



Criminality and Violence as Socio-Economic Factor in Nigeria: As Portrayed in Festus Iyanyi's *Violence*

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Abstract

Violence against the woman in Africa has been taken up by the feminist writers as a major issue for a prolonged thesis in the crusade for women liberation from men. The agreement that women suffer abuses in a patriarchal society remains valid. Indeed the general assumption is that men exploit women sexually and economically. Some writers have identified that violence against the woman or any other member of the society is caused by social problems caused by class system and capitalist arrangement of the society. To this class of writers what matters is how to use ideological art to influence the socio-economic situation of the people. In this article, the researchers investigate how the socio-economic conditions of the masses lead them into violent crimes. The researcher uses Marxist Literary Criticism to explain that the capitalist oppression, subjugation, exploitation and alienation of the masses make them to violently react against their political and economic oppressors. Ultimately the researcher observes that the spite of violence and criminality in Nigeria is caused by social factors of inequality and uneven distribution of National Wealth. It is observed that the elite and capitalists commit various type of crimes to sustain themselves and to maintain their Status quo. Crime and violence killing is on the increase in Nigeria because of economic interest of the capitalists in the military, priesthood, politics, public and private enterprises. Using Marxist Literary theory the research suggest that the social gap between the poor and rich need to be closed so that there will be mutual coexistence of different classes of people in the society.

Introduction

The implications of government policy implementation failure includes unemployment, lack of growth, backwardness in global competition, constant crises, lack of social security, poor standard of living, high cost of living, unfulfilled life. Criminal tendencies among

the youths, lack of integrity and honesty among the people, lack of skill and value need among the youths, lack of self-discipline no creatively and no innovation, economy growing without generating any corresponding success and this leads to abject poverty, sickness and hardship. The critical element of policy implementation in Nigeria operates under ineffective and corrupt political

leadership. The corruption and ineptitude of the government affects the content, quality and product of government at formation stages which should be reduced so as to ensure that nobody has reason to engage in violent criminal activities like suicide bombing, kidnapping, armed robbing, prostitution, child trafficking and even suicide which are caused by socio-economic factor. In order to avoid violent revolution, the researcher suggests the need for an even distribution of National Wealth and more meaningful attention to the needs of the masses through the provision of social amenities. Accordingly, Anifowose Remi observes in his works that;

There is no single cause, which is more or less potent. In fact usually there are multiple causes and important contributing conditions rooted in historical relationship and brought to violence by a variety of catalyst...each conflict been unique. (p.5)

In *Violence*, Festus Iyayi identifies exploitation, alienation, deprivation and subjugation as social factors that lead to violence. He also expresses the fact that poverty and delinquency are major products of capitalist system, where these social factors combine to cause violence. Iyayi uses *Violence* to show the extent to which capitalists exploit everybody in the fictional society of the novel. These are physical and psychological violence in the novel. Psychological violence is a sort of mental torture, which an individual suffers as a result of oppressive economic and political systems in the society.

Exploitation of the masses is clearly illustrated in the novel. It is simply, the act of taking undue advantage of the peasants' poor situation in order to make profit. Under Marxist ideology, exploitation is defined as the act of taking advantage of the depressed condition of the masses in order to amass wealth. Through exploitation the bourgeois class denies the peasants of their legitimate social and political rights. It is a deliberate way of encouraging poverty of the proletariats.

Violence clearly shows how poverty leads to physical violence. It could be recalled that exploitation leads to poverty and poverty leads to all manner of violence. Idemudia and his wife are typical examples of poverty-ridden members of the society. They inherited poverty from their parents because economic system does not allow their parents to grow above the level of peasant farmers.

In retrospect Idemudia remembers that he dropped out of secondary school due to his father's inability to pay his school fees, this was because the father suffered absolutely from poverty, scarcity and lack of the essential things of life. His father could not pay his tax owing to poverty. This was because the rich members of the society explicated him.

Idemudia's most memorable experience of poverty and its consequence was when his father violently manhandled his mother because she asked him to go and plead for Idemudia's release from the police station at Ubiaja. It could be recalled that Idemudia's father ran away because of the tax agents and Idemudia, then a teenager, was arrested and locked up. However, poverty and fear made Idemudia's father to react violently to his wife's demand.

In one occasion, Idemudia saved his mother from collapsing to death, when she was brutally beaten by her husband: "He heard the hurry of feet, screams, harsh blows and more feet, very quickly he got into his trousers and rushed into the backyard where all noises came from". (*Violence* p. 7-8) When Idemudia saw his mother completely beaten to death by his father, he released his father's hand and exclaimed: "But I am saying it now that as long as I am alive nobody is going to kill my mother, nobody!!". (*Violence* p.8)

Idemudia's father is brutal not because he was born a violent and brutal man, but because of poverty and frustration. Idemudia blamed his father for beating his mother. He claims that he would never beat his own wife. Idemudia's decision was motivated by his ignorance that violence is not premeditated, but it is caused by

circumstances, which a capitalist system encourages. The government also promotes these factors by not closing up the gap between the poor and the rich through taxation and massive employments. Idemudia, later in life broke this vow by beating his wife, Adisa.

In the case of Idemudia's beating of his wife, poverty and hunger were the causal factors. Adisa protested against Idemudia going out because she suspected that Idemudia feeds outside, while she starves at home. She does not know that Idemudia goes out to hunt for jobs. In one occasion, she wanted to prevent him from going out, Idemudia released a perfect and violent slap on her and she creamed:

You will kill me today, you will kill me today,.... They became locked in a fierce struggle. Idemudia trying to break her grips and she trying by all means to retain it. They panted and sweated, struggled and cursed. (Violence p.14)

When eventually Idemudia discovered that Adisa has torn his trousers, he could not resist beating her violently because he has no money to get another trouser. Idemudia screamed bitterly as he released his slaps on Adisa:

You bastard, ... You fool. He raised his hand and struck her violently on the side of her face. Adisa staggered side ways.... She threw herself on the floor and screamed wildly, very slowly blood trickled down the corner of her mouth to her chin (Violence, p.14)

Poverty is not only a social problem but also a disease that oppresses the masses. When Idemudia realized that his life has been dominated by one form of violence or the other that are essentially linked, he becomes ashamed as the omniscient narrator observes:

He thought about his unfinished education, his joblessness, his hunger, his poverty, all these he found out were different forms of violence. It consisted not of physical brutal assault, but of a slow and gradual

debasement of his pride as a man. (Violence p.243)

Idemudia's consciousness of the various social factors that violently suppress the peasant's masses motivated him to actively join in the strike action against the bad treatment of the Greek contractor, Papiros Clerides, and the poor payment, which workers at the building 'site' receive from Queen Obofun. This strike later takes the form of violent revolt by poor workers in the site.

In the novel, *Violence* Idemudia and his colleagues are exploited by Queen Obofun who underpaid them for a job that worths more than the five naira, they were individually given. Queen also tried to exploit Idemudia sexually but failed owing to Idemudia's moral superiority. Adisa was exploited sexually by Chief Obofun who craftly takes advantage of Adisa's desperate search for her husband's discharge bill. Individual or group of individuals in power exploits the society and government. The medical doctors of Government Hospitals siphon drugs in the hospital's pharmacy, which are meant for treatment of the sick. He uses these drugs to stock his private chemist, 'The Everyman's Chemist' where he apparently refers his patients. Dala and Iriso, who are senior civil servants and members of the ruling class severally, exploited the masses and the government by diverting items meant for the society for their own selfish ends.

Exploitation enables the capitalists to gain surplus income with which to maintain their status quo and class integrity for themselves and their posterity. Exploitation leads to poverty and alienation of the peasant section of the society. It encourages extravagance and delinquency on the side of the Capitalist, who cannot prudently manage their resources. The corruption of the ruling class is apparently transferred to their children. This delinquency can be seen in the novel when Lilian, Chief Obofun's daughter was violently raped by her schoolmates. Delinquency also leads to violence.

The occurrence of large scale violence in the society is rooted on the basic characters of

social structure and process which determine the working pattern of that society, the activities of the ruling class determines the reaction of the working class members of the society. The corrupt activities of the ruling class lead to violent reaction of the masses. Iyayi uses the novel to empathize with the masses that have been badly manipulated. He proselytizes the masses into Marxist ideology by making them realize that violence is caused by social factors.

Another major social factor that leads to violence in the novel is alienation. Alienation of the masses occurs when an individual is separated from his activity, his own product, from his fellow men and his species. The capitalist uses unpopular and distasteful actions to separate the working class masses, completely from social amenities. The narrator observes this when he says:

Not far off were the houses which sweat already erected, the property owners lived in them already. Life there was ablaze where labour had left it's positive mark, the labour of hundreds of thousand of workers working either in the intense sunlight or in biting cold or blinding rain piling blocks higher and wiping the salt and the sweat from their eyes and their fore heads with backs of their hands and all underpaid, underfed and treated no better than slaves (Violence p.247)

The narrator sees this alienation as the greatest form of violence maintained and jealously promoted by greedy unfeeling class of exploiters, greedy money makers, conservative and reactionary public officials who in the end took all the credit for the achievement of labour just as the slave drivers took all credit for the achievement of the slaves. This is why the narrator reacts to this type of alienation by giving a vivid picture of the slum, tenement areas here the working class masses are abandoned to die without the influence of government, with regards to social amenities. Describing Idemudia's house, the author states:

He and his wife, Adisa wrer tenants in one of the low mud but zinced houses along Owode street. Owode, like its father,

Ekenwan road was always overflowed any time the rain falls. (Violence, p.1)

The peasant members of the contemporary society can better appreciate this situation. It could be recalled that in Owode Street, mud houses collapse at random; sometimes the collapsed house trapped small children thereby creating an insecurity of life and property. IYAYI shows that the peasants are used by the capitalists as 'robot' and they are at last dumped and thrown away with a meager pay that enable them and their children to continue production process. This means that man makes himself through labour under capitalist condition. He apparently destroys himself in the process because the objects of his labour (wealth) is taken away from him eventually. This same wealth is what the capitalist uses to enslave him, depriving him the subject of his objectivity and humanity. Queen, tries to alienate Idemudia from his colleagues by offering to give him promotion, sexual gratification and emolument. When the peasant masses consciously respond to the mental torture which alienation brings. It results to aggression and violence.

Violence illustrates that subjugation also causes violence in the society. Subjugation means undue political and economic oppression which are meant to subdue the masses. Violence stupendously presents the masses as victims of economic and political oppression because they do not have the courage to resist oppression. Queen shows this when she says:

"Everyman has a price", she said to herself, she would buy him over now in the future, she could do away with him, discard him as rubbish into dustbin. (Violence, p.252)

The most effective element of enslavement as IYAYI illustrates with novel are hunger and unemployment. The capitalist uses these to oppress the poor masses. Idemudia suffers psychological violence or mental torture in the novel. It could be remembered that he severally sold pint of his blood to enable him and Adisa feed. The psychological effect of this action is seen as violence.

And each time after he had sold his blood, he had returned home subdued and for reason, he could not understand, ashamed. And he never told Adisa that the money he brought home come from selling his blood at fifteen naira per pint. (Violence, p. 157)

This violence act of selling one's blood for feeding is violence because a capitalist society does not care for the welfare of the citizens.

Deprivation is another social factor, which Festus IYAYI identifies as the cause of violence in the novel. This deprivation is a deliberate act of denial or prevention of a group of individuals from using or gaining access to something that is legitimately their entitlement. Because Nigerian capitalists adhere to "Machiavellian" philosophy of putting expediency above political morality, they have perfected the use of deceit in statecraft and this accounts for their activities, which lack scruples. This act of immorality manifests in subjugation and oppression of the masses. In a capitalist society, