic and ideological mechanisms of exploitation, using satire, exaggeration, and spatial contrast to reveal how the elite manipulate society to consolidate wealth. Iyayi, by contrast, foregrounds the experiential and existential realities of poverty, illustrating how economic oppression affects the daily lives, dignity, and aspirations of ordinary people. Together, the two novels provide a comprehensive unfolding of economic and class conflict: one shows how exploitation is constructed and justified, and the other shows how it is lived and endured. In both cases, the texts demonstrate that class conflict is not incidental but an inevitable outcome of structural inequality.

By integrating textual evidence from both novels, it is evident that ideology operates on multiple levels: as a public justification for inequality, as a linguistic mechanism for controlling perception, and as an internalized belief system that shapes individual understanding. Ngũgĩ emphasizes the public, performative, and satirical exposure of ideology, revealing how elites manipulate social narratives, while Iyayi emphasizes the internal, cognitive struggle of the oppressed, highlighting the psychological complexity of ideological awakening. Together, the texts demonstrate that ideological conflict is both a cause and consequence of structural injustice, linking economic exploitation, gender subjugation, and the struggle for consciousness in postcolonial African societies.

Finally, the comparative analysis reveals that the authors' stylistic approaches shape the depiction of conflict. Ngũgĩ uses satire and allegory to expose the systemic mechanisms of exploitation, whereas Iyayi employs social realism to capture the lived experience of oppression. Together, these approaches provide complementary perspectives, highlighting both the structural roots of conflict and the human responses it elicits, thereby offering a holistic understanding of postcolonial societal tensions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that case conflict in Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* and Iyayi's *Violence* is multi-dimensional, emerging from intertwined economic, gendered, and ideological factors. Both novels reveal that systemic inequality not only produces tangible hardships but also shapes perceptions, social relations, and ethical frameworks. Ngũgĩ highlights the structural and symbolic mechanisms of exploitation, emphasizing how elite greed and capitalist ideology perpetuate social injustice. Iyayi complements this by foregrounding the human experience of oppression, showing the endurance, awareness, and moral resilience of ordinary individuals. Together, the novels illustrate that conflict is both a product of social structures and a catalyst for consciousness and resistance.

In essence, the analysis confirms that literature functions as a mirror and a critique of society, providing insight into the ways postcolonial African societies grapple with inequality, exploitation, and human agency. Conflict, therefore, is not merely narrative tension; it is a social phenomenon that both authors interrogate through character, language, and ideology.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing discussion, it is recommended that case conflict in African literature should be examined from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective, to understand how historical, political, cultural as well as religious underpinnings engender class, gender and ideological conflict in the society. Again, educators and curriculum developers should consider incorporating thematic and comparative literary analysis into teaching strategies. By engaging students with both Ngũgĩ's allegorical critique and Iyayi's social realism, learners can better understand the complex interplay between structural inequality, social norms, and individual agency. This approach can enhance critical thinking skills, encourage reflection on social justice, and provide a model for using literature as a tool for socio-political awareness. Furthermore, policymakers and social institutions can draw insights from the depiction of systemic exploitation and inequality in literature to inform strategies for social intervention. Ngũgĩ and Iyayi reveal how economic structures, gendered oppression, and ideological manipulation perpetuate conflict. Recognizing these dynamics in policy development such as addressing structural poverty, promoting gender equity, and raising awareness about institutional bias can help mitigate the conditions that produce conflict in contemporary society.

Fourthly, literary practitioners, including writers, playwrights, and cultural commentators, are encouraged to explore literature as a medium for social critique and resistance. The novels analyzed demonstrate that literature can reveal the roots of societal conflict, challenge dominant ideologies, and inspire ethical reflection and action. Future creative works can similarly examine intersectional oppression, amplifying marginalized voices and fostering public discourse around justice, inequality, and empowerment.

Finally, at the academic level, this study recommends further research into resistance and consciousness as recurring motifs in postcolonial literature, emphasizing the relationship between conflict and transformative agency. Scholars might investigate how different literary forms novels, poetry, drama depict the development of consciousness and ethical engagement, potentially expanding the understanding of literature's role in shaping societal awareness and moral imagination. These recommendations highlight the practical, educational, and scholarly relevance of understanding case conflict through literature. By integrating literary analysis with social insight, stakeholders across disciplines can use these findings to foster a more critical, informed, and ethically engaged engagement with postcolonial African societies.

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