

Predation and Competition in Fiction: An Analysis of the Oppressor/Oppressed Dichotomy in Ifeoma Odinye's *Pain in the Neck*

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Abstract

In practical term, there exists only but a thin, or perhaps an imaginary line separating the oppressors from the oppressed in every given society. This is because those who are oppressed by stronger individuals or groups also exploit their kin and even their oppressors whenever they have the opportunity to do so. This paper sought to interrogate the traditional juxtaposition of the oppressors and oppressed groups using such binary oppositions as rich/poor, male/female, white/black and so on. The Marxist Literary Theory was used to analyze the instances of exploitation and subjugation of the weak in Ifeoma Odinye's Pain in the Neck. The findings reveal that humans have high propensity to manipulate other people around them, regardless of their social category. The analysis also unveils a novel dimension of the issue of oppressors/oppressed relationship; a situation where the oppressors feel that they are being oppressed.

Keywords: *Predation, Competition, Oppression, Marxism, Exploitation.*

Introduction

The biosphere of the earth consists of living things that interact with their respective kinds and other living things on the one hand and the non-living component of their environment on the other hand. Such interactions could be beneficial or harmful to the living thing in question or its environment. Man as a living being

interacts with the physical and the social components of his surrounding, including the sea, the land, trees and animals. He also interacts with his kind at home, in business locations, markets, offices, places of worship among others.

As he relates with other things in his environment, man is sometimes met with difficult situations where he

must eliminate – or where he thinks he must eliminate – other things around him in order to survive. This results in predation, the plundering of the earth or massive exploitation of mineral resources and other creatures in the society.

The universal law of the strong preying on the weak comes to mind here. It is easy to see how the poor workers (the proletariats) are being exploited by their employers (the bourgeoisies including the government as employers of labour). Also, a keen observer can tell that generally speaking, men enjoy certain privilege which they deprive women. Most women in such societies that still uphold some harmful patriarchal traditions see all men – without exception – as their oppressors.

Competition like predation occur as result of social interaction within the social milieu. Competition has dual effect on the society: ‘In the complex landscape of the modern workplace, the concept of internal competition has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can ignite motivation, drive innovation, and push individuals and teams to perform at their best.’ (FasterCapital).

On the other hand, according to the above mentioned online publishers, internal competition, ‘has the potential to foster an environment of cutthroat rivalry, leading to disengagement, mistrust, and even burnout among employees.’ It therefore concludes that ‘Striking the right balance between competition and collaboration is a

challenge that organizations of all sizes face.’ (Faster Capital).

A situation where the strong oppress the weak, here termed *vertical oppression*, typifies predation. The oppressed here suffer and die as a result of the nefarious activities of their oppressors. While vertical oppression mentioned above has received critical attention from scholars and activists, another form of oppression – a kind of horizontal oppression or competition occurring among members of the deprived community – has not received adequate attention, hence the need to examine the nature of this horizontal oppression.

This paper is therefore, an attempt to unmask the proclivity of humans of all social categories to manipulate other people and to demonstrate that the activities of the oppressors in *Pain in the Neck* affect all social categories men and women, white and black etc. Instances where the weak exploited weaker members of the society in the focused text are analyzed to close the gap already mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

Literature Review

Predation is a necessary evil in the society in that it helps to ensure that the balance required for a functional ecosystem is maintained. Predation in popular parlance suggests the existence of two animals, the predator and the prey. The predator which is usually larger and stronger devours the prey. Biologists focus more on how

energy flows from the primary consumers (herbivores) to the secondary consumers (carnivores). In this sense, it is uncommon to talk of predation occurring between animals of the same species much less among humans. Katy McLaughlin writes that, 'Predation refers to a flow of energy between two organisms, predator and prey. In this interaction, the prey loses energy, and the predator gains energy.' (McLaughlin). On his part, Richard Heinberg states that,

a complex or stratified human society can be thought of as an ecosystem. Within it humans (all a single species), because of their differing social classes, roles, and occupations, can act, in effect, as different species. To the extent that some exploit others, we could say that some act as "predators" others as "prey". (Heinberg).

It goes without saying therefore that *predation* here used metaphorically can occur among humans. The human predators here exploit the human prey in different ways. Richard Heinberg identifies sex slavery, debt slavery, raid, invasion, plunder, crime, colonization etc. as some forms of predation among humans. He made further clarification on the use of the term in his work:

Speaking informally of human economic

exploitation of others humans in terms of "predation" is hardly new...; a cursory search of the literature turned up few systematic exploitation of the metaphor. In discussing the phenomenon of "predation," I am not so much interested in cases in which some humans actually eat others (though this did happen in some societies), but rather in forms of economic exploitation. (Heinberg).

The action of killing and eating other humans (cannibalism) might differ semantically with that of economic exploitation, but their end products are similar in some respects. In each of the two cases, the sufferer of the action is eliminated. While the cannibal directly kills his victims, the oppressor on the other hand deprives the oppressed of the basic necessity of life as a result of which the oppressed dies of hunger or disease or both.

Similarly, both the cannibal and the oppressor enjoy some benefit from their victims. The former derives energy from the human flesh/blood while the latter makes profit from the oppressed workers. Predation can be classified as a vertical oppression in that the oppressor and the oppressed in each cases belong to different social categories. Predation and competition are intertwined because it is the struggle or competition for the scarce

resources that brings about predation. *Predation* can be likened to what biologist called interspecific competition. The people (animals) involved are of different species. Competition on the other hand can be equated with intraspecific competition. It is a struggle among the oppressed.

Biesanz and Biesanz are of the view that, 'competition is the striving of two or more persons or groups for the same goal which is limited so that all cannot share it'. (Biesanz).

It is important to note that members of the group involved in such competition with rival group(s), sometimes subconsciously compete for power, money, love etc., among themselves. For this and some other reasons, bell hooks warns:

It is necessary to remember, as we think critically about domination, that we all have the capacity to act in ways that oppress, dominate, wound (whether or not that power is institutionalized). It is necessary to remember that it is first the potential oppressor within that we must resist – the potential victim within that we must rescue – otherwise we cannot hope for an end to domination, for liberation. (hooks).

It has also been observed that, ... competition can turn toxic when it's left unbridled. When winning

becomes the sole focus, employees may resort to unethical practices, such as backstabbing or sabotaging colleagues, to get ahead. This not only damages morale but also undermines the organization's long-term success. Instances of internal competition at companies ... serve as a stark reminder of the pitfalls of excessive rivalry. (Faster Capital).

The pervasiveness and the impact of toxic internal struggle within a social category (here referred to as competition) and those of external struggle among different social groups (which is tagged 'predation' in this discourse) are the main foci of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Marxist Literary Theory. Marxist Literary Theory stems from *Marxism*, traced to Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels. It is often referred to as a materialist theory as opposed to idealist, aesthetic, and functionalist's theories. Nasrullah Mambrol writes that,

Marxism is a materialist philosophy that interprets the world based on the concrete, natural world around us and our society. It is opposed to idealist philosophy which

conceptualizes a spiritual world that influences and controls the material world. In one sense, it tried to put people's thoughts into reverse gear as it was a total deviation from the philosophies that came before it. (Mambrol 2016)

Marxist Literary theory, rooted in Marxist material philosophy, analyzes the manner in which literature depicts how the bourgeoisie who control the production and distribution of goods in capitalist states exploit the proletariats. Marxian writers often fault capitalism, which they claim is responsible for the class system and the attendant ills. Marxian philosophers expanded Karl Marx theory. One of them, Paulo Freire wrote on how the oppressors exploit the oppressed and how the oppressed in a bid to please or emulate the oppressors exploit their kin. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes that,

... almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors." The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to

be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. (Freire 1)

Freire observes how Karl Marx's 'Ideological Hegemony' and 'false consciousness' work in the minds of the proletariats who rather than unite and fight their common oppressors connive or collaborate with the bourgeoisies to exploit other members of the oppressed group. The oppressed have internalized the idea of master/servant relationship so much that they do not see themselves as being oppressed. They are contented with the role they play and the wages they receive as a reward. Put more succinctly, the oppressed see the exploitation of the weaker members of the society as a norm. And so, instead of striving for liberation, to use Freire's phrase, they oppress their kin either to please their common masters/oppressors and receive favour in return or to demonstrate that they have the potentials to become masters or for some other hideous motives. The horizontal oppressors who have been so indoctrinated see nothing wrong in the way and manner in which the strong prey on the weak, else they would not allow themselves to be used as an instrument to inflict pain on other members of the oppressed group.

