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Poverty and Exploitation: Iyayi's Social Realism in *Violence* and *Heroes*

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Abstract

Festus Iyayi deploys his artistic and creative idiosyncrasies to unravel social tensions such as poverty and exploitation in his native Nigeria. In addition, he identifies deteriorating aspects of Nigerian society and prescribes a panacea for class reordering. However, while interpreting his two novels *Violence* (1979) and *Heroes* (1986), some scholars overlook the upper-class echelon, exonerating them from the misery of poverty and exploitation which they inflict on the poor masses. Through the social realistic medium anchored on the Marxist theoretical framework, this study extends the frontiers of interpretation by demonstrating that poverty and exploitation are caused, sustained, and maintained by the wealthy, privileged, government, capitalist class who exploit the poor masses. The excruciating poverty in *Violence* is a direct consequence of government's failure and corruption among the upper-class. The exploitation and carnage in *Heroes* are avoidable, soul-wrenching disaster caused by the ruling military class who use poor, ignorant soldiers to advance their inordinate ambitions. In this way, Iyayi's novels serve as a symbolic, primal penetration into social fabric which uncovers the extreme dimensions of capitalism and its degrading complexion. Thus, the novelist uses the two novels to nourish his social realistic predilection proving that literature can be a source of social awakening, renaissance, and renewal.

Keywords: Poverty, exploitation, war, Marxism, Social Realism

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Introduction

The novel genre in Africa accounts for a resurgence of interest in literary criticism and diverse humanistic concerns ranging from history, politics, religion, and other social indices. Through its narrative structure and simplicity of language, the novel establishes a compelling appeal among all classes of people in society. Its modest, straightforward identity grants it a level of attractiveness as the most distinguished form in the prose fictional category. African novelists have utilized the rich potential of the genre to recreate the continent's historical, social realistic, and contemporary experience. Through the novel genre also, Africa writers have formulated their own ideological paradigm which undoubtedly has redefined a plethora of misconceptions and biases about the continent. African novels document Africa to the extent that realities like history, culture, and even the reception of modernity are well documented in them. African novels have sought to revalidate the African identity by telling the continent's stories. Thus, many people derive and base their objective interpretations of the African condition through the contents of the novels that emanate from Africa. Many scholars and critics in Europe and the Western world, depend on African novels to nourish their knowledge and understanding of the continent. Indeed, African potentialities are expressed in literature especially, through the novel.

It is therefore, inevitable that Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) would be translated into more than fifty languages of the world. Through the novel, millions of people have come to terms with the reality of Africa's undiluted history and the inevitable contact with the West which formed the continent's colonial experience. In the 19th and 20th centuries, African novelists have also dedicated the themes of their works to contemporary events which can adequately be interpreted with Western theories like Marxism and Social Realism. The novels of these periods locate the immediate concerns and challenges of the African society ranging from class conflict, survival, poverty, corruption, injustice and exploitation. The two Festus Iyayi's novels chosen for this research work *Violence* (1979) and *Heroes* (1986) directly examine the conditions which pervaded and still pervade the Nigerian society. Beyond poverty and exploitation as major social realistic elements, the two novels also focus their sub-plot searchlight on injustice and corruption. The writer, through his novels, paints a grim picture of Africa's mutative actuality. Beyond entertainment and didactic prefiguration, African novels also shape the people's consciousness for positive advancement and re-alignments.

