



A Marxist Reading of Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Yishau Olukere's *In the Name of Our Father*

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Abstract

*This study deploys the principles of Marxism to explore instances of class oppression, ideological conditioning and systemic exploitation as portrayed in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Yishau Olukere's *In the Name of Our Father*. These novels illuminate the perpetuation of alienation, commodification, and marginalisation of citizens entrenched in the Nigerian socio-political and economic spheres by the capitalist system. Onuzo provides a periscope of Lagos as a vibrant metropolis with unequal opportunities where survival implies moral compromises which are a reflection of the contradictions of capitalist modernity. The experiences of the characters foreground the economic disparities which ultimately create endless cycles of hope and despair, thereby compelling individuals to navigate a system that thrives on inequality. Yishau, on the other hand, explores the ideological mechanisms that sustain oppression, focusing on the complicity of religious and political institutions in upholding exploitative systems. By conflating narratives of personal struggles with broader critiques of power and control, Yishau interrogates how faith and authority are manipulated to justify exploitation and silence. The study observes that both authors employ compelling narrative techniques to humanize the consequences of entrenched inequality, crafting stories that resonate with the raw realities of contemporary marginalised societies. Thus, their works transcend the goal of depicting struggles, to challenge the entrenched systems, provoke critical contemplation and inspire a reimagined social order rooted in equality and justice. By anchoring the study on Marxist criticism, this study*

emphasises the role of literature in amplifying marginalised voices and fostering awareness on the need to challenge the systemic forces that hold the society hostage.

Keywords: Marxist criticism, exploitation, alienation, commodification, marginalisation

Introduction

In most contemporary societies, individuals with economic, social, or political power often wield their power in ways that perpetuate oppression against those without as much power while safeguarding the interests of the powerful. This systemic oppression manifests in various forms, from economic exploitation to ideological conditioning, and is deeply intertwined with the structures of power and privilege that dominate societal hierarchies. Ernest Osas Ugiagbe and Helen Eweka describe this oppression as “relations of domination and exploitation –economic, social, and psychological – between individuals; between social groups and classes within and beyond societies,” noting that this relationship is rooted in the intent to manipulate the power dynamics by manipulating the economy and psychology of the society to dominate and exploit others (517). This is reflective of a society that thrives on class stratification and a belief system that constantly creates an 'other' and builds a framework where this “other” is subjected to their hegemony.

Within this oppressive framework, the lower class find themselves marginalised and disenfranchised, forced to navigate a system that is stacked against them from the outset. Economic inequalities are perpetuated through exploitative labour practices and limited access to resources, trapping individuals in cycles of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, the lower class is subjected to societal pressures to conform to the values and norms of the ruling class, leading to a sense of alienation and disconnection from their own identities and communities. This could be better termed as “marginalisation”, a situation conceptualised by Aaron Antonovsky as one where “some of the members of one group, for one reason or another, come under the influence of another group, and in the resultant interaction, the cultural and/or racial barriers serve to block full and legitimate membership within another group” (57). This is further expanded by Franz Gatzweiler, Heike Baumüller, Christine Husmann, and Joachim von Braun thus:

[Marginalised implies] an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems, preventing them from access to resources, assets and services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing extreme poverty (7).

The above definition emphasises that class differentiation and elitism serve as foundational pillars that uphold the structures of capitalism and oppression in contemporary society.

The stratification of society into distinct socio-economic classes not only reinforces existing power imbalances but also perpetuates the cycle of exploitation and oppression that underpins capitalist economies. The ruling influencers, driven by their self-interests, exploit these divisions to consolidate their power and maintain their privileged positions at the expense of the lower class. This is sometimes achieved through ideological conditioning, where structures are put in place by way of religion, art, and even education to ensure that “the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as 'natural' or not seen at all” (Eagleton 5). This points to the extremes that the pervasive influence of capitalism can reach to ensure profit maximisation and individual wealth accumulation, further exacerbating social and economic inequalities, thus creating a society where the pursuit of economic gain takes precedence over human welfare and social justice.

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan assert that “literature can only be understood if its full context – historical, economic, social, and cultural – is taken into account” (644). They further aver that literary works function to “reproduce the class structure of society... [and reflecting] unproblematically the values and ideals of the class in dominance” (Rivkin and Ryan 644). This view is further adumbrated by Wole Soyinka in 'The Writer in the Modern African State' with particular reference to Africa, which states: “The despair and anguish which is spreading a miasma over the continent must sooner or later engage the attention of the writer in his society or else be boldly ignored” (13). By this submission, Soyinka reiterates the role of the literary writer as an observer and reporter of the reality of his society. Consequently, Chibundu Onuzo in *Welcome to Lagos* and Olukorede Yishau in *In the Name of Our Father* present the reader with incisive critiques of socio-economic inequalities and class struggles, core issues central to Marxist analysis. By critically examining both novels, we can gain valuable insights into how oppression is reflected and perpetuated within the fabric of society with particular focus on contemporary Nigeria. Through a Marxist lens, this study uncovers the underlying power dynamics, ideological struggles, and class conflicts that shape the narratives of these novels and shed light on the broader socio-economic realities of contemporary Nigeria. Through this process, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of capitalism and its impact on individuals, communities, and society.