Synopsis of Ifeoma Odinye's *Pain in the Neck*

Ifeoma Odinye's *Pain in the Neck* is a feminist prose fiction that has racial discrimination and gender oppression

as its major thematic preoccupations. Thus, Adanna's rejection of Emeka's marriage proposal symbolizes women liberation from the shackles of patriarchy. Through flashback, the story of Chika's aborted dream of studying Chinese Language in the Beijing Foreign Studies University, China is revealed. While in China, Chika meets Adanna who was tricked into a life of prostitution. Sex slavery describes Adanna's situation in Madam Louis African Restaurant located in Guangzhou, China. Chika is determined to rescue Adanna from the claws of her owner – Madam Louis the owner of the restaurant treats her workers as chattels. So she literally owns Adanna and other girls that work in her restaurant.

As she grapples with loneliness and racial discrimination that make the learning of Chinese Language even more difficult for her, she encounters yet another bigger problem that put paid to her study in China. Her fiancé, Chinedu – who deflowered her – had been in relationship with Ngozi. Chinedu gives the reason why he dumps Ngozi and clings to Chika:

'How could I possibly marry a loose girl who sold one of her kidneys to venture into drug business? This is very impossible! I cannot marry a drug addict and a baroness! How could I allow one incident which I had no control over ruin my life. I must forge a new life. I must socialize and

create a new future for myself. Ngozi cannot stop me. No, it's late now!' (154)

When it was dawn on Ngozi that Chika has taken her place in Chinedu house, she takes a step that unfortunately leads to Chinedu's death and the subsequent sexual enslavement of both Chika and Adanna. The narrator reveals Ngozi's reason for punishing Adanna in this word, 'the intimate relationship Adanna had with Chinedu that night in her house was a huge slight on her.' (206).

Chika and Adanna had bitter experience as sex workers under Ngozi before they are rescued and deported back to Nigeria. Thanks to a missionary body, Synagogue Church of All Nation (SCOAN) the two girls were rehabilitated and reintegrated back into the society. The church offers to sponsor Chika's education in a Nigerian university. She will study law, no longer Chinese. She also empowers Adanna financially after sponsoring her training as a tailor. Meanwhile, Ngozi is arrested shortly after Adanna and Chika were deported to Nigeria. The Chinese police arrested her because, 'Chinedu's corpse was discovered in a huge freezer in one of her client's apartment.' (205).

Back to Nigeria, Ngozi has nothing but her life. She is 'deported without a dime' (206). She comes to meet Chika and Adanna who are living together. The girls forgive her after she pleads for mercy. Chika's mother with

the consent of the girls rents a room for Ngozi and gives her some money (One hundred thousand Naira) to start up her own business.

Yet when Emeka comes to seek Adanna's hand in marriage, Ngozi tries to stop him from marrying Adanna: 'Smiling mischievously, Ngozi looked at Adanna. She thought, 'this marriage must not happen! Not today! Not tomorrow! Never! *Ashawona* is *Ashawo*! Once *Ashawo*, always *Ashawo*!' (10). She tells Emeka not to marry Adanna whom she describes as *Ashawo* (prostitute). Emeka after hearing Adanna story from Chika decides to marry her despite her ugly past. But Adanna sensing danger in the future decides not to accept Emeka's marriage proposal at the moment. She gives her reason:

'Emeka, I have made up my mind. There is no going back. What happened today took away my power, my strength and my love, but I finally have them back now! It is not safe for me to marry now. I don't want marriage to be an escape route to my past. ... I have grown to know that people are often reminded of their past by the person they deeply love. This hurts deeply and sticks forever. (210)

Adanna fears that she might one day be reminded of her past by the

same Emeka who wants to marry her. She recalls how her father hurt her and her mother. She needs time to consider Emeka's proposal so she doesn't repeat the mistake her mother made by marrying her father.