Poverty and Exploitation

In a critical sense, one can profitably argue that poverty and exploitation are inevitable indicators of class polarity in many societies of the world. It is difficult to x-ray the level of development in any society without a close appraisal of the poverty and exploitation levels. Poverty is a consequence or corollary of exploitation given that when people are poor, they are susceptible and vulnerable to exploitation therefore, accept it as an immediate palliative for survival. Martin Sticker opines that "susceptibility to exploitation certainly is one of the reasons why poverty is bad" (2). As inexorable components of modern social structure and negative phenomena, poverty and exploitation are mostly inflicted on the unfortunate, deprived lower-class underlings by their privileged upper-class counterparts who control means of wealth and means of production. That is not to exonerate impoverished people from complicities in their unfortunate, deprived conditions in life. While poverty can be self-inflicted in many instances, the focus of this study is to examine and establish the extent to which the privileged class in the societies of the two novels contributes to the deprivations of the working class through unmitigated acts of exploitation. Given the persistent and increasing dominance of poverty and exploitation in many parts of the world, literature and creative writers have conscientiously sought to depict the dire veracity of the two vices. Also, their debilitating effects on a sizeable percentage of global population have not been spared of the writers' critical enquiry. In Africa especially, many writers have engaged their audience with incidents of spiralling poverty and exploitation given that the continent has experienced brutal colonialism with imperial overlords plundering the homeland, leaving the people poor, exploited, and wretched. After independence, the new African elite that emerged from the crucible of colonial exploitation advanced in greed and avarice. With the collaboration of Western accomplices, the emergent new class fleeced the motherland, plunging the continent further into the abys of excruciating poverty and penury. Thus, immediately after independence, a new wealthy class existed side by side with a new underprivileged, over-taxed, miserable class.

In Nigeria especially, following the lowering of the British Union Jack and the hoisting of the Nigerian national flag which marked independence and self-rule for the country, the emergent indigenous political class raised poverty and exploitation to the status of statecraft. The consequent social contradictions, corruption in the corridors of power and disharmonious relationship among the different ethnicities in the country culminated in vicious change of government through coups and counter

coups which in turn led to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war that lasted for three gruelling years. At the end of the war, class contradictions that began from independence heightened in intensity with glaring and pronounced material differentiations. Millions of Nigerians who survived the war were consigned to peonage and penury while a few privileged people not affected by the war gloried in new found economic opportunism. While the upper-class flourished in opulence, the lower-class was vanquished by need and a craving for daily survival. The existence of privileged and non-privileged class enthroned social stratification so that two classes of people exist in Nigeria. These became the preoccupation of many creative writers in the country. In analysing their works, critics apply the Marxist theory and emblematize such works with prevailing scenes of deprivation, exploitation, and poverty.

The two novels used in this paper *Violence* (1979) and *Heroes* (1986) capture different periods in Nigeria's socio-political evolution. In *Violence*, through a social realistic prism, Iyayi lays the social conditions of Nigeria bare and reveals how the bourgeois, made up of government functionaries and contractors, through corruption and negligence, are implicated in the misery and anguish of the ordinary people. He uses Idemudia's character to demonstrate how poverty and exploitation can lacerate the lives of some people. Eziafa and Nworah observe that "the men in *Violence* are denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting jobs so as to fend for themselves and their families, they are therefore unable to also afford medical attention" (50). Thus, social deprivation orchestrated by members of the upper-class is at the root of the ideological foregrounding of the novel. In *Heroes*, Iyayi appropriates history to revisit the internecine and mindless carnage of the Nigeria civil war, exposing through gripping narrative, how senior military officers exploited the poor, naïve junior soldiers while plunging the country into an avoidable human wastage. Chreachain argues that:

> the task which Iyayi explicitly sets in *Heroes* obviously has much in common with that of the radical historian: to expose the ideological bias of bourgeois historiography and, by adopting the perspective of the exploited majority, by rewriting history "from below" to reveal the class interests that are the motive force of history (49).

Stratification is an inevitable reality of human existence. Thus, every society is invariably divided into various groups of materiality, persuasion, creed, culture, religion, and different peculiarities. According to Gerhard E. Lenski "stratification arises basically out of the needs of societies, not out of the needs or desires of individuals"

(43). From the foregoing Lenski's observations, every society intricately structures itself for its benefit of which man is a part. It follows that social stratification primarily favours a society. Subjecting this view to more critical inquest reveals that man is a major component of any society, thus when the circumstances and conditions of man are favourable, society operates in harmony and vice versa. Furthermore, social stratification becomes inconsequential if it inhibits the growth and wellbeing of man. Stratification is primordially situated in nature which provides a model for originality, perfection, tranquillity, and quintessence. In nature, there are grades and further gradations in which case everything has its place, size, domain, abilities, and habituation. The supremacy of nature in the hierarchy of perfection is echoed by British poet Alexander Pope in his *An Essay on Criticism*:

