International Journal of Arts and Humanities: ISSN-2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access: DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.23160042
Abbreviated Key Title: *Int. J. Arts Humanit.*
ISSN: 2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access
Volume-14 (Issue): 4, April, Pp. 98-111, 2026

Full Length Research

Feminist Power, Class, and Gender: A Comparative Study of *Miss Julie* in Nigeria and South Sudan

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative feminist analysis of August Strindberg's Miss Julie, contextualising the play within the current gender dynamics of Nigeria and South Sudan. Using intersectional, materialist, and postcolonial feminist frameworks, the research examines the functioning of gendered power within literary and sociocultural contexts. The analysis illustrates that Miss Julie dramatises the precariousness of female agency within patriarchal frameworks, where class, sexuality, and psychological conditioning combine to generate both resistance and confinement. By applying this framework to African contexts, the study uncovers both structural continuities and significant divergences. In Nigeria, gender relations are influenced by the interplay of customary law, religion, and contemporary state systems, resulting in contradictions between female empowerment and enduring patriarchal limitations. In South Sudan, conflict, displacement, and traditional customs exacerbate gender inequality while concurrently fostering forms of collective female agency in peacebuilding and survival economies. The dramatic interaction of sexual power is defined by a patriarchal culture of impunity—where violence is used to break social bonds **(**Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) This system is rooted in a patriarchal structure that defines women as sexual objects for men's satisfaction and uses violence as a means to express masculinity and maintain power. Comparative analysis underscores that while gendered power appears to be fluid in these contexts, it persists as structurally unequal, perpetuated by social norms, economic frameworks, and symbolic authority. However, the study also criticizes Strindberg's Eurocentric naturalism for its shortcomings, especially its emphasis on individual psychological determinism and its failure to address colonial and racial power dynamics, which limits its applicability to non-Western contexts and overlooks the complexities of gender relations in societies like South Sudan. By integrating African feminist epistemologies, the research reframes Miss Julie as a significant yet incomplete analytical framework. The study contends that although the expressions of patriarchy differ across cultural and historical contexts, the negotiation of female agency continues to be a pervasive global issue. The research enhances feminist literary criticism by connecting European dramatic texts with African socio-political contexts, providing a more nuanced and decolonised understanding of gendered power.

Keywords: Feminist literary criticism, Intersectionality, Patriarchy, African feminism Gender and power

Accepted: 22/4/2026 Published: 30/4/.2026

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and the Problem of Gendered Power

August Strindberg's Miss Julie (1888) is a classic naturalist play that shows how gender and class hierarchies break down when an aristocratic woman and her servant have a deep psychological encounter. The play is often considered a deterministic look at heredity, environment, and social decay, which fits with naturalist aesthetics that were influenced by Émile Zola's literary theory of experimental realism (Zola, 1880). In this context, Miss Julie is depicted as a character influenced by conflicting social forces rather than independent agency, which coincides with the naturalist focus on human behaviour as socially and biologically determined.

From a feminist critical standpoint, Julie's character reveals the precariousness of patriarchal definitions of femininity. Her fluctuation between dominance and submission exemplifies what Butler (1990) defines as gender performativity, wherein identity is not intrinsic but continually constructed through social norms and expectations. Julie's efforts to establish dominance over Jean are consistently thwarted by the systemic power of class and gender, illustrating that her aristocratic identity cannot mitigate her susceptibility as a woman in a patriarchal framework, as she faces societal pressures that dictate her behaviour and limit her agency.

1.2 Feminist Literary Theory and the Construction of Female Subjectivity

Feminist literary criticism serves as an essential interpretive framework for analysing Miss Julie as a text that portrays the construction of female subjectivity within patriarchal discourse. Showalter (1977) contends that female characters in literature are frequently depicted through male-authored frameworks that delineate femininity in terms of male desire and authority, rather than through independent identity formation. In Miss Julie, female identity is solely shaped by Jean's perspective and the unseen authority of the Count, whose presence serves as a symbolic framework of patriarchal oversight.

Gilbert and Gubar (1979) assert that female characters in canonical literature often embody psychological fragmentation arising from the internalization of patriarchal norms. Julie's actions show this condition because her fear of social punishment and moral judgement always gets in the way of her desire for freedom. Consequently, her eventual psychological breakdown may be interpreted not as an individual pathology but as a structural outcome of patriarchal constraints inherent in aristocratic femininity.

Foucault's (1977) theory of disciplinary power elucidates the mechanism by which Julie is governed. In the play, power doesn't just come from direct force; it also comes from internalized surveillance. The Count is an invisible authority figure who controls Julie's actions even when he is not there. This shows that patriarchal power works best when it can control itself.

1.3 The Politics of Sexual Power and Dramatic Interaction

The dramatic structure of Miss Julie is based on conversations and psychological exchanges that get more and more intense and show how Julie and Jean's power dynamics change. Strindberg constructs dialogue as a site of ideological struggle where language becomes a mechanism of social mobility and domination. Julie first tries to show her superiority by using aristocratic speech and controlling behaviour, but Jean slowly undermines her authority by taking on bourgeois ambition and sexual assertiveness.

The seduction sequence holds particular significance in feminist analysis, as it reveals the convergence of sexuality and power. De Beauvoir (1949) posits that women in patriarchal societies are frequently categorised as the Other, whose sexual agency is both coveted and constrained. Julie's initiation of intimacy may be seen as an effort to overcome her structural constraints; however, Jean reinterprets this act as a moment of domination, thereby reinforcing male authority over sexual significance.

Moi (1985) contends that gendered subjectivity in literature is precarious and formulated through discourse rather than biological determinants. This theoretical stance is manifest in the disintegration of Julie's identity as linguistic authority transitions to Jean. Her eventual collapse is not solely psychological but ideological, illustrating how patriarchal discourse re-establishes itself through the regulation of female desire.

1.4 Comparative Feminist Context: Nigeria and South Sudan

Even though Miss Julie comes from Sweden in the 1800s, it can be usefully compared to modern African settings like Nigeria and South Sudan, as long as the comparison doesn't make generalisations about feminism.