Predation and Competition in the Novel

This section of the paper analyzes the activities of the oppressors and sub-oppressors in the novel with a view of unmasking the harmful effects of such activities on their prey – the oppressed who are directly affected by such activities – and the other members of the general public.

Chief Akaego and Chinedu as Victims of Predation.

Chief Akaego is Chinedu's master. Chinedu comes from a poor family. His father could not get the money required to perform the surgery on his sick mother. The reader gets to know that,

Chinedu's mother died when he was very young because they had no money to make a huge deposit that the hospital demanded for before her surgery. They were indeed 'cut up' in that situation until the ruptured vermiform appendix killed his mother. Before her death, his father had borrowed enough money from his friends using his lands as collateral. He had borrowed too much money

without any foreseeable means of paying back that his friends had refused to lend him more money. (150)

To change the poor condition of the family therefore, Chinedu chooses to go out and seek ways to make money. So, 'After his mother's burial rites, his ambition took him to Onitsha Main Market where he served Akaego with dedication and complete loyalty.' (151). He knows that his master is a rich business man. But he does not know that his master is a drug dealer. The story has it that, "Chinedu's trip to China was fully sponsored by Chief Akaego. He had been told that he came to China to oversee Chief Akaego's business just like he did at Onitsha. He never expected the circumstances that surrounded his life in Guangzhou; though he never bargained for such a lifestyle." (151)

Chinedu's master was killed three weeks after he left for China. We are told that, 'Akaego died tragically in the hands of hoodlums sent by his detractors who wanted to control his drug money.' (151). Chief Akaego's business associates are obviously the predators here. The hoodlums they sent are their agents analogous to *horizontal oppressors* described in the preliminary sections of this paper. The hoodlums are probably victims of oppressive government in their home country, Nigeria. A good number of young women from Nigeria work as commercial sex workers in China. The

story has it that prostitution is 'the type of venture into which many Nigerian girls seemed to be rushing as the country moved towards hardship and constant unemployment.' (158). It is therefore possible that their male counterparts would take into violent crime such as assassination in order to survive. So rather than seek to come together and oust the oppressive government, the young men – and possibly women – decide to work as agents of other oppressors e.g. Chief Akaego's business associates. In other words, rather than strive to liberate themselves from their oppressors/leaders, they decide to oppress other people.

The narrator goes further to state the reason why they decide to kill their business rival,

Chinedu's presence in China was a threat to Chief Akaego's associates who connived and killed him. The same people who murdered Akaego plotted to implicate Chinedu with drug related issue. They had secretly planned to get rid of him by planting cocaine in the bag packed with money as he headed to deposit them in China Bank of Industry. (152).

The reason for their action can be gleaned from the extract above. They eliminate Chief Akaego in order to ensure that their drug business does not suffer retrogression as a result of

his latest move of sending Chinedu to monitor his business in China.

The action of the Akaego's business associates lead to his death and set the stage for Chinedu's death and the sexual enslavement of Chika, Chinedu's fiancée.

Unhealthy Competition: Ngozi as a Sub-Oppressor

Ngozi portrays the character of an oppressed person - as a woman and as an African in China – who inflicts pain on other oppressed persons. She is described as 'a classic prostitute, a young baroness and a pimp.' (152). And so she knows what prostitutes, African women in particular, go through in Guangzhou and other parts of China. Yet instead of thinking of how to emancipate those oppressed women/prostitutes, she exploits them, using the weaker ones among them to meet her ever growing quest to make money and more money. Her attitude towards the oppressed in her society buttresses Paulo Freire's comment which says that, 'A particular problem is the duality of the oppressed: they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence.' (Freire 12)

Ngozi is generous and shows love to people occasionally. We read that 'Ngozi's love for Adanna was different and very peculiar. No other girl had ever been accorded such privilege.' (158). Adanna herself tells Chika how kind Ngozi has been to her:

Anytime Aunty Ngozi comes around, my level changes. She gives me good food, shoes, clothes, perfume and...The most interesting part is that she does not allow me to satisfy all those local Chinese and African men who never treated me nicely. She takes me to very expensive hotels to satisfy her wealthy friends from Europe. I mean clean, handsome and caring men who cherished me more than the local ones. They handle me with so much love and gentility that I can never regret having fun with them. (156).

It is not surprising therefore, that Adanna and the other 'girls were usually happy any time she came visiting because of her supposedly acclaimed generosity and love for them.' (155)

But hers is not an unconditional love; it is that kind of love that must be paid for. Anyone who receives her act of charity must give her what she wants in return. She loves Adanna and receives the latter's obedience as a reward. We learn that, 'Adanna's psychological makeup had been grossly affected by past traumatic events that she had no willpower to resist any humiliation. Of course, Adanna's will was often regulated by Ngozi's reason. In fact, she submitted

to Ngozi's will without any display of resentment.' (155). The relationship between the women from Ngozi/oppressor perspective is a symbiotic relationship: Adanna surrenders her will to Ngozi's and the latter treats her better – at least better than other prostitutes working for her. Ngozi's action might just be a deliberate ploy to get the other sex workers to become submissive to her so they too can benefit from her purported generosity.

Like Adanna, Chinedu benefits from Ngozi's supposed generosity. She saves Chinedu's life and sold one of her kidneys to raise the money with which Chinedu established the business both of them manage. Chinedu pays the price for accepting those acts of generosity:

The very day Ngozi saved Chinedu's life was also the day he lost his freedom. Chinedu could still recollect the despondence in his voice and the utter frustration that seized his body after Ngozi's sudden revelation which got him emotionally trapped to her. The thought of being killed for the crime he did not commit got him depressed and afraid. There and there, in his own room, Ngozi took advantage of Chinedu and robbed him of his innocence for he had never touched a woman before. (153).

She probably knew that, 'Chinedu never loved her, but accepted her friendship as a result of the favour she did to him in the past.' (148). But she is never deterred. 'Since she met Chinedu, she had wanted to be his wife' (148). The need to settle down in marriage with Chinedu is all that matters to her. That is what she need and no one, not even Chinedu himself can stop her from accomplishing that. Chinedu's attempt to dump her brought out the beast in her. Her reaction proves that she is indeed the tiger she calls herself: 'You haven't seen anything! You have indeed touched the tail of a tiger.' (149) she says. She issues the threat during their altercation over Chika's presence in Chinedu's house. Chinedu should have known at that point that he who pays the piper calls the tune and that it is unwise for man to jokingly tell a spinster that he wants to marry her. Before he promised to marry Chika, he and Ngozi '... often joked about marriage, but as time passed he realized that they were not meant to be together.' (96). Ngozi herself reveals that, 'Chinedu accepted me as his girlfriend and promised to love me forever.' (169). She therefore sees her anger and the reaction that proceed from it as justified. She cannot stoop so low as to share a man – a man she considers as her fiancée – with Chika whom she calls a little brat or Adanna, a common whore. She avenges herself of this wrong doing by inflicting pain on the girls. She perhaps feels that Chika in particular deserve the

punishment as can be inferred from her words:

Chika, you've caused me great sorrow. Your presence has altered my life. You are now under my watch. You have no say in any matter concerning your life in China. I am now fully in charge of your life. You have automatically joined the other girls in this business. You have nothing to say! My decision is final. Don't try to play smart. If you try it, you will blame yourself forever. My men will haunt you down, implicate you with drugs and hand you over to *Ndi Eke* (Chinese police). (169).

Ngozi's words also reveal that she thinks that Adanna deserves the punishment meted out to her for sleeping with Chinedu. The two girls do not belong to her class. She is determined to punish them to prove that point. The punishment will also serve as a deterrence to other girls under her control. Adanna's 'sin' and punishment can be deduced from Ngozi's furious outburst:

'So you slept with my man!' Ngozi's voice thundered. Adanna! You mean you had the courage to seduce my man without thinking twice. You deliberately did it to

humiliate me right? You have no respect for me eeh? After all I did for you! You have also joined this small rat here, a girl who should have concentrated on her studies to drag my man with me. Okay, let's see where all these will lead two of you!' Ngozi shouted furiously. (165).

It does not matter that Adanna was drunk when the said act occurred. Chika too cannot be wholly blamed for accepting Chinedu's proposal. She had made an attempt to know about Chinedu's love life earlier. Her word: 'Can you tell me the truth? Are you alone here?' Chinedu answers in the affirmation: 'Yes dear! Sure! I am all by myself. That's why I look forward to you becoming my wife!' Chinedu said smiling.' (96). The fact that Adanna acted under the influence of alcohol does not matter to her. As the saying goes, if a man wants to hang his dog, any rope can serve. She doesn't owe anybody an explanation for whatever pain she inflicts on Adanna and other persons she treats as her property. Marxists argue that the bourgeoisies consider the proletariats, particularly their employees as their property. Paulo Freire agreeing with this assertion avers that 'for the oppressors, "human beings" refers only to themselves; other people are "things." (Freire 14)

Perhaps that is why Ngozi will lament that Chika has caused her great sorrow while in the real sense she is the one that ruins Chika's life. The sudden death of Chinedu, in effect, is a lost to both of them. But she only cares about her own feelings. Chika and every other persons of the lower class are mere things and cannot possibly have feelings like humans. That is perhaps the reason she subjects them to unimaginable pain after Chinedu's death. One of the numerous passages describing how Ngozi tortured the girls reads:

Days rolled into weeks and weeks into months. Adanna and Chika were raped again and again, sometimes six or seven times. Each day, they were constantly punched and starved for long hours before they would be served with boiled eggs, locally made soya milk and *mantou* (Chinese steamed bread). They could not describe how much pain they suffered in the hands of those guys. Chika got pregnant during the three months she was under house arrest. The guys punched her until she miscarried the pregnancy. Every day was pure torture and pain. They thought they were going to die, but grace kept them pushing through the difficult times. (168).

Without caring how Adanna and Chika feel after surviving such dehumanization, she tells them the trauma Chika's action has caused her: 'I was emotionally disturbed and completely devastated when I came back from Dubai after some months of business trip there and visited Chinedu only to see you fast asleep on his bed.' (169). She reveals further that,

'That very day, the demon in me surfaced. I stole your international passport and threatened to hurt you. I warned Chinedu to send you back to Beijing but his love for you made him revolt against me. I soon mapped out a new plan of action to humiliate and hurt you. I faked my apology only to calm his nerves. I did not want him to suspect my actions. Everything worked the way I planned it, but his sudden death was indeed a huge mistake. I never planned it.' (169).

Here, Ngozi kills Chinedu – albeit in the heat of passion – and punishes Adanna and Chika for the murder or at least manslaughter. The two girls are coveting her would-be husband. It hurts her to be competing with 'lowlifes' like Adanna and Chika for Chinedu love or attention. Chinedu the 'coveted trophy' has been eliminated and none of the competitors can be said to have won the competition. To demonstrate her

superiority therefore, she enslaves the girls.

Racial Discrimination

Africans in China are treated with disdain because of their colour and nationality. Chika suffers racial discrimination within the university that should have championed the struggle against such segregation. Jessica tries to convince Chika that the word, *heiren* is not derogatory: 'I don't think it's always hurtful. I think it depends on the intention of the person saying the word. I don't think they mean any harm. They are simply fascinated seeing a black person', Jessica cut in.' (39). Jessica might be right to claim that calling Africans 'black person' is not always meant to hurt. But that does not change the pervasive racial discrimination in Beijing and other parts of China. We read that,

The problem of race was still a major issue which haunted Chika like a ghost. Beijing had been set up to make the issue of race, colour and superiority very glaring. All dark people were labelled Africans without any formal introduction. People's complexions defined their nationality and continent. Most of the dark complexioned people from Europe who attended the church had an air of superiority which placed

them above people from Africa. They were very unfriendly and unapproachable. They hated everything about Africa and avoided any form of association with them. (134).

It follows that Africans suffer discrimination not really on account of the colour of their skin but because they come from poor countries. In other words, citizens of strong/developed nations, regardless of their colour oppress or discriminate against those of weak/poor nations.

Gender Oppression

Instances where men use their natural and cultural advantages to exploit the women around them abound in the focused novel. Adanna epitomizes the victim of patriarchal exploitation manifested in incestuous sexual abuse and sexual slavery. She recounts how she has suffered abuse from her childhood:

In fact, this childhood incest paved way for adult rape. It continued even when my mother's friend took me to her house at Asaba, Delta State. Her husband and the boys who were serving him took turns to molest me for years. Day and night, they sexually abused me every day, any time; in the kitchen, room, toilet,

veranda, bathroom....
Everywhere! (181).

Like other girls working in Madam Loius Restaurant in Guangzhou, Adanna suffers molestation in the hands of the male customers as noted below:

‘Ada, bia ebe a sharp sharp!’ (Ada, come here quickly!) One of the men said. ‘Adanna or what is she called? Come here and attend to me’, the man repeated hitting her buttocks romantically with his right hand. The other guy touched her well rounded and projected breasts with a claim of ownership that sent shivers down Chika’s spine. (98-99).

These men (blacks) who are oppressed by the Chinese on account of their colour and nationality in turn abuse/oppress the helpless girls (prostitutes). Indeed, the saying that the strong will always prey on the weak is a universal truth.

Unclassified oppression

We have so far categorized the oppressors/oppressed based on race and gender. This tradition of using binary opposition to explain the nature of the oppressors/oppressed relationship is helpful but it tends to over simplify the very complex phenomenon. There are different

forms of exploitation in the focused novel that do not fit into the usual juxtaposition of the oppressor/oppressed phenomenon into male/female, white/black, rich/poor and so on. Beside the cases of intra-gender and intra-racial exploitation discussed above, there are some other cases that requires attention. Tunde’s remark in the excerpt below shed some light on what may be regarded as a novel dimension of the discourse on the oppressor/oppressed discourse.

You see, many responsible Chinese citizens are not happy with them because they deceive their girls and marry them just to have legal business in China. They give birth to children who are neither Chinese nor Nigerians. And they travel back to Nigeria to begin a new life with their Igbo wives. Then, tell me what happens to those Chinese women they married? What will their children do? This is indeed a serious problem ooo!
(104)

Here, the oppressed Africans oppress their host and oppressors – the Chinese – by taking advantage of the unsuspecting Chinese women. As a result, ‘Guangzhou, an international metropolis was populated by African immigrants, mostly Nigerians and their mixed-blood offspring with Chinese women.’ (170-171). The oppressed

African immigrants in turn exploit the Chinese women who yearn for them. Perhaps the immigrants are aware that,

Some Chinese men believed that African dishes had the tendency of building your body muscles and could help in enhancing sexual performance which was fast becoming a hot topic in China. The assumption was strongly connected to most Chinese girls marrying or befriending African guys leaving young Chinese guys fuming with rage and loneliness. Despite the unruly behaviour exhibited by many Nigerian men, some Chinese hot and rich babes still yearned for them which had led to constant heartbreaks and fraud stories. (109).

The exploitation of the Chinese women as shown above confirms that, 'we all have the capacity to act in ways that oppress, dominate, wound (whether or not that power is institutionalized).' (hooks). The oppressed has the propensity to exploit their oppressors or other members of the oppressed group if given the chance.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the various ways and manner in which the strong exploit the weak in the society. It has

found through the analysis of the focused novel that oppression is ubiquitous and that men and women of different races, colour and nationality manipulate people around them to meet certain need. Given the universality of oppression therefore, it is suggested that researchers and other stakeholders should go beyond the traditional categorization of the oppressors and the oppressed based on race, gender, class, ethnicity etc. in their search for a solution to the complex issue of oppression and subjugation of the less privileged in the society. It is further suggested that researchers should pay more attention to the nature and the consequences of competition among humans of the same social category which is termed horizontal oppression in this paper.

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