> First follow Nature, and your judgement frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same;
> Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
> One clear, unchanged, universal light,
> Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,
> At once the source, and end and test of Art (68-73)

Pope's observations about nature underscore its elevation to the pinnacle of flawless excellence. However, in all the perfect trappings of nature, there still abounds stratification which categorizes all the elements that inhabit it into different groups. In that natural division, some elements dominate others and in fact, derive their sustenance from members of the same natural ecosystem. The same applies to human society where people of different persuasions are inevitably demarcated along the lines of material possession, age, gender, and various classifications. Class structure therefore becomes an inexorable component of every social reality. However, Erik Olin Wright observes that "the Marxist concept of class is rooted in a polarized notion of antagonistic class relations: slave masters exploit slaves, lords exploit serfs, and capitalists exploit workers" (xxvii). By pointing out the Marxist class sensibilities, Wright reminds us that social stratification is presaged by exploitation and mutual but skewed dependencies of social actors. The Marxist notion of class relation is represented in different genres of literature across the world. Therefore, social stratification and class concerns have both become dominant in most academic conversations and intellectual engagements. Literature and the liberal art have not been spared of these social stratification and class concerns. There is no society in any part of the world that is not challenged by class issues in their multiple, overlapping

alignments such as class formation, class struggle, class structure, and class consciousness. In some societies, the class differences or categories are more pronounced than in other societies. This has led to continuous class conflicts between those who control the means of production, the bourgeoisie and those who only survive by selling their labour and earning wages, the proletariat.

Originally, every society was sharply divided into two different classes - the bourgeois and proletariat but from the 18th century up till the 21st century, different classes of people have emerged so that there are sub-categories of the bourgeois and proletariat. Literature as an instrument of social analysis and conscientization has always been at the forefront of social scrutiny, therefore, has taken a radical position in the ongoing class parallels. Accordingly, Marx and Engel outline the nature, causes, and consequences of these class relations in their radical pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*. The book was originally published in 1872 but has been republished over the time the latest being in 2021. Accordingly, they submit that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another" (79). Commenting on Marx's class theoretical framework, Vivek Chibber remarks that "Marx's arguments directly or indirectly shaped much of the debate on modern political dynamics" (1). Beyond politics, Marxist ideas have defined the theoretical structure of many literary texts including the two texts chosen for this study. Class struggle in every society of the world has remained unchanged despite various mechanisms of resistance such as revolution and guerrilla warfare.

Marxist Standpoint

This study relies on Marxism, a theoretical framework propounded by German philosopher Karl Marx, which seeks to identify various forms of class contradictions in society, expose the causes, awaken the exploited and deprived masses of their miserable conditions urging them to revolt and achieve an egalitarian social order. The Marxist postulation identifies two contrasting classes of people in every modern society – the bourgeois and proletariat. The bourgeois are the capitalist class who own properties and control every means of production. They employ labour and pay wages to those who work for them. On the other hand, the proletariats are the lower members of the society who do not own properties but depend on their labour power for survival. According to Marx, at the heart of this kind of pervasive social stratification is exploitation because the bourgeois continually exploit the proletariat

who, having no choice or available alternatives, succumb to exploitation. As a panacea to this kind of unequal social structure, Marx recommends revolution as a means of overthrowing the bourgeois exploitative, capitalist superstructure to attain a classless society where everyone will be equal. Marxism maintains that the worker is ravaged and his body plundered through daily toiling which is a compulsory condition for his survival. However, Terry Eagleton posits that "the goal of Marxism is to restore to the body its plundered powers but only with the supersession of private property will the senses be able to come into their own" (201). If Marxism is against the supersession of private properties which is the cornerstone of capitalism, it follows that the theory favours communism which aligns with the equitable distribution of properties among all the classes in a society.