The Capitalist Canvas: Urbanization and Dystopia in Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Yishau's *in the Name of Our Father*

The city of Lagos, Nigeria's commercial nerve centre, is a powerful embodiment of capitalist expansion in the Global South. Urbanisation and capitalism are deeply intertwined in the contemporary global economy, with cities as hubs of production, consumption, and investment. Lagos, one of the fastest-growing cities in Africa, has emerged as a quintessential capitalist metropolis, demonstrating the hallmarks of rapid economic development, social stratification, and the commodification of urban space. This transformation is not without consequence. As Lagos continues to evolve as a global economic player, the interplay between its capitalist forces and socio-spatial inequalities becomes more pronounced. *In the Name of Our Father* and *Welcome to Lagos* illustrate capitalist dystopias, reflecting Marxist critiques in which socio-economic structures amplify class divisions and trap the working class in cycles of alienation and exploitation. These narratives depict a world shaped by capitalist ideals — profit maximisation, rigid class hierarchies, commodification and consumerism — that deepen inequality and marginalise the majority while elite sections and groups in the society hold resources and control. Through symbols like urban decay, extreme wealth disparity, and, commodification of religion and the dominance of profit-driven entities, both novels portray societies that prioritise economic utility over individual humanity, thereby exposing in the process, the consequences of unchecked capitalist systems.

Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* presents the vibrant and tumultuous landscape of Lagos and serves as a fertile ground for exploring the vignettes of capitalism through a Marxist lens. The novel examines the capitalist forces within this bustling metropolis, depicting a city where the struggle for economic survival influences every aspect of life. Through a Marxist reading, one can discern the profound impact of capitalist relations on the characters' lives and the social structure of Lagos. Onuzo sets the stage as Chike, Yemi, Fineboy, and Isoken cross from Bayelsa into Lagos.

A significant area mentioned and described in the novel is Surulere. This neighbourhood symbolises a microcosm of Lagos society, where a church and a mosque coexist despite the ever-looming shadow of capitalist development that threatens traditional communal spaces. Commenting on the symbolism of the area to the greater whole of the state, the narrator states: “It showed a certain tolerance that his street in Surulere should boast both a church and a mosque, tolerance from his neighbours, with whom he should have long since banded to demolish both buildings” (Onuzo 50). This juxtaposition highlights a tolerance paradoxically upheld and undermined by capitalist pressures. It reveals the contradictions inherent in capitalism, where, as Parker Simon explains, economic imperatives often clash with communal and traditional values, leading to a constant renegotiation of space and identity within urban landscapes (245).

The bustling bus parks of Lagos provide a vivid tableau of the city's capitalist dynamics. Onuzo describes an assortment of individuals, each participating in the economy differently. The narrator states thus: "There are those who wish to make honest money... Those who wish to steal... and of course, those who are there solely for entertainment" (Onuzo 71). This scene is emblematic of Marx's theory of base and superstructure, where the economic base (the means and relations of production) conditions the superstructure (culture, institutions, political power structures) (Ervin 372-373). In Lagos, the bus parks' economic activities reflect the city's economic base and shape its inhabitants' social relations and cultural expressions. Furthermore, the dismissal of unemployment figures by the Lagos State Commissioner for job creation in the novel speaks volumes about the ideological superstructure designed to mask the realities of capitalism. The Commissioner's claim that "our people will always find something doing" and his critique of the UK's welfare system as a "dangerous system" reveals a typical capitalist ideology that valorises self-sufficiency and stigmatises welfare dependency (Onuzo 83). This narrative obscures the exploitative conditions under capitalism by suggesting that employment is always available, albeit in the informal sector, thus shifting the focus from the failure of the system to provide adequate jobs to the individual's ability to exploit available opportunities.

Onuzo also explores the alienation and dehumanisation wrought by capitalist exploitation through her depiction of the labour market. Characters find themselves in menial jobs that "blister their hands before attacking their minds," a direct nod to Marx's concept of alienation, where workers become estranged from their species-essence and the products of their labour (Onuzo 89; Hetterley 28). Further explaining this, Jae Hetterley notes that "as commodities on the market, the worker becomes little more than a cog in the larger machine of productive relations. As such, our subjectivity (understood in terms of its ability to express our individuality) is hugely altered by socio-economic conditions" (29). This alienation is further depicted in the financial district, where workers are reduced to "thin, long, powerless creatures" in the reflections of glass buildings—a metaphor for the distortion of human relations under capitalism, where individuals are valued not for their humanity but for their economic utility and outward symbols of wealth (Onuzo, 99).

Again, the makeshift governance under the city's bridges, where "every food seller, every hairdresser, even every beggar has paid their levy, and they expect security in return," showcases an adaptation of capitalist relations in spaces marginalised by formal economic structures (Onuzo 91). This scenario illustrates how capitalist relations permeate even the lowest strata of society, creating a shadow economy that mirrors the exploitative mechanisms of the broader capitalist system.

Similarly, Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father* presents a gritty examination of societal oppression and the capitalist exploitation that characterise daily life for those in impoverished communities. Yishau uses characters like Alani and Tosin to illustrate the weight of societal constraints, which leave individuals struggling to survive under harsh economic and social conditions. In Lagos, specifically in the rundown town of Isheri, Alani's existence reflects a life hindered by poverty, limited opportunities, and an environment that offers little respite. His one-room apartment, nearly flooded due to a leaking roof, stands as a stark reminder of his destitution and resignation to a life where "luck" is a rare and often unattainable commodity (Yishau 11). Unlike his neighbours who manage to avoid such hardships, Alani's repeated encounters with bad fortune signal the cyclical trap that binds the lower class in a constant struggle for survival.

Yishau depicts Alani's frustration and his desire for liberation from poverty, hunger, and "miserable occurrences" as emblematic of the burdens shouldered by the lower class in a capitalist society (Yishau 11). Alani's lack of options and his limited means highlight the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality and inhibit social mobility. This sense of entrapment is further emphasized as Alani and Tosin, his girlfriend, confront an unplanned pregnancy. The potential birth of a child is not a joyful occasion; rather, it threatens to deepen their struggles, compelling them to consider abortion as a means to escape the additional financial strain. For Alani and Tosin, the harsh reality of their circumstances forces them to weigh moral and ethical considerations against the practicalities of survival, revealing how oppression and systemic barriers drive the marginalised to desperate actions. The author further explores the impact of capitalist structures on human lives through the character of Tosin, who turns to spiritual mediums for relief. Her decision to seek help from a pastor reflects her desperation, but it also underscores how capitalism permeates even the spiritual sphere, commodifying religion as a means of profit. The pastor, who presents himself as a "miracle-worker," demands a fee beyond Tosin's reach, effectively placing spiritual aid out of her grasp (Yishau 17). By portraying religion as a commercialised entity, Yishau highlights how capitalist societies exploit even the most vulnerable and sacred aspects of life. Tosin's encounter with the pastor, a figure who prioritises profit over genuine assistance, mirrors the larger structures of exploitation in which the marginalised are left with few, if any, viable options for advancement or support.

Evidently, both *In the Name of Our Father* and *Welcome to Lagos* explore the deep-rooted effects of capitalism on human lives, particularly through the themes of poverty, inequality, and class struggle. Yishau's depiction of Isheri reveals a society where individuals, like Alani and Tosin, are denied basic security and opportunities, trapped in cycles of misfortune and despair. Their experiences critique a system that commodifies human needs, leaving the poor in a state of dependence and vulnerability. Similarly, *Welcome to Lagos* uses the city as a reflection of capitalism's impact, examining not only

the visible economic exploitation but also the more subtle ways in which it alters social relationships and personal identities. Together, both novels provide a powerful commentary on the pervasive influence of economic forces on human lives, exposing how societal structures intensify class dichotomies and shape individual destinies.

Ideological Conditioning in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father*

Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father* use the city of Lagos and the political sphere of a fictional country to represent how ideological conditioning silently moulds the minds and actions of individuals, reinforcing the socio-political hierarchies that govern their lives. As Althusser posits, ideology works through "Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)," such as media, education, and political institutions, which condition individuals to accept dominant norms without realising it (Althusser 110). This covert mechanism of control is reflected in the lives of Onuzo's ex-military officer, Chike, and Yishau's characters like Alani (later Prophet Jeremiah) and General Idoti, whose understanding of their worlds is shaped by what Gramsci terms "cultural hegemony," where oppressive systems are normalised and presented as inevitable truths (Gramsci 181 *qt in* Wullweber 150). Through depictions of corruption, moral decay, and power struggles, both novels unearth how ideology constructs reality, as characters grapple with their roles in a system that silently conditions them to consent to injustice.

In Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father*, the canvas of Nigerian society under military rule is painted with deep strokes of ideological conditioning, where media manipulation, class disparity, and religious exploitation coalesce to control and subdue the masses. Through the lives of characters like Justus and Alani, the novel explores the intricate ways the ruling elite employ ideology to cement their power, crafting a narrative that aligns with Marxist critiques of power and oppression. Justus, a journalist, serves as a poignant embodiment of the intellectual struggle against oppressive regimes. His endeavours to challenge the status quo through his manuscript "Angels Live in Heaven" are an act of defiance against the ideological manipulation by religious tyrants who collude with military rulers. This act of rebellion underscores Marx's notion of religion as "the opiate of the masses," a tool used by the ruling class to placate public discontent and deter revolutionary impulses. Justus's narrative reveals the desperate lengths the state will go to maintain control, including imprisonment and suppression of dissent. His reflections from prison, lamenting the corrupted state of the press, "especially when I read new publications which were being funded by the regime to twist the reality on the ground" (Yishau 199), illustrate the media's role as a powerful ideological state apparatus.

The contrasting experiences of Omoeku and General Iya further expose the stark class divisions characteristic of a capitalist society entrenched within the military hierarchy. Omoeku's transfer to a better facility, once exclusively occupied by General Iya, highlights the privileges accorded to the military elite, reminiscent of the bourgeoisie's dominance over the proletariat. The new, albeit relatively luxurious, prison conditions described by Omoeku, "My room was a paradise compared to where I was coming from" (Yishau 210), starkly contrast with his previous sufferings, illustrating the material disparities that enforce ideological compliance and class stratification.

Furthermore, Yishau addresses the complicity of religious leaders in the oppression of the people, demonstrating how ideological conditioning extends beyond the political sphere. The Prophet's influence over General Idoti and his role in Justus's imprisonment reveal the collaboration between religious figures and military leaders to maintain control. Justus learns that his refusal to comply with their demands regarding his novella "Angels Live in Heaven" led to his imprisonment: "It never crossed my mind that my stint in prison had anything to do with the fetish prophet who lied and committed atrocities in the name of the Father" (Yishau 226–227). This illustrates how religion, which should provide moral guidance, is instead weaponised to suppress dissent and reinforce the status quo. The Prophet's actions demonstrate how religious leaders, in collusion with those in power, exploit their authority to keep the masses subservient, using the guise of spiritual legitimacy to maintain control.

Moreover, the narrative vividly captures the exploitation of religious beliefs for ideological subjugation. Justus's determination to publish his novella despite the threats and consequences positions him as a character resisting the ideological conditioning imposed by both the state and religious authorities. His efforts to expose the corrupt practices of religious leaders align with Olaniyan and Quayson's view of literature as "a deconstructive searchlight of truth against all the dark burdens that circumscribe the ability of the community to achieve its best" (Olaniyan and Quayson 101). Justus's manuscript debunks the sanctity of religious figures who manipulate faith for personal and political gain, reflecting a Marxist critique of religion as a vehicle for social control. This blend of spiritual and military power stifles the societal quest for truth and perpetuates a culture of fear and obedience. Justus uses literature to challenge the dominant ideology and illuminate the injustices faced by the people, highlighting the potential of literature as a tool for resistance. However, the backlash he faces underscores the challenges of resisting a deeply entrenched system and being willing to use any means necessary to suppress opposition. The military's hierarchical structure mirrors the capitalist system, where the senior officers, akin to the bourgeoisie, dictate terms and conditions, reinforcing their ideology across the ranks. Junior officers and the masses comply without question, a dynamic vividly depicted in Biliaminu's conversation, merely echoing his superior's orders, "Yes, sir...everything is under

control... I'll do as you wish, sir...consider everything done, sir" (Yishau 176). This absolute obedience underscores the deeply ingrained ideological control that stifles individual agency and perpetuates the status quo.

Yishau's narrative does not merely critique the overt oppression by military and religious leaders; it delves into the ideological underpinnings that sustain such regimes. The novel portrays the media as a double-edged sword that can illuminate truth or shroud it in shadows, depending on who wields it. Justus's lamentation at reading regime-funded publications reveals his awareness of the media's potential to mislead the public, showcasing how the state shapes ideology to suit its needs. Justus's journey, marred by imprisonment and ideological battles, paints a grim picture of the challenges faced by those who dare to question the prevailing order. His ordeal is a testament to the resilience required to challenge deeply entrenched ideologies that are reinforced through both coercion and consent. His realisation in prison, where he connects his incarceration with his attempts to publish his critical manuscript, highlights the personal costs of intellectual resistance in an oppressive regime.

In Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, ideological conditioning emerges as a significant theme, intricately woven through the characters' interactions with the urban environment and each other. With its vibrant chaos and oppressive structures, Lagos is a fertile ground for exploring the complex layers of social conditioning that shape individuals' lives. Through detailed narratives and the inner thoughts of characters like Chike, Onuzo delves into how deeply entrenched beliefs and societal norms dictate behaviour and influence destinies in Lagos. Chike's experience and reflections offer a poignant critique of the societal conditioning prevalent in Lagos. His disillusionment with the city's relentless pace and the apparent futility of the struggle for survival encapsulate a broader critique of capitalist society. This is evident when he observes the morning rush, where workers fight to enter buses in a desperate scramble that mirrors their daily battle for economic survival: "Each morning he watched workers clamber into danfos, pushing, shoving, crushing against one another, struggling to make it inside, where they would sit thigh to thigh, heads drooping out of windows, desperate for fresh air" (Onuzo 101). This scene is a microcosm of the larger capitalist grind, where individuals are pitted against each other in a relentless competition that often feels like treading water with no real progress.

The concept of destiny and the influence of supernatural beliefs in shaping life choices is another form of ideological conditioning that Onuzo explores. Chike's recollection of his mother washing his feet in holy water to protect him from taking on another man's frustrations illustrates the deep-seated cultural beliefs that govern personal actions. "Destinies were exchanged at crossroads...You could take another man's frustrations that way" (Onuzo 106). This narrative thread highlights the cultural conditioning that individuals undergo. It reflects the broader societal acceptance of fate and supernatural

interventions in personal fortunes, which can often lead to a resignation from one's circumstances. Moreover, Chike's internal taxonomy of the city's inhabitants reflects a deeply ingrained ideological conditioning regarding social hierarchies and economic status. His mental classifications of pedestrians, motorists, and street vendors into an urban Linnaeus system reveal how societal structures condition individuals to categorise and judge others based on economic and social markers: "Pedestrians and motorists were migratory, passing briefly to destinations unknown, delineated by their wealth, the comfort in which they travelled, their relations with the fixtures on the road" (Onuzo 114). This systematic ordering of society into hierarchies based on economic capability and social mobility showcases the capitalist ideology at work, where individuals' worth and identity are often tied to their material success and visible social markers.

As he reads the Psalms, Chike's struggle with hope and despair also symbolises the ideological battle between accepting one's predetermined societal place and the desire for divine intervention or change. "He did not hope much for deliverance, the divine rescue that the psalmist was so sure of, but he understood life in the pit, clawing and clawing and sliding to claw again" (Onuzo 100). This reflection not only underscores his resignation from the harsh realities of life in Lagos but also reflects a broader societal conditioning where individuals are often resigned to their fate with little hope for change.

Both Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father* and Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* portray ideological conditioning against a backdrop of societal and economic structures that deeply influence individual actions and collective consciousness. Yishau's narrative delves into the manipulation of religious and media institutions as tools of ideological control in a military regime, aligning with Marxist critiques of how ruling classes perpetuate their dominance. Onuzo, conversely, presents Lagos as a microcosm of capitalist society, where class divides and cultural beliefs shape destinies and daily struggles, vividly illustrating Marx's concepts of base and superstructure. Both authors effectively highlight the pervasive impact of ideological conditioning in shaping human experiences and maintaining existing power structures, urging a reevaluation of the accepted norms and the potential for societal transformation in the face of deeply entrenched ideologies.

Struggle and Exploitation in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father*

In Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, the fabric of Lagos unfolds in layers of contrasts and contradictions where glamour and squalor coexist, setting a vivid tableau for exploring themes of struggle and exploitation through a Marxist lens. The novel

dives deep into the heart of Lagos society, revealing how capitalist dynamics permeate even the most personal aspects of life, from opulent weddings to the desperation of poverty-stricken lives lurking just outside the celebrations.

The novel opens a window to the grandeur of Lagos' high society with a wedding scene that encapsulates the glaring disparities within the Nigerian society. The lushness of towering cakes, complimentary champagne, and ice sculptures starkly contrasts with the beggars and touts that linger around these festivities, waiting for crumbs to fall from the table of the wealthy. "The happily ever after turned into a capitalist boom" (Onuzo, 46), Onuzo remarks sardonically, highlighting how even matrimonial bliss is commodified, transformed into a spectacle where the affluent display their wealth, while the poor, in the shadows of these celebrations, grasp at the economic opportunities the event inadvertently offers. This scenario is not just a display of wealth but a microcosm of the capitalist system at play, delineating the stark divide between those who have and those who have not. Onuzo's portrayal of Lagos highlights the commodification of everyday life, from opulent weddings to the exploitation of humans through dehumanising labour. As Desmond McNeill observes, commodities are "imbued with value" in capitalist systems, yet this value is abstracted, concealing the exploitation behind it (McNeill 60). Additionally, The city symbolises capitalist contradictions, where wealth and poverty coexist in sharp relief.

Beyond the superficial glitz, the novel also portrays the ongoing environmental and economic exploitation in the Niger Delta. The plight of the Deltans is a poignant reminder of how natural resources, rather than being a boon for the locals, become a curse that attracts multinational exploitation and ravages the environment and its original inhabitants. "Money from our oil has built every infrastructure you see in Nigeria, and yet we, the owners of the oil, don't have hospitals, schools, roads," a character laments (Onuzo, 19). This dialogue encapsulates the core Marxist critique of capital: it accumulates in the hands of a few, deriving its value from the exploitation of both the environment and the proletariat. The local militants, dubbed criminals by the government, are seen not just as lawbreakers but as desperate men pushed to extremes by a system that extracts wealth from their land while leaving them impoverished and disenfranchised.

Moreover, the character of Chief Momoh, a former minister of petroleum who asserts that his wealth and his tenure are unrelated, embodies the corruption endemic within capitalist systems where political power often shields the economic exploitations of its bearers. His narrative reveals the complicity of state mechanisms in maintaining the status quo that benefits the ruling elite at the expense of the masses. The mention of his ownership of oil rigs "by proxy" (Onuzo, 40) underscores the covert operations behind the facade of legitimacy, highlighting how capitalist societies often mask exploitation beneath layers of bureaucracy and legal manipulations.



In the everyday streets of Lagos, we see another layer of struggle among the common folk. The bus parks and under-bridge areas become arenas where survival tactics are employed by ordinary citizens looking to scrape by. "Lagos bus parks attract an assortment of individuals... Those who wish to make honest money, lifting bread and bananas to the newcomers as they fall out of buses" (Onuzo, 71). Here, every small opportunity is seized by those trying to make a living, embodying the capitalist spirit in its most primal form—survival of the fittest.

Furthermore, Onuzo does not shy away from illustrating the brutal truths of the job market in Lagos, where government officials dismiss the unemployment figures as "rubbish lies" (Onuzo, 83). This denial by the Lagos State Commissioner for Job Creation belies the grim reality millions face, underscoring the disconnect between governmental rhetoric and the lived experiences of the populace. This aspect of the narrative highlights the alienation of the workers from the fruits of their labour, a fundamental Marxist concept.

Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father* and Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* represent the stark realities of struggle, exploitation, and ideological conditioning that are powerfully depicted through the lens of Nigeria's socio-political landscape. These novels illustrate the core tenets of Marxist theory, where commodification, class struggle, and oppression converge to shape the experiences of individuals and society.

In Olukorede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father*, the intertwining of struggle and exploitation forms the crux of a narrative that profoundly examines the sociopolitical fabric of Nigeria during its tumultuous military era. Through characters like General Sani Idoti and Prophet Jeremiah, Yishau paints a vivid picture of a society marred by corruption, abuse of power, and a commodification of spiritual beliefs that serve the political elite. This complex web of interactions highlights the core Marxist tenets of class struggle, commodification, and the pervasive influence of ideology as tools of oppression and control.

General Idoti, a military leader turned despot, symbolises the systemic corruption that Marx critiqued as inherent to capitalist systems. However, in this context, it manifests within the framework of a military dictatorship. His rise to power is marked not by the promise of democratic freedom but by the tightening grip of autocracy. "General Idoti is a sad reminder of Nigeria's military era... Rather than make good his promise, he set up five political parties supposedly to adopt him as a consensus life president" (Yishau, provided text). This manoeuvre starkly represents how political power is commodified and twisted into a tool for personal aggrandisement rather than serving the public good. Here, the class dynamics are explicit: a ruling class is represented by Idoti and his cronies, who manipulate societal structures for their benefit. At the same time, the masses remain exploited and subdued.

Prophet Jeremiah's role in this dynamic furthers the theme of exploitation. He represents the spiritual commodification that Marxists argue is a feature of capitalist societies, where even faith and spirituality become commodities to be bought and sold. This is vividly illustrated when Prophet Jeremiah views his appointment not as a spiritual duty but as an opportunity to exploit a "spiritually weak leader" for financial gain. "Prophet Jeremiah was analysing the man he was due to meet... And in turn, he would make billions of Naira" (Yishau, 114). This scenario encapsulates the degradation of human values under the pressure of capitalist-like greed that permeates even the non-economic spheres of life, such as religion and governance.

The interaction between Idoti and Jeremiah also highlights the Marxist concept of base and superstructure, where the economic base (the military regime's control and corruption) directly influences the ideological superstructure (religious manipulation and societal values). This relationship is mutually reinforcing, with Jeremiah providing the spiritual justification for Idoti's rule, in turn deepening the societal exploitation. Yishau's characters, such as General Idoti and Prophet Jeremiah, exemplify how political power and spiritual beliefs are commodified and manipulated for personal gain, reflecting Marx's critique of how capitalist structures distort human relations into transactions. As Marx noted, commodities "reflect the social characteristics of men's labour as objective characteristics of the products themselves," masking the exploitation within (Marx 165 qt in Musto 82). This distortion is mirrored in Idoti's political manoeuvres and Jeremiah's spiritual exploitation, which align with the Marxist concept of base and superstructure, where economic power influences ideological control.

Though often silent in the grand narratives of power struggles, the masses' plight under this regime is palpable. The everyday citizens are the unseen victims of these high-level exploitations, their lives and destinies shaped by the whims of those in power. The pervasive fear and control maintained by Idoti reflect the Marxist view of the ruling class subjugating the proletariat not just through economic means but through ideological control, keeping them in a state of continuous struggle and helplessness.

Moreover, the concept of false consciousness is evident throughout the narrative. The masses are led to believe in the necessity of Idoti's rule and Jeremiah's spiritual guidance, distractions that keep them from understanding the true nature of their exploitation and oppression. This ideological manipulation ensures that the status quo is maintained, and any potential for genuine class consciousness and subsequent uprising is effectively quelled.

In both *Welcome to Lagos* by Chibundu Onuzo and *In the Name of Our Father* by Olukorede Yishau, the depiction of struggle and exploitation is deeply intertwined with Nigerian society's socio-political and economic fabrics. Yishau's narrative exposes the

sinister layers of religious and political manipulation, highlighting how ideology and corruption perpetuate systemic injustice. Onuzo's portrayal of Lagos through vivid, contrasting imagery of wealth and poverty underlines the harsh realities of capitalist exploitation, where societal disparities are stark and the commodification of life is commonplace.

Resistance and Solidarity in the Face of Capitalism in Chiubundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Olukerede Yishau's *In the Name of Our Father*

Resistance and solidarity are pivotal responses to the oppressive structures that arise within capitalist systems, where power dynamics favour the elite at the expense of the marginalised. As Karl Marx asserts, class struggles are central to societal development, driven by the inherent conflict between the ruling class, which controls the means of production, and the working class, which is exploited for its labour (Marx and Engels 240). In capitalist societies, oppression manifests through economic exploitation and ideological control, where dominant groups maintain power by shaping societal values and beliefs. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony explains how the ruling class subtly instils its worldview as common sense, masking the inequalities and contradictions inherent in the system (Gramsci 181 *qt in* Wullweber 150). Yet, this hegemonic dominance often sparks resistance as individuals and groups recognise the need to confront and dismantle oppressive structures. Resistance, whether through intellectual or physical means, requires solidarity—a collective unity against exploitation.

In *Welcome to Lagos* by Chibundu Onuzo, the themes of resistance and solidarity in the face of capitalism are explored through a rich tapestry of character interactions and plot developments that underline the communal fight against corruption and exploitation. The narrative is a mere depiction of individual struggles and an evocative illustration of collective efforts to challenge systemic injustices within Nigerian society.

Central to the story is the character of Ahmed Bakere, an editor at the Nigerian Journal, who represents the media's potential to foster resistance against corruption. His decision to run a risky article about Chief Sandayọ is a testament to the power of the press in mobilising public opinion and accountability: "Was he brave enough to run this article? Could he even imagine the consequences?" (Onuzo, 179). This reflects a critical moment of decision that highlights the press's role as a tool for social change despite the potential dangers involved. In Lagos, where the "incendiary days of blowing up journalists were gone," the remnants of threats still loom, suggesting the lingering risks faced by those who dare to confront powerful corrupt entities.

The collective responsibility to fight corruption is further echoed in the editorial that Bakere eventually publishes, stating, "I believe that the corruption in this country exists because of the goodwill, support, and cooperation of large segments of the population"

(Onuzo, 180). This statement captures a profound truth about society's complicity in enabling corruption, and it challenges the readers to reflect on their roles within such a system. It's a call for collective action, highlighting that change requires a communal effort and not just the heroics of a few individuals.

The narrative also ventures into the Niger Delta, where resistance takes a more violent form through the actions of militants fighting against the exploitation of their land and resources by national and multinational corporations. The character Fineboy, who transitions from wanting to be a star to becoming a militant, exemplifies the forced transformation of youth into fighters due to the dire circumstances imposed by environmental and economic exploitation. His story, along with soldiers like Chike and Yemi sent to suppress such uprisings, illustrates the complex dynamics of resistance where the lines between right and wrong blur in the murky waters of conflict.

Chike's and Yemi's eventual disillusionment with their military roles and alignment with Ahmed Bakere and other civilians in exposing corruption represent a significant shift. This solidarity across different strata of society—from journalists to former soldiers—highlights the potential for unity in combating the systemic roots of corruption and capitalism that plague their country. The burning of Bakere's office after the exposé on Chief Sandayo signifies the persistent dangers of such resistance, yet it also underscores the impact of their collective efforts.

As the events unfold, Bakere's safety becomes so compromised that he must rely on Chike and his crew for protection. This reversal of roles, from protector to protected, deepens the theme of solidarity and shows the vulnerabilities of those who challenge the status quo. It's a compelling reminder of the personal costs of fighting corruption and the strength found in communal support.

As far as resistance and solidarity go, the fact that Omoeko was able to publish *Angel Live in Heaven* tells of the brave steps taken by media practitioners to initiate awareness and, in so doing, call out the mechanisms that perpetrate oppression and social injustice in the society. The story in *In the Name of Our Father* is narrated by Justus Omoeko, a journalist, who is determined to bring to light what he knows about a corrupt administration.

In the introduction to the novel, Justus Omoeko receives a letter that threatens him thus:

Mr. Journalist, do you know what happened to Dele Giwa? He was blown to pieces for following a path similar to the one you are now on. If you love yourself, just keep the terms of the deal. That useless book you are working on about our prophet must not see the light of day (Yishau 6).

The reference to Dele Giwa in the letters underscores the situation that is common in societies where control and resources are coveted by a few elites, and these elites stand



ready to eliminate any threat to their wealth and power. Dele Giwa's death was a consequence of his advocacy for the liberation of individuals exploited and oppressed. However, Omoeko's resistance is seen in his declaration: "Even if I die, this work must see the light of day." The first section of the novel is titled *Harbinger of Storm (Angels Live in Heaven)*.

Justus represents the struggle for justice and the pursuit of truth in a society marked by fear, exploitation, and class divisions. His actions reflect the courage required to stand against powerful elites and institutions that silence dissent, punish whistleblowers, and perpetuate systemic inequality. Justus's journey of resistance illuminates the high personal cost of challenging entrenched power structures and, at the same time, the profound impact of solidarity in fostering change, even in the bleakest circumstances.

Unfortunately for Justus Omoeko, he was imprisoned. He was accused of plotting a coup against General Idoti. His determination to publish *Angels Live in Heaven* brings severe repercussions, as he becomes a marked enemy of the state, facing intimidation, harassment, and eventual imprisonment. The regime's response to Justus's resistance is a testament to the lengths authoritarian governments and people who have power go to suppress dissent. In detention, Justus faces torture, solitary confinement, and psychological abuse, meant not only to punish him but also to serve as a warning to others who might be inspired to resist. An acquaintance of his is enlisted at the prison to make him suffer. Johnson, the acquaintance, who is a warden at the prison, reveals this: "Demola," he began, "I pray that God sees you through. These people at the top have no good plans for you. Though they have sentenced you to life in Prison, they are also hell-bent on ensuring that you do not enjoy the rest of your days on earth. Before I was posted here, I was briefed by my boss on the need to ensure that you suffer, suffer and suffer, and beg for death to claim your soul" (Yishau 198).

This level of punishment reflects the consequences of challenging power in a society where individual lives are secondary to the maintenance of power.

However, even in the oppressive confines of prison, Justus finds solidarity with the likes of Johnson, who tries to be kind to him when the situation allows. The fact that the likes of Johnson saw the injustice and perversion of power going on provided him with strength and resilience, allowing him to endure the harsh conditions imposed on him. One notable relationship is his connection with General Iya, formerly a second in command in the country, now a fellow prisoner who has also been jailed for opposing the government. Together, they shared stories, offered support, and kept alive the hope for freedom and change. This solidarity demonstrates how, even in environments designed to isolate and break individuals, the bonds formed through shared resistance can provide a source of strength and a reminder of the collective struggle for justice.

Resistance and solidarity in *Welcome to Lagos* and *In the Name of Our Father* echo the personal and collective struggle against oppressive capitalist and authoritarian systems. Through characters like Ahmed Bakere and Justus Omoeko, these novels reveal the high cost of challenging entrenched power and corruption, while highlighting the power of unity in confronting injustice. Both novels demonstrate that in societies where inequality and exploitation prevail, resistance often requires immense courage, and solidarity among diverse individuals becomes essential to foster hope and drive meaningful change.

Conclusion

This study has examined how Chibundu Onuzo and Olukorede Yishau have deployed their novels, *In the Name of Our Father* and *Welcome to Lagos*, as vibrant canvasses on which they paint the intricate interplay of power dynamics, survival and resistance in contemporary Nigeria, represented in the works by Lagos, which is Nigeria's most cosmopolitan city. Guided by the principles of Marxism, the study reveals that the authors, through character portrayal and narrative techniques, dissect the anatomy of exploitation, marginalisation and alienation of the masses through the ideological and economic machinery of capitalism evolved and sustained by the ruling class, as well as manipulative institutions like religion and politics to keep the masses in perpetual poverty and subjugation. However, the study also discovers that the novels are not bereft of the prospect of resistance through collective action, which is embodied in the awareness-creating initiatives and actions of some of the characters in the narratives which are symbolic of the potential reality of modern Nigeria.

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