Feminist scholarship in Nigeria, exemplified by Oyěwùmí (1997), critiques the imposition of Western gender categories via colonial administration, contending that colonial modernity exacerbated the rigidity of gender as a binary system. Even though more women are going to school and working, patriarchal structures still limit women's freedom through institutional, religious, and family systems. Violence against women and inequitable access to power continue to be enduring issues in feminist discourse (Nnaemeka, 2005).

In South Sudan, ongoing conflict and political instability exacerbate gender inequality. Women often

find themselves in unstable social situations because of customary law, being dependent on others for money, and being forced to move. Bride wealth systems, though culturally important, often reinforce unequal gender relations by framing marriage as a transaction. Due to extreme poverty and displacement, some men in positions of power, including those managing humanitarian aid, engage in sexual blackmail, demanding sexual Favors in exchange for relief supplies. Women in South Sudan are not only depicted as victims; they also actively work towards peace at the grassroots level, engaging in local peace agreements and intervening to stop cattle raids, despite the high risks and gender-based discrimination they face. Nonetheless, studies indicate that women engage in peacebuilding and community survival strategies, exhibiting agency even in constraining contexts (Hutchinson, 2011).

1.5 The Research Problem and Its Importance

This study examines the utilisation of Strindberg's Miss Julie as a comparative framework for analysing gendered power relations in Nigeria and South Sudan, while avoiding the pitfalls of Eurocentric universalism. The issue is reconciling the interpretive significance of a European canonical text with the imperative for contextual specificity in African feminist analysis.

Mohanty (2003) warns against treating all "Third World women" the same way in Western feminist discourse. She says that feminist analysis needs to take into account the differences in history and culture. This study utilises Miss Julie not as a universal archetype of womanhood but as a comparative literary framework for the critical examination of patriarchal structures across various societies.

In conclusion, Miss Julie presents a nuanced depiction of gendered instability influenced by class, sexuality, and power dynamics. When critically analysed in relation to feminist realities in Nigeria and South Sudan, the play uncovers structural similarities in the functioning of patriarchy while also emphasising notable contextual disparities. Nonetheless, any comparative analysis must be anchored in feminist theory that emphasises specificity, intersectionality, and a repudiation of Eurocentric generalisation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINIST READING OF *MISS JULIE*

2.1 Feminist Theory, Material Conditions, and the Question of Gender Construction

Modern feminist theory posits that gender is not a biological essence but rather a socially constructed and institutionally governed category. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is still very important in this area. She says that gender identity is made up of repeated actions that give the impression of stability (Butler, 2004). In literary studies, this framework has been broadened to underscore that gender is not merely performed individually but is perpetuated through institutional, linguistic, and cultural repetition that dictates what constitutes an intelligible identity.
Recent feminist scholarship has enhanced Butler's model by emphasising the material constraints that influence performativity. For instance, gender is now widely recognised as both discursive and material- based, indicating that performance is perpetually influenced by social power, economic status, and bodily susceptibility (Budgeon, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2018). This is especially important for Miss Julie, where class hierarchy and the decline of the aristocracy are closely linked to how people act based on their gender.

In this context, Strindberg's drama can be interpreted as a space where gender is both enacted and violently contested within intersecting systems of patriarchy and class power. Julie's aristocratic identity does not confer stable authority, as femininity is inherently positioned as subordinate within both domestic and symbolic hierarchies.

2.2 Gender Performativity and the Fluidity of Identity in Miss Julie

Butler's theory of performativity is especially effective in examining the dynamic identity constructions in Miss Julie. Butler contends that gender is not a static identity but a continuous process of reiteration that creates the semblance of coherence (Butler, 2004). In the play, Miss Julie embodies aristocratic femininity through displays of superiority, emotional instability, and moral ambiguity; however, these portrayals consistently fail to solidify her authority.
Jean, on the other hand, shows masculinity through ambition, logic, and sexual power. But his masculinity is also made up of different parts, since he goes back and forth between being obedient to his master and wanting to be a member of the bourgeoisie. This is in line with Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which says that masculinity is not just one identity but a hierarchy of socially accepted behaviours that men must keep doing to stay on top.
The interaction between Julie and Jean illustrates that gender in Miss Julie is not fundamental but rather relational and strategic. Power resides not in static identities but in the capacity to manipulate socially recognised performances of class and gender.

2.3 Material Feminism and the Constraints of Performativity

Butler's framework is pivotal; however, feminist scholarship post-2000 has scrutinised its shortcomings,

notably its inadequate focus on material inequality and embodied vulnerability. Material feminists contend that gender cannot be comprehensively understood through discourse alone, as bodies are perpetually situated within economic and institutional frameworks that limit agency (Hennessy, 2013; Fraser, 2013).

In Miss Julie, the structural relationship between the aristocracy and servitude shows how material inequality is present. Julie is limited in how she acts as a woman because she relies on inherited class privilege, which is itself falling apart. Jean's ambition is facilitated by his role within labour structures that incentivise masculine assertiveness and economic mobility.

This convergence of gender and class exemplifies intersectionality theory, which posits that oppression functions through various, interconnected systems rather than a singular axis of identity (Crenshaw, 2016). Julie's downfall cannot be comprehended merely as gendered punishment; it represents a confluence of class deterioration, sexual transgression, and patriarchal regulation
.

2.4 The Structure of Drama, Sexual Politics, and the Creation of Power

The dramatic economy of Miss Julie is based on changing power dynamics that are always being talked about, sexualised, and given symbolic authority. Modern performance theory posits that dramatic space functions as a regulatory system wherein bodies are disciplined through visibility and proximity (Carlson, 2014). In Strindberg's limited kitchen environment, spatial confinement exacerbates psychological dominance and fortifies unequal power dynamics.

The seduction sequence is especially important in feminist analysis because it shows how sexuality is used as a way to negotiate power instead of freeing both people. Modern feminist scholars contend that heterosexual intimacy within patriarchal frameworks frequently perpetuates structural inequality, even when it seems consensual (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Julie's sexual initiation of Jean does not emancipate her; rather, it re-establishes her within a hierarchy where male desire assumes interpretive supremacy.

Jean's reinterpretation of Julie's desire as weakness exemplifies what feminist theorists term the masculinisation of interpretive authority, wherein men dictate the significance of female sexuality. This dynamic corresponds with Moi's (2008) subsequent feminist reevaluation of subjectivity, which underscores that identity is constructed through social recognition rather than independent self-definition.

2.5 Patriarchal Fatalism and the Critique of Determinism

A primary tension in Miss Julie is the simultaneous presence of feminist critique and patriarchal determinism. The play exposes the volatility of gender and class hierarchies, yet it ultimately reinforces a deterministic perspective wherein female transgression results in unavoidable destruction. Modern feminist criticism has made these kinds of stories more difficult to understand by saying that naturalist texts often show social inequality as something that is biologically or psychologically unavoidable instead of something that happened in the past (Moi, 2008).

From this standpoint, Julie's suicide serves as ideological closure, reinstating patriarchal order by removing the disruptive female subject. This corroborates the feminist concept of narrative containment, wherein women who violate gender norms are ultimately penalised to uphold prevailing ideology (Hirsch, 2016).

But new feminist interpretations also say that these kinds of endings can be read ironically, showing patriarchal violence instead of supporting it. Butlerian interpretations of subversion suggest that Julie's instability may expose the constructed essence of gender norms, despite the text's incomplete evasion of patriarchal ideology (Butler, 2004).

2.6 Significance for Comparative Postcolonial Feminist Examination

When viewed through modern transnational feminist lenses, Miss Julie has more theoretical importance than just European naturalism. Postcolonial feminist theory contends that gender should be examined within particular historical and cultural contexts rather than through universal categories (Mohanty, 2003; Lugones, 2010).

In this regard, the performative instability exhibited in Miss Julie serves as a comparative framework for analysing gender relations in contexts like Nigeria and South Sudan, where patriarchal authority is influenced by colonial legacies, economic vulnerability, and traditional institutions. However, this comparison must eschew theoretical homogenisation by acknowledging that African gender systems are not merely variations of European models but rather unique epistemological constructs.

The feminist theoretical framework of Miss Julie elucidates gender as a fluid and contentious process influenced by performance, material disparity, and institutional authority. Butler's theory of performativity serves as a basis for comprehending the fluidity of identity within the play, while contemporary feminist scholarship enhances this examination by emphasizing material conditions, intersectionality, and postcolonial particularity.

In the end, Miss Julie is both a criticism of and a copy of patriarchal ideas. It reveals the instability of gender while concurrently reaffirming its deterministic confinement. This tension renders the text especially significant for comparative feminist analysis in various socio-cultural contexts, such as Nigeria and South Sudan, where gender continues to be a locus of persistent negotiation between agency and structural constraint.

3. GENDER AND POWER IN MISS JULIE

3.1 Sexual Politics as a Venue for Power Negotiation

The sexual relationship between Miss Julie and Jean serves as the primary context in which Strindberg illustrates the volatility of gendered power. Instead of serving as a moment of shared intimacy, sexual interaction in the play functions as a means of domination, inversion, and symbolic control. Feminist scholarship has progressively contended that heterosexual relationships within patriarchal frameworks are not neutral; rather, they are shaped by asymmetrical power dynamics that govern desire, consent, and the construction of meaning (Gill & Orgad, 2018). In this context, the interaction between Julie and Jean should be interpreted as a negotiation of authority rather than a romantic interaction.

At the start of the play, Julie breaks class lines, which temporarily upsets the social order. This is an example of transgressive intimacy. But Jean quickly reinterprets this wrongdoing in terms of sexual opportunism and male dominance. This change is most clear in the conversation after their sexual encounter, when Jean changes Julie's desire from being a sign of moral weakness to being a sign of agency. This kind of interpretive control fits with feminist critiques of heterosexual discourse, which say that men often have epistemic authority over the meaning of female sexuality (Moi, 2008).

Jean says that he could have made Julie a countess, but she could never make him a count. This is a key dramatic moment. This statement sums up how sexual politics in the play are not equal. Julie’s actions temporarily disrupt class boundaries, whereas Jean’s language reinforces structural hierarchy by integrating gender into social mobility. The scene illustrates how sexual intimacy serves as a locus where class ambition and gender supremacy intersect, ultimately solidifying male interpretive authority even during instances of seemingly female initiation.

3.2 The Intersectionality of Class and Gender as a Structural Constraint

The instability of power in Miss Julie cannot be comprehended solely through the lens of gender. It necessitates analysis through intersectional frameworks that consider the interplay of class and gender as mutually reinforcing systems of inequality. Crenshaw's (2016) theory of intersectionality says that oppression works through overlapping structures instead of separate identity groups. In the play, Julie's aristocratic status gives her symbolic power over Jean at first, but this power is weak because it is based on social and historical factors.

The first few lines of dialogue between Julie and Jean show this instability. Jean says that Julie is "too stuck up in some ways and not proud enough in others,", which shows that even people who are lower on the social ladder see her class identity as inconsistent. This contradiction intensifies as Jean describes Julie's previous interactions with servants, indicating that aristocratic femininity is already undermined by desires that transcend class distinctions. Strindberg thus conceptualises class not as a fixed hierarchy but as a performative framework that necessitates continual enactment.

Recent feminist materialist theory elucidates this dynamic by asserting that class is not merely symbolic but materially entrenched in access to labour, mobility, and survival (Fraser, 2013; Hennessy, 2013). Jean's desire to improve her social standing is based on economic logic and hard work, while Julie's power comes from her family rather than from her own efforts. This distinction becomes pivotal in the subsequent power reversal following their sexual encounter, wherein Jean's material aspirations allow him to reinterpret Julie's vulnerability as an indication of decline rather than parity.

Class and Socioeconomic Inequality in South Sudan

The Urban versus rural divide is stark, with 83% of the population residing in rural areas and facing significant limitations in access to education, healthcare, justice and other social services, particularly women. Women and children are among the most vulnerable groups affected by social inequality. South Sudan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, and women face limited employment. Most women work in agriculture or in the informal sector, with minimal control over productive resources like land. Women economic empowerment is limited by double burden of unpaid household labor and limited access to formal employment. Traditional gender roles restrict women’s mobility, and cultural practices such as early marriage and gender-based violence further entrench inequalities. In addition, children, particularly those displaced by conflict, face significant challenges in accessing education and healthcare, which compromises their prospects (UNDP, 2020).

The play shows that class instability makes gender oppression worse. Julie's aristocratic identity can't protect her from being seen as a woman by men when she enters the symbolic economy of sexual exchange.

3.3 Psychological Internalization of Patriarchy and Female Subject Formation

Julie’s psychological breakdown exemplifies the internalisation of patriarchal ideology as a means of self-regulation. Feminist theorists have long contended that patriarchal power is most efficacious when internalised as self-surveillance rather than imposed through external coercion (Foucault, 1977; Gill & Orgad, 2018). In Miss Julie, this internalisation is evident in Julie's growing inability to differentiate between personal desire and societal prohibition.

One of the most important dramatic moments happens when Julie says, "I can't leave, I can't stay, I can't live, I can't die." This is when she realises she can't change her mind or get away. This fragmentation of agency exemplifies what contemporary feminist psychology identifies as the disintegration of self-efficacy in the face of conflicting social expectations. Julie has been shaped by a system that requires both purity and desirability, obedience and autonomy, but does not provide a clear way to balance these needs.

Her monologue further illustrates the internalisation of patriarchal shame as she simultaneously assigns blame for her condition to her mother, father, and herself. This distribution of culpability illustrates what Gilbert and Gubar (1979) characterise as the disintegration of female subjectivity within patriarchal narrative frameworks. Julie loses her ability to find a stable source of agency, which leads to psychological dissolution.

The last suicide scene makes this internalisation even stronger because Julie wants someone else to give her permission to die. Her repeated demand for Jean to command her illustrates the paradox of patriarchal subject formation, wherein female agency is comprehensible solely through male authority. This dynamic illustrates that Julie's tragedy is not solely personal but structural, highlighting how patriarchal systems generate individuals who cannot achieve autonomous resolution without male validation.

3.4 Shifts in Dramatic Power and the Illusion of Control

The dramatic structure of Miss Julie is based on constant changes in who is in charge, which makes it seem like power relations are always changing. Feminist analysis shows, though, that these changes are limited by structural patriarchy, which always reasserts male authority when things are unstable. Jean's change from servant to dominant speaker is not just a change in social status; it is also a change in her beliefs within a gendered hierarchy of knowledge and interpretation.

This is especially clear in how Jean changes the meaning of the story after the sexual encounter. He reinterprets Julie's actions as a lack of moral strength, turning closeness into proof of female instability. This kind of discursive control shows that feminists are worried about narrative authority in general, where men still have the power to define and interpret women's experiences (Moi, 2008).

Julie’s momentary display of dominance, particularly in her fantasies of vengeance and destruction, fails to convert into structural power. Instead, these moments serve as what feminist theorists term compensatory agency, wherein emotional or symbolic assertion supplants material control. Jean's ultimate dominance, bolstered by his recognition of the Count's authority, illustrates that supreme power is entrenched in patriarchal and class-based frameworks rather than in individual interactions.

3.5 Conclusion: Gendered Power as a System of Structure and Mind

In Miss Julie, gender and power function concurrently at structural, interpersonal, and psychological dimensions. Sexual politics serves as a platform for negotiation while ultimately fortifying masculine interpretive authority. Class intersectionality exacerbates gender inequality by revealing the vulnerability of aristocratic femininity amid evolving economic frameworks. Psychological internalization perpetuates patriarchal power within the individual's cognition, resulting in self-destruction rather than external resistance.

Modern feminist theory shows that these dynamics are not limited to Strindberg's naturalist context but are still important for looking at gendered power relations in a wider way. Consequently, the play serves as both a historical artefact and a theoretical framework for comprehending the functioning of patriarchy through the interplay of sexuality, class, and psychological control.

4. FEMINIST REALITIES IN NIGERIA: PATRIARCHY, AGENCY, AND STRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS

4.1 Patriarchy, Traditional Authority, and Gendered Social Norms

Gender relations in Nigeria are influenced by a multifaceted interplay of customary law, religious authority, colonial legal legacy, and modern state governance. Feminist scholars assert that these intersecting systems create a multifaceted patriarchy wherein women's autonomy is governed by both formal and informal institutions (Nnaemeka, 2005; Amadiume, 2015). In this framework, gender transcends mere personal identity; it is a socially imposed category integrated into kinship networks, inheritance customs, and matrimonial arrangements.

From a comparative feminist standpoint, this structural positioning parallels Strindberg’s Miss Julie, wherein female identity is similarly governed by unseen yet potent patriarchal systems. In Miss Julie, the Count acts as an all-powerful figure whose absence makes control stronger. This is similar to how religious and cultural norms in Nigeria work as rules even when they aren't directly visible. In both situations, women act the way they do because they think about how others will judge them, not because they are being punished right away.

Entrenched patriarchal norms in South Sudan often view women as community property, with practices such as bride wealth and widow inheritance reducing women’s autonomy and enabling men to maintain social and

economic control. Women in South Sudan are not only depicted as victims; they also actively work towards peace at the grassroots level, engaging in local peace agreements and intervening to stop cattle raids, despite the high risks and gender-based discrimination they face

Impact of Patriarchal Norms and Practices

Bride Wealth (Dowry) Commodification: Bride price is frequently seen as a "token of appreciation" but often evolves into an economic transaction that commodifies women, treating them as property to be managed by in-laws. High bride prices can force young men into cattle raiding, driving conflict. Mark A. W. Deng **(**2021). A prominent legal scholar whose work, such as " Bride Price in the Patriarchal South Sudanese Society: A Legal perspective," argues that bride price objectifies and commodifies women, lowering their status and violating their constitutional rights to freedom of marital choice. Like wise Jok Madut (2001). An anthropologist and professor who has extensively explored how conflict, displacement, and the cattle-based economy have altered the institution of bride wealth. His work examines how women are increasingly viewed as family resources and "sources of income".

Widow Inheritance and Social Control: Widow inheritance in South Sudan is a deeply entrenched patriarchal practice used to control a woman's reproductive and productive labor within her deceased husband's family. While historically framed as a protective mechanism for widows and children, it now serves as a significant barrier to autonomy and a driver for the spread of HIV/AIDS. (Mark, A. W. Deng , 2021) and Hutchinson, (2023)

In Nigerian social contexts, women's sexuality and marital decisions are frequently governed by communal norms, especially in kinship-based systems where family honour is associated with female conduct. This creates what modern African feminist theory calls relational autonomy, where agency is always negotiated within group expectations instead of personal freedom (Oyěwùmí, 2016). This dynamic is similar to Julie's situation in Act 1 of Strindberg's play, where she tries to be sexually and socially independent, but the rules of aristocracy that define what is acceptable for women already limit her.

4.2 Education, Economic Autonomy, and Structural Inconsistencies

Nigeria today shows a lot of progress in women's education and economic participation, especially in cities. Feminist development studies emphasise that women are progressively assuming positions in academia, entrepreneurship, politics, and professional domains (Ogunyemi, 2018). This heightened visibility does not inherently result in structural equality, as patriarchal norms persist in governing access to leadership and decision-making authority.

This contradiction between visibility and structural constraint can be effectively analysed in conjunction with Miss Julie's aristocratic status. Julie has symbolic power, but she doesn't have any control over the structure of her social environment. In the same way, educated Nigerian women may be able to support themselves financially, but they are still held back by sexism in the workplace and cultural expectations of being responsible for the home.

A particularly relevant dramatic parallel can be found in Strindberg's Act 2, in which Julie tries to take control of Jean again by using her class identity and commanding tone. Jean's response weakens this authority by changing the way she sees her actions from having legitimate power to being emotionally unstable. This reflects current Nigerian contexts where women's professional authority is frequently undermined by gendered interpretations of emotion, morality, or cultural suitability.

Intersectional feminist theory elucidates this tension by positing that empowerment is not a linear process; rather, it is shaped by intersecting systems of inequality, including gender, class, and institutional access (Crenshaw, 2016). Consequently, the educational advancement of Nigerian women occurs concurrently with enduring structural constraints, akin to Julie's failure to translate symbolic privilege into enduring agency.

4.3 Gendered Violence, Domestic Authority, and Institutional Normalisation

Gendered violence in Nigeria functions as both an interpersonal occurrence and a structurally normalised system bolstered by cultural, legal, and social frameworks. Contemporary African feminist scholarship elucidates that domestic violence is frequently entrenched in normative expectations of male dominance and female subservience, complicating the distinction between private harm and public ideology (Olanrewaju & Awogbayila, 2022; Ogunlade et al., 2023). In Miss Julie, the dynamic between Julie and Jean exemplifies how intimacy transforms into a locus of domination instead of equality. Even though the relationship seems to be consensual, there is an imbalance of power in class and gender hierarchies. Jean's capacity to reframe Julie's desire as weakness exemplifies a form of symbolic violence that corresponds with Bourdieu's notion of masculine domination as culturally sanctioned power rather than mere physical coercion (Bourdieu, 2001).

In Act 2 of Strindberg's play, a very important dramatic moment happens when Jean tells Julie what to do and then makes it seem like she can't escape because the Count has power over her. This verbal control is like how patriarchal systems often use outside forces like family honour, religion, or tradition to justify their power over others. Julie's inability to resist Jean's narrative control

illustrates how violence can function through psychological manipulation rather than physical force.

Feminist scholars, including Gill and Orgad (2018), contend that modern gendered power frequently functions through affective regulation, wherein women internalise societal expectations regarding behaviour and responsibility. This theoretical perspective enables an interpretation of Nigerian gendered violence not merely as physical harm but also as ideological conditioning that influences subjectivity.

4.4 Comparative Feminist Link to Miss Julie: Sanction, Stigma, and Societal Control

Miss Julie's trajectory serves as a comparative framework for comprehending the social discipline of women who violate gender norms. In Strindberg's Act 3, Julie's mental breakdown reaches its peak when she asks Jean to order her death. This moment symbolically restores patriarchal order by giving control back to male authority. This narrative resolution exemplifies what feminist narratology terms containment, wherein female transgression is ultimately mitigated through punishment or self-destruction (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000).

In Nigeria, women who go against patriarchal norms may also face social control in the form of stigma, exclusion, damage to their reputation, or their families not supporting them. The outcomes may not be identical to Julie's psychological demise, yet the fundamental rationale of containment persists as structurally analogous. Women's autonomy is frequently perceived as a threat to social order, especially when it contests conventional norms regarding marriage, sexuality, or leadership.

But it is important not to make things too simple. Nigerian women, unlike Julie, are also part of active networks of resistance, such as feminist groups, digital activism, and movements for legal reform. African feminist theorists assert that agency in these contexts is neither absent nor singular, but rather distributed and relational, frequently manifested through collective rather than individual action (Mama, 2011; Nnaemeka, 2005).

This distinction is important because it shows a flaw in Strindberg's naturalist framework. Miss Julie depicts female agency as ultimately self-destructive, whereas Nigerian feminist contexts illustrate that agency can endure despite structural limitations. This distinction emphasises the necessity of situating literary analysis within socio-historical specificity.

4.5 Conclusion: Structural Parallels and Contextual Divergence

When compared to Miss Julie, feminist realities in Nigeria show both structural similarities and important differences. In both scenarios, gender is governed by overlapping systems of authority that influence behaviour, desire, and identity. Patriarchy functions not solely through explicit domination but also via internalised norms that delineate acceptable femininity.

Nonetheless, Nigerian feminist contexts exhibit manifestations of resistance and the reconfiguration of gender roles that transcend the deterministic framework of Strindberg's naturalism. Although Miss Julie concludes with psychological and narrative confinement, the experiences of Nigerian women demonstrate that gendered power is perpetually contested rather than definitively resolved.

This comparative framework thus underscores the significance of Miss Julie as a theoretical lens while simultaneously elucidating its constraints. It does not serve as a universal representation of female experience; rather, it is a literary expression of patriarchal logic that requires critical reinterpretation through postcolonial and African feminist lenses.

5. Feminist Realities in South Sudan: Conflict, Tradition, and Limited Agency

5.1 Conflict, Displacement, and Gendered Susceptibility

In South Sudan, enduring civil conflict, displacement, and tenuous state formation significantly influence gender relations. Feminist conflict scholarship illustrates that war does not impact men and women uniformly; rather, it exacerbates existing gender hierarchies by heightening women's vulnerability to economic instability, sexual violence, and caregiving responsibilities (Hutchinson, 2011; El Bushra & Sahl, 2005). Women often take on more responsibilities for survival, such as providing food, caring for children, and keeping the community going, while at the same time having less access to political power and physical safety.

From a feminist theoretical standpoint, this condition exemplifies what contemporary scholarship refers to as gendered survival labour, wherein women's agency is manifested within contexts of structural constraint rather than formal empowerment (Ginty, 2017). This agency is genuine, yet it is influenced by necessity rather than volition, rendering it fundamentally distinct from liberal concepts of autonomy.

A helpful comparison can be made with Strindberg's Miss Julie, especially Act 2, where Julie's mental and social weakness becomes more and more clear after she breaks the rules of her class and sexual orientation. Julie, like South Sudanese women, has to find a way to survive in a world where aristocratic authority is falling apart. Nonetheless, whereas South Sudanese women employ collective survival strategies, Julie's experience is singular and individualised, illustrating the constraints of European naturalist individualism.

5.2 The Price of a Bride, Traditional Authority, and Gender Inequality in Society

One of the most controversial parts of South Sudanese gender relations is the practice of bride price, which still affects marriage, family, and trade.

Anthropological and feminist scholarship warns against oversimplified interpretations of bride price, highlighting its role within intricate systems of reciprocity and social organisation (Leonardi, 2013). Nonetheless, it recognises that in numerous modern contexts, bride price can perpetuate patriarchal dominance by situating women within transactional paradigms that constrain autonomy.

Feminist theorists contend that when women are symbolically or materially regarded as interchangeable within kinship economies, their social agency is filtered through male relatives and marital frameworks (Connell, 2009; Mama, 2011). In South Sudan, this dynamic is exacerbated by economic instability, wherein bride wealth may acquire increased material significance, thereby perpetuating gender asymmetries.

This structural logic resonates with Miss Julie, especially in Act 1, where Julie's aristocratic identity is defined by inherited value rather than personal agency. Jean's words often put Julie in a position of exchange and possession, especially when he says that she has put herself below him by having sex with someone else. This change in discourse is similar to how bride price systems work, where a woman's identity is determined by how much she is worth in economic and symbolic terms, not by her own choices.

In both scenarios, women are not merely individuals; they are integral components within exchange systems that govern their autonomy through cultural and economic frameworks.

5.3 Women's Agency, Peacebuilding, and Negotiated Authority

Even with these structural limitations, South Sudanese women exhibit considerable agency, especially in peacebuilding, community organisation, and informal governance. Feminist peace studies underscore that women in conflict zones frequently establish alternative political spaces that contest formal exclusion from state structures (Puechguirbal, 2010; Tripp, 2015). These types of agency are not always clear in official political stories, but they are very important for social survival and keeping conflicts from getting worse.

Women's groups in South Sudan have been important in settling local disputes, keeping communities together, and pushing for peace agreements. African feminist scholarship refers to this as 'relational agency', where power is shared among many people instead of just one and is built into networks of care and survival (Mama, 2011; Ginty, 2017).

In contrast to Miss Julie, this collective aspect of agency underscores a notable deficiency in Strindberg's portrayal of female subjectivity. Julie’s agency is highly individualised and ultimately disintegrates into psychological fragmentation. In contrast, the agency of South Sudanese women is disseminated and perpetuated via social networks, indicating a more robust form of feminist resistance that does not result in self-destruction.

Nonetheless, a significant comparison can still be conducted. In Act 3 of Miss Julie, Julie's last request for Jean to order her death shows how deeply she has internalised patriarchal authority to the point where she can't understand her own power without a man's approval. In South Sudanese contexts, women's agency frequently functions within patriarchal frameworks that restrict its acknowledgement within formal political systems. This does not suggest equivalence but rather uncovers structural similarities in the regulation of female agency by patriarchal authority.

5.4 Limited Agency and Feminist Analysis of Miss Julie

The idea of constrained agency is important for understanding both Miss Julie and the lives of feminists in South Sudan. Feminist theorists contend that agency should not be perceived as unqualified freedom but rather as action constrained by structural limitations (Butler, 2004; Mahmood, 2005). In this regard, both Julie and South Sudanese women exert agency within frameworks that delineate the limits of acceptable conduct.

In Miss Julie, Julie's effort to assert her independence through sexual and social transgression seems to be a rejection of aristocratic norms at first. But in patriarchal discourse, this act is quickly seen as a moral failure, which causes her mental breakdown. Jean's linguistic control over the meaning of her actions illustrates how patriarchal systems govern not only behaviour but also interpretation itself.

In South Sudan, women's actions may be acknowledged as socially valuable in local contexts, yet they are systematically restricted by national and legal frameworks that hinder political representation and economic equality. Feminist scholarship underscores that these contradictions are emblematic of post-conflict societies, wherein formal equality and experiential inequality coexist (Tripp, 2015).

The comparison demonstrates that constrained agency functions variably across contexts yet is uniformly influenced by the interplay of gendered norms, economic frameworks, and symbolic authority.

5.5 Conclusion: Gender, Conflict, and Structural Continuities

Feminist realities in South Sudan illustrate that gender must be perceived as a dynamic construct influenced by conflict, tradition, and survival economies. Women face many obstacles, but they also find ways to work together that go against patriarchal exclusion. These realities complicate simplistic narratives of victimhood by emphasising resilience amid structural constraints.

When compared to Miss Julie, the gender dynamics in South Sudan show both similarities and differences. In both situations, female agency is often controlled by systems that set the limits of what is acceptable and what is not. Strindberg's tragic individualism stands in stark

contrast to the collective and relational forms of agency evident in South Sudanese feminist practice.

This comparison ultimately underscores the significance of intersectional and postcolonial feminist frameworks in literary analysis. It shows that Miss Julie is a good way to understand patriarchal logic, but it needs to be reinterpreted critically through African feminist epistemologies to keep European stories of women's failure from becoming universal.

6. A COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION OF STRINDBERG IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

6.1 Power that is fluid but not equal and the false idea of negotiated agency

When read alongside feminist realities in Nigeria and South Sudan, one of the most important similarities is how gendered power relations seem to change all the time. In Strindberg's drama and African socio-political contexts, power is not fixed; it is in constant flux through interaction, negotiation, and contextual authority. Feminist theory elucidates that fluidity must not be conflated with equality. Power can be negotiated, yet it persists as structurally asymmetrical, influenced by persistent systems of patriarchy and socioeconomic hierarchy (Connell, 2009; Fraser, 2013).

In Miss Julie, the most obvious example of this fluidity is how Julie and Jean switch who is in charge. In Act 2, Julie initially asserts aristocratic authority through commanding speech and emotional volatility; however, Jean gradually reclaims interpretive control by reframing Julie's behaviour as weakness and moral instability. This change shows that even when power seems to be changing at the interactional level, the structural gender hierarchy makes sure that final interpretive authority stays masculine. Feminist discourse analysis underscores that these interactions demonstrate not equality of agency but an asymmetry in the ability to construct meaning (Moi, 2008).

In Nigeria and South Sudan, gender relations often seem to be negotiable in the home, in cultural settings, or in the economy. Nevertheless, feminist scholarship illustrates that such negotiations transpire within patriarchal structures that constrain female autonomy (Mama, 2011; Nnaemeka, 2005). Fluidity functions within limitation rather than emancipation, perpetuating the structural persistence of gendered inequality.

6.2 Social Punishment, Narrative Closure, and the Control of Women's Wrongdoing

A second important similarity between Miss Julie and the lives of African feminists is how society controls women who don't follow traditional gender roles. In Strindberg's play, Julie's psychological and physical destruction serves as a narrative containment mechanism that reinstates patriarchal order. In Act 3, her final breakdown into suicidal submission represents the restoration of male authority, especially through her reliance on Jean to sanction her death. Feminist narratology views these conclusions as ideological instruments that regulate female transgression via punishment or eradication (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000).

In numerous African feminist contexts, such as Nigeria and South Sudan, transgressive femininity is frequently confronted not with literal destruction but with various forms of social sanction, including stigma, reputational harm, exclusion from kinship networks, or limited marital opportunities. Feminist sociologists refer to these mechanisms as symbolic punishment, where social discipline is maintained through community recognition and withdrawal instead of formal violence (Olanrewaju & Awogbayila, 2022; Tripp, 2015).

The similarity with Miss Julie is more about structure than about words. Julie's death is not just a personal tragedy; it is also a dramatisation of how patriarchal systems reassert control when women go beyond their limits. Nonetheless, a significant divergence must be acknowledged. African feminist scholarship underscores that women's resistance frequently endures despite sanctions, notably via collective organisation, informal economies, and political activism (Mama, 2011). Strindberg's naturalist framework, conversely, precludes the potential for enduring resistance, resulting in a deterministic narrative of female failure.

6.3 The Intersectionality of Class, Culture, and Gender as a Structural Formation

A third point of convergence between Strindberg's drama and African feminist realities is the intersection of class, culture, and gender as interdependent structures of inequality. Crenshaw (2016) developed intersectionality theory, which says that social categories don't work alone but instead work together to create complicated systems of oppression.

In Miss Julie, class serves as a fundamental axis of identity that intersects with gender to establish power dynamics. Julie's aristocratic status puts her above Jean at first, but this power is not stable because it is inherited rather than earned through work or social negotiation. Jean's masculinity, on the other hand, is linked to ambition, rationality, and social mobility, which lets him take on both class and gender roles.

In African settings like Nigeria and South Sudan, gender is similarly influenced by intersecting systems, including economic disparity, cultural conventions, and institutional frameworks. Feminist scholars, however, warn that these intersections must be comprehended within postcolonial narratives that have restructured indigenous gender systems through colonial administration and legal reform (Oyěwùmí, 2016; Lugones, 2010). This marks a significant departure from Strindberg's European context, where class functions amid aristocratic decline rather than colonial reorganisation.

So, while Miss Julie is a good way to think about

intersectional instability, African feminist contexts show that colonial history, communal kinship systems, and the current fragility of the state make intersectionality even more complicated.

6.4 Colonial Distinction, Epistemic Constraint, and Theoretical Recontextualisation

Notwithstanding the constructive parallels delineated above, it is imperative to acknowledge the epistemological constraints inherent in utilising Miss Julie as a comparative framework for African feminist contexts. Postcolonial feminist theory cautions against the application of European literary paradigms as explanatory frameworks for non-Western contexts (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 2010). Strindberg's naturalism is founded on 19th-century European concerns regarding aristocratic decline, heredity, and individual psychology, rather than on collective social transformation or colonial governance.

African feminist scholarship underscores that gender systems in Nigeria and South Sudan are influenced not solely by patriarchy but also by colonial intervention, communal relationality, and current political instability (Mama, 2011; Nnaemeka, 2005). These dimensions yield manifestations of gendered experience that elude complete encapsulation within Strindberg’s deterministic paradigm.

For instance, Julie's isolation is a key part of her tragedy, while African feminist contexts often focus on relational subjectivity, which is when identity is made through family, community, and group survival. This difference shows a major epistemological flaw in Miss Julie: it can't explain how people can work together to resist and act.

6.5 Conclusion: The Comparative Value and Critical Limitations of Miss Julie

The comparative analysis of Miss Julie in conjunction with Nigerian and South Sudanese feminist contexts uncovers both structural similarities and epistemological disparities. The play depicts persistent dynamics of patriarchal control, encompassing fluid yet inequitable power relations, the sanctioning of transgressive women, and the convergence of gender with class-based hierarchies. Conversely, African feminist contexts present essential aspects including colonial history, collective agency, and socio-political instability that surpass Strindberg’s naturalistic perspective. Consequently, Miss Julie ought not to be regarded as a universal exemplar of gendered experience but rather as a historically particular expression of patriarchal logic that acquires comparative significance solely when re-examined through intersectional and postcolonial feminist lenses. This method makes sure that literary analysis stays both critical and based on the right context.

7. CONSTRAINTS OF THE MISS JULIE FRAMEWORK

7.1 Eurocentrism and the Historical Particularity of Naturalism

Even though Miss Julie is a useful way to look at gendered power relations, its Eurocentric roots make it hard to use in African settings. The play is situated within nineteenth-century European naturalism, a literary tradition influenced by the decline of aristocracy, hereditary determinism, and bourgeois social anxiety, rather than colonial encounters or postcolonial restructuring (Zola, 1880; Strindberg, 1888). Consequently, its understanding of power is predominantly limited to a class-based hierarchy within a European feudal remnant system.

Postcolonial feminist theory cautions against the unexamined application of European literary paradigms to African socio-historical contexts. Mohanty (2003) contends that Western feminist and literary discourses frequently generalise European experiences, thereby masking the distinctiveness of non-Western gender constructs. In this regard, Miss Julie may become an interpretive framework that insufficiently addresses the historical and political intricacies of African societies, including Nigeria and South Sudan.

Moreover, African feminist scholarship underscores that gender systems within African contexts are profoundly influenced by colonial intervention, legal reconfiguration, and indigenous epistemologies that resist reduction to European class-based frameworks (Oyěwùmí, 2016; Mama, 2011). Consequently, although Miss Julie elucidates patriarchal dynamics, it fails to comprehensively represent the historical complexity of gender formation in postcolonial Africa.

7.2 Individual Psychology versus Social Formation as a Whole

Another limitation of Miss Julie is its methodological emphasis on individual psychological disintegration as the principal locus of meaning. Strindberg's naturalist method creates social conflict by focusing on the inner lives of his characters, especially Julie's emotional instability and Jean's psychological ambition. This exemplifies a wider European literary tradition wherein subjectivity is individualised and sequestered.

African feminist scholarship underscores that subject formation is frequently relational and collective rather than individualised (Mama, 2011; Nnaemeka, 2005). In places like Nigeria and South Sudan, gender identity is shaped by family ties, community responsibilities, and social institutions that go beyond the individual's inner thoughts and feelings.

From this standpoint, Julie's isolation in the play exemplifies a culturally specific model of subjectivity that

fails to accurately represent African relational epistemologies. In Nigeria and South Sudan, women often use collective negotiation, informal economies, and communal resistance strategies to assert their power instead of going through a personal psychological crisis. Consequently, the psychological determinism in Miss Julie constrains its explanatory potential in cross-cultural applications.

7.3 No Race, Colonialism, or Global Power Structures

The most important flaw in Miss Julie is that it doesn't show any racial or colonial power dynamics. The play is focused on class and gender in its structure, but it doesn't talk about imperialism, colonial rule, or racial hierarchy. This omission is significant when contextualising the text within African settings, where gender relations are inextricably linked to colonial history and its persistent socio-political ramifications.

Postcolonial feminist theorists contend that gender is inextricably linked to race and coloniality, as these systems collaboratively generate social hierarchies (Lugones, 2010; Spivak, 2010). In Nigeria and South Sudan, gendered experiences are influenced by patriarchy, colonial legal frameworks, missionary education, and the formation of postcolonial states. These factors create complex inequalities that surpass the explanatory framework of Strindberg’s European naturalism.

For instance, Miss Julie portrays class as the principal axis of social distinction, whereas African feminist contexts illustrate that colonial histories have reshaped social stratification by intertwining ethnicity, state power, and global economic systems. This makes Strindberg's framework inadequate unless it is critically augmented by decolonial feminist theory.

7.4 The Importance of African Feminist Epistemologies

Because of these limits, Miss Julie needs to be read alongside African feminist epistemologies that focus on relationships, historical context, and resistance. Researchers like Oyěwùmí (2016) contest Western gender classifications by illustrating that precolonial Yoruba social structures did not inherently function through inflexible binary gender frameworks. Nnaemeka (2005) likewise underscores negotiation and "nego feminism" as a culturally rooted framework of agency that contrasts with Western liberal individualism.

Mama (2011) contends that African feminist research should be rooted in tangible experiences and shared political struggles instead of abstract universal theories. These frameworks serve as crucial corrective lenses that avert the erroneous application of European literary texts as universal explanatory paradigms.

Consequently, although Miss Julie is significant for examining patriarchal logic, it should be regarded as one analytical perspective among several rather than an all-encompassing framework.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Gendered Power as a Universal Yet Contextually Distinct Framework

Employing Miss Julie as a feminist analytical framework uncovers persistent global trends in the dynamics of gendered power, especially the precarious and contingent status of female agency within patriarchal structures. In Strindberg's European naturalist context and in African societies like Nigeria and South Sudan, gender is not a stable identity but a contested domain of negotiation influenced by social norms, institutional authority, and cultural expectations.

In Miss Julie, this instability is dramatised through the protagonist's psychological and social disintegration, as her efforts to transcend class and gender boundaries ultimately lead to narrative containment. In African contexts, although the repercussions of transgressive femininity vary in manifestation, women similarly traverse systems where autonomy is constrained by cultural, economic, and institutional limitations.

8.2 Value Comparison and Theoretical Boundaries

Strindberg's play provides a compelling dramatisation of patriarchal structures; however, its European historical context constrains its ability to comprehensively address postcolonial gender realities. It does not address colonial histories, racial hierarchies, or collective agency, which are fundamental to African feminist analysis. Because of this, it can only be used if it is combined with intersectional and decolonial feminist frameworks.

When integrated with African feminist theory, Miss Julie transforms into an effective comparative instrument for analysing the functioning of patriarchal systems across various cultural and historical contexts. It emphasises the common structural logics of gendered power while also demonstrating the importance of contextual specificity.

8.3 Final Synthesis

In the end, feminist readings from around the world show that even though patriarchy looks different in different times and places, the issue of women's agency is still a global one. Miss Julie does not serve as a universal explanation of gender oppression; rather, it represents a historically specific expression of patriarchal logic that acquires critical depth solely when analysed through postcolonial and African feminist lenses.

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