Marxism has come under serious critical hammer owing to its prescription of communism which, according to some critics, promotes social stagnation and tolerates no opposition, stifling individual potential. However, neo-Marxists, that is, critics with new ideas about Marxism, have identified the existence of other classes beside the bourgeois and proletariat which Marx initially failed to identify in his theoretical postulations. For example, the neo-Marxists have identified the existence of a lower class below the proletariat, the down-trodden, those who live a miserable life and do not even have any jobs to do. The neo-Marxists also preach the reordering of social structures to erase all forms of exploitation and close all channels of social inhibitions such as corruption and self-enrichment by the ruling class. Iyayi's two novels are seen more as a mirror for every person who plays a part in society one way or another to reflect on the different roles they play in enthroning social tensions, inequality, exploitation, and in many cases death. The social realistic penetration of the two novels remains timeless because after many years of their publications, the conditions addressed in them still define the Nigerian situation even on graduated levels. It is in the bid to critically analyse the novels and utilize the instrumentality of literature as a mechanism for social interrogation that this paper has become necessary. While not jettisoning the formal and artistic features of the two novels which are in abundance, the study incisively penetrates the various dimensions of social inequality, exploitation, poverty, betrayal, and death demonstrating the complicities of the bourgeois class.

The deployment of Marxism as a theoretical framework for the interpretation of literature seems to be more prevalent in the Third World and developing countries around the world. This is basically because the societies in these countries are evolving and typical of every evolving social structure, there are instances of class

contradiction in terms of material and wealth distribution. In Africa, following the attainment of independence, many African countries have been enmeshed in new politics and the fashioning of new societies. In this process, there is inevitable schism, a yawning, abysmal gap between the emergent new political, bourgeois class and the toiling masses who only depend on their labour power for relevance and survival. Accordingly, African writers have responded to these developments by directing their creative and critical energy towards social commitment and the immediate need to identify various anomalies in society. Many writers in Africa that emerged in the early 1970s and 1980s fall into this category and Festus Iyayi is arguably one of them. These writers see in the Marxist theory a veritable armament for critical social commentary and reconfiguration. Thus, we have writers in Africa referred to as Marxist writers. According to Saint Gbilekaa "in African literature today, Marxist analysis of society has been employed both in the conventional and popular theatre to release the people from the claws of exploitation and to urge them to revolt against the decadent social order that oppresses them" (1). Therefore, Marxism provides a timely peep for most writers to scrutinize and analyse the material conditions of different societies.

Dimensions of Poverty and Exploitation in *Violence*

The title of the novel *Violence* is symbolic of the violation of humanity through social structures which are sustained and maintained by members of the upper-class. The lead character Idemudia is caught in a web of excruciating poverty, abysmal living conditions, deprivation and exploitation which force him to sell his blood to provide food for his family. Abubakar Sani and Manimangai Mani argue that "in *Violence*, the working class are represented by Idemudia and others who gather at Iyaro Motor Park constantly searching for work to do to survive and fend for their families" (39). Idemudia is uneducated because his father could not afford to send him to school. Given his poor educational background, he is handicapped to secure any meaningful employment that will guarantee a decent living. As a young boy growing up in the village, he endured hardship and witnessed domestic violence from his father against his poor, helpless mother. His exposure to poverty, hardship, and unstable family structure affects him psychologically inflicting a permanent scar on his emotional wellbeing. Gradually, he began to see poverty and deprivation as a way of life. He began to see life as a war of survival. He began to see himself as belonging to the deprived group who must grovel at the door step of the privileged for survival. As a young boy in the village, he witnessed his father and uncle escape

into the bush to run away from tax collectors. The government at that time, imposed taxes on all adult male irrespective of their employment status. A government that failed to provide employment for the citizens lack the moral or civil justification to tax the same citizens. This calls to question the obnoxious tax regime that exists in most parts of Africa where jobless people are forced to pay taxes to the government. But that is the prevailing realities of society which Iyayi captures in the novel. It raises the all-important question – should jobless citizens be made to pay taxes seeing that they have no means of income? Idemudia's father didn't have money to pay his school fees because he was a poor farmer and had no extra money to train his children in school. All of these combined to injure Idemudia's mental and psychological constitution and further fuelled his survival instincts.

Pushed by poverty in the village, he migrates to Benin City in search of the proverbial golden fleece. An uneducated man in search of the golden fleece is a recipe for exploitation and the advancement of poverty. Through hard work as a labourer, Idemudia manages to secure a one-room apartment where he lives with his wife Adisa. The novel captures their poor living conditions succinctly:

> He and his wife, Adisa, were tenants in one of the low mud but zinced houses along Owode Street. Adisa, who had been sweeping the badly cemented floor, dropped the broom and stretched her hand across the table which stood against the window. The window screeched on its hinges as it went wider. Adisa bent to pick up the broom…. the broom was so short that she had to stoop substantially to sweep clean. (1).

Idemudia's living condition with his wife described above is that of extreme poverty. Without any meaningful means of income for husband and wife, they manage their miserable lives in a low, mud house. According to Cornel Ujowundu "Iyayi's photographic exposition of the horrors of deprivation through Idemudia and the other indigent characters and the apathy shown by the very rich who thrive on the deprivation is worthy of note" (308). Thus, there is a remarkable contradiction between two classes of people presented in the novel, the poor and the rich. Idemudia and his wife Adisa belong to the poor class. Due to their inability to feed and provide for their only son, they sent him back to Idemudia's mother in the village. On this day at the beginning of the novel, Idemudia complains to his wife that he is hungry and the wife replies by telling him to bring the money and food will be ready. Both husband and wife are hungry having failed to eat any food for a few days. Given that kind of condition, Idemudia is desperate and ready to do anything that would put food on the table for himself and his wife. That is a consequence of what poverty

can do in the life of a man. Poverty exposes a man to exploitation. Poverty leads a man to willingly offer himself to be degraded and exploited. Poverty stripes a man of his humanity. Idemudia finds himself in that situation and soon afterwards, he consciously submits himself to be an object of exploitation all in his bid to find material survival. Under the heavy rain of the morning, he goes out to borrow as little as one naira to provide food for himself and his wife. As he steps into the rain with heavy flood, a Mercedes Benz car loses control and runs into a flooded gutter. Exploitation beckons and Idemudia willingly submits himself. The owner of the car is a rich, bourgeois woman, Queen Obofun. She beckons on Idemudia to help her push the car out of the gutter. Under the heavy rain and flooded gutter, Idemudia is able to push the Mercedes car to safety. However, Queen, the bourgeois owner of the car fails to pay Idemudia for the work he had done. In this way, she takes undue advantage of Idemudia and exploits him. In a pretentious show of appreciation, Queen requests that Idemudia should recruit some labourers like him to help her offload three trailers filled with bags of cement. Each trailer contained five-hundred bags of cement making a total of one thousand five-hundred bags. Idemudia and his three friends, Patrick, Omoifo, and Osaro submit to Queens exploitation because they are mere labourers looking for a means to earn money, eat, and survive with their families. For the three-trailer load of cement, Queen promised to pay them the ridiculous amount of five naira each. Under the heavy rain and in empty stomach, the three men toil and labour until they finish their jobs and Queen pay them the agreed sum. But having toiled hard under the rain, Idemudia caught pneumonia and when he got home, was severely sick. Instead of using the money he earned for food for himself and his wife, they expend it on procuring medicine for his wellbeing. But due to the severity of his condition, he was eventually taken to a hospital.

Iyayi's creation of the hospital scene presents excruciating levels of poverty, deprivation and social contradictions. While many patients are cramped in one room, among them women and children – the downtrodden, poor masses, another section of the hospital is occupied by rich people where one person shares a large room with air conditioning unit. After Idemudia's treatment, he and his wife are unable to pay the hospital bill. Adisa approaches Obofun, Queen's husband, to assist them with some money for the hospital bill so Idemudia could go home. But instead of helping her out, Obofun, a corrupt government contractor takes advantage of Adisa who is helpless and vulnerable. Obofun has forced sex with Adisa and gives her one hundred naira and some cartons of whisky to start a business. However, by the time Adisa got to the hospital to pay the bills for her husband, she discovers that

Idemudia's friends had managed to pay the hospital bill. Idemudia's condition with his wife Adisa x-rays the continual exploitation of the poor by the privileged class and the poor having no alternative for survival, submit to such devastating exploitation.

In order to reinforce how the society exploits the individual and ravage him with poverty, Iyayi presents three plays at the hospital written by patients who were already discharged. The three plays are presented on a day to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the hospital. The title of the third and last play is Violence and it is from here that the novel derives its title. The three plays together chronicle how three different men, out of the need for survival, took to armed robbery robbing with violence. In the plays, Iyayi dramatically enacts how poverty can drive a man to extreme behaviour which includes but not limited to armed robbery. The plays draw positive responses from the crowd who immediately identify themselves with the content. A government official who happened to be the guest of honour to the event feels uncomfortable with the content of the play because it exposes corruption in government circles and the poverty the government inflicts on the people. After leaving the hospital, Idemudia and his friends are endlessly exploited by the corrupt Obufun and his morally bankrupt wife Queen. According to Mbanefo Ogene, "she exploited the poor labourers like Idemudia and his friends to improve on her already rich conditions" (58). In addition to exploiting Idemudia, Queen tries to lure him into sexual immorality as a way to dissuade him from embarking on a planned strike with his fellow labourers due to poor remuneration. However, Idemudia stands his ground and is able to resist Queen's sexual advances. Beside Obofun and Queen's exploitative tendencies, their marriage is based on a structure of immorality which provides a peep into the scrabbled lives of many upper-class personalities. The novel rehashes in a new key the extreme capitalist tendency of the Nigeria ruling class and the debasing, grovelling nature of the poor masses. Such social imbalance, Iyayi argues, can negate progress and advancement.

Heroes: Evidence of Poverty and Exploitation

Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* pointedly narrates the gruelling human wastage that characterized the Nigeria/Biafra civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970. In many ways, the war signposts as the most brutal and soul-wrenching civil strife in the history of Africa. The novel exposes those who, while pretending to keep Nigeria as one, invidiously pursued inordinate intentions and at the same time wasted the lives of many innocent, helpless people including ignorant, young soldiers. Edwin Onwuka buttresses the foregoing assertion by positing that "the message in *Heroes* is that

soldiers like Sergeant Kesh Kesh and Audu and Corporal Kolawole and their kind who die in combat are the true heroes that ought to be celebrated for their sacrifices not the officers who indulge themselves partying behind the war zones" (56). Told through the eyes of a journalist Iyere Osime, a political correspondent with *Daily News*, the novel condemns the civil war, revealing its futility while implicating senior army officers from both warring parties, Nigeria and Biafra. It is one of the most neutral accounts of the civil war which celebrates young, naïve soldiers from both warring parties as heroes of the war and not the generals who sat and enjoyed themselves while many people died at the war front. Initially, Osime was convinced that the Biafrans, as the rebels, were at fault in the war. He blamed them for all the atrocities of war and their insistence to have a separate country away from Nigeria. Although the Biafrans called themselves liberators, Osime did not think that they were genuine liberators. He saw them as power hungry, desperate people who were only interested in grabbing power, killing people, and satisfying the vaunting intentions of Ojukwu, the Biafran commander and Head of State. Osime believed that the Federal troops were the real liberators and wished that they will overpower the Biafrans and set everybody free. Although Osime's landlord Mr Ohiali and her daughter Ndudi, who happen to be Osime's girlfriend, were sympathetic to the Biafran cause, it didn't change Osime's stance that the Biafrans were desperate rebels interested in grabbing power by all means. However, Osime eventually realizes that the war is an extension of the brutal class dichotomy between the privileged class and the poor masses. At the heart of this dichotomy is poverty and exploitation which are ingredients that sustain the opposing class relations. Omijie and Aro collaborate this assertion by observing that "the military officers on both the Biafra and Federal sides are actually an elite group who are selfish and cannot respond or associate with the war time travails of the ordinary civilians. They are corrupt and do not care about the safety of their troops and are ready to sacrifice them for their own wellbeing" (36). The contradictory class relations and the attendant poverty and exploitation even during a war situation portray the inevitability of class war and dominance.

The first evidence of exploitation and poverty in the novel is the mindless genocide, poverty, hunger, and disease among women, children and the entire civil populace. Given the war situation, both soldiers from Biafra and Nigeria, in their bid to decimate the territory of their opponents, dropped bombs indiscriminately among the civil populace. The result is that many ordinary people were killed by soldiers from both warring parties. The Biafran soldiers accused the Nigerian soldiers of genocide, the

mindless killing of innocent people. The Nigerian soldiers accused the Biafrans of exposing the civil populace to harm and death. Thus, innocent people became the cannon fodder and scapegoats during the war while many of the soldiers enjoyed the escapade which the war provided. Also, given the social disruption of the war, movement of goods and services, the production of food items and agricultural products for feeding the populace were hampered. Thus, the civil populace, among them women and children, died of hunger and starvation. Ironically, every food item in both warring zones were mopped up and reserved for the fighting soldiers. During the war also, the soldiers forcefully seized food items from people and converted them to their use. In that case, the civil populace suffered the brunt of the tragic war situation. According to the novel: "But the maltreatment of the civilian population was not propaganda. That and the photographs of the hungry and diseased children. Those were not propaganda, they were true" (4).

Beyond the maltreatment, hunger and disease suffered by the helpless civil populace, many of them were also rendered homeless and had nowhere to go to. They became homeless each time either of the warring parties dropped bombs and other explosives on peoples' houses which not only killed people but also completely destroyed houses and homesteads. Interestingly, senior army officers were never affected by these calamities and they and their families suffered no harm. Andrew Nwagbara posits that "*Heroes* has become an evergreen prose narrative that uses the civil war motif to highlight the class struggle between the poor and the rich even in the raging flames of human suffering that the civil war endangered" (107). Although the rich army class convinced the civil populace that the war was in the interest of the general public, the people whom they claimed to protect were massacred and killed in thousands while those who postured to protect them were hardly affected. Thus, the lower members of society are exposed to harm and become a shield for the upper-class soldiers who interestingly are, to some degree protected from harm. Many soldiers also died in the war, but they were basically junior soldiers who only obeyed instructions and didn't have the luxury to ask questions or question the rationale behind the war. Osime Iyere thought that: "The war was stupid but even more stupid were the reasons given for it, the reasons that led up to it. Why couldn't people, the leaders, have been more honest with each other? Why did they have to be dishonest to cause a war?" (13).

Osime's colleague Ade tries to educate him about the futility of the war and how both the Biafran soldiers and the Nigerian soldiers are pursuing inordinate objectives. According to Ade:

> It doesn't matter whether you are talking about the Federal troops or the Biafran soldiers. There are two elephants involved in this war and all round them is the grass. The grass is the one that is taking the beating. The elephants trample on the grass most crudely, most viciously. This is not our war and all the talk about the Federal side or the Biafran side is an illusion (15).

Ade uses the elephant and grass analogy as a metaphor to describe the relationship between the upper-class soldiers and the impoverished, ordinary civil populace. Unlike Osime who believes that the Federal troops will bring sanity and restore order in the country, Ade thinks that both warring factions are murderous and pursue the same selfish, inordinate intentions. To buttress his point further, Ade narrates how his landlord, a Bini man who belongs to the Federal side, was brought out in the open and shot by the Federal soldiers because his landlord hid some civilians who were Biafrans by origin. The narrative shocked Osime who thought that the Federal troops were more humane and less barbaric. Gradually, it began to dawn on Osime that there was no major difference between the Federal troops and the Biafran troops, they were soldiers who, in the pursuit of their self-serving ambitions rode on the blood and lives of the helpless civil populace. Yet Osime still believed that the Federal troops were more genuine intentioned than their Biafran counterparts. Two major incidents however, cleared all the doubts he had about the Federal soldiers.

During the cultural day which held at the stadium, Osime went there to cover the event as a journalist. He had gone with the hope that the Federal troops would be there to guarantee safety for every one since it was a federal event. He didn't expect what happened to him as he came face to face with the unruly, uncultured, and monstrous attitude of the Federal soldiers and even police officers. On getting to the stadium, his Pass was seized by the soldiers for no justifiable reason. His efforts and insistence to collect back his Pass brought him face to face with the Federal soldiers and police officers in a disputation that almost cost him his life. It took the intervention of Salome his former girlfriend to save him from being shot outside the stadium. After the event, it dawned on him that the Federal troops were as reckless and brutal as the Biafran troops who he thought were the aggressors in the war. A critical scrutiny of the war revealed that the soldiers in both warring factions were basically the same. They were united in one accord to unleash mayhem on the civil populace. After the incident at the stadium, Osime began to have a different view of the entire war scenario and began to see both soldiers of the warring factions from the same perspective.

Another tragic event that finally convinced Osime of the brutality and insensitivity of the Federal troops which cast them in the same category as the Biafran troops occurred not long after his experience in the hands of the Federal troops at the stadium during the cultural day celebration. In response to a newspaper notice that all men of Biafran origin should report to the Army Post for formal registration, Osime encouraged his landlord Mr Ohiali to go and register. Initially, Mr Ohiali was reluctant but Osime convinced him that nothing would happen to him. In fact, Osime volunteered to drive him to the Army Post for the registration. At the Army Post, many other men who had come for the registration exercise were there. The men were interrogated and afterwards, they were separated into groups. While a group was set free and asked to report to the Army Post on a subsequent date, the other group which compromised of Osime's landlord Mr Ohiali were shot dead on the spot. When Osime's landlord was shot, Osime vomited and could not hide his disgust. With the death of his landlord, he came to realize that both Biafran soldiers and Federal soldiers were deadly disposed against ordinary citizens who had no hand in the war. Osime was convinced beyond any doubt that the ordinary people suffered more from the war in more ways than he had known. Chukwuka Ogbu underscores Osime's realization of the truth about the war. According to Ogbu "with experience, Osime screens the truth of the war from its smokescreen: In this war, bourgeois warriors, businessmen and women, permanent secretaries, bishops and politicians and other war profiteers lose nothing but gain everything" (94). The civil populace was at the receiving end of the war, suffering more while the army generals who issued all the orders were protected from the mayhem. From this point, Osime's attitude and perception of the war changed and he began to see it as a war between two different classes, the rich privileged class and the grovelling poor class.

Conclusion

The two novels provide a concise metaphor for the appreciation of class tensions in contemporary Nigerian society. While *Violence* realistically mirrors the expanding tensions of class war where the rich exploit the poor, *Heroes* scrutinizes the fate of the poor and downtrodden during any civil strife. In the first novel, poverty is a corollary of exploitation. The society inflicts poverty on individuals so that they are not able to take care of themselves or take charge of their lives. When the individual is poor, he is consequently and inevitably deprived. He lacks education and cannot secure a good employment. In that state, the individual becomes vulnerable and desperate to survive. When a man is desperate for survival, he lacks the moral

energy, willpower, and strength to resist exploitation. His sense of value is eroded because the needs of his life must be met. The upper-class in every society cannot be completely exonerated from the economic malaise suffered by members of the lower class in society. Through Osime Iyere's direct experiences, he realizes that the Nigerian civil war was more than a conflict between two warring factions but a conflict initiated by the upper-class to inflict pain, poverty, disease and death on ordinary people. At the end of the war, it was recorded that more than three million people lost their lives. Intriguingly, the two major characters in the war, Yakubu Gowon and Emeka Ojukwu lived afterwards, married new wives and had children. While Emeka Ojukwu died in 2011, Yakubu Gowon is still alive enjoying the status of an elder statesman in Nigeria. It is instructive therefore, to view social tensions critically and understand the roles played by members of the upper-class in furthering their personal objectives to the detriment of the ordinary, poor masses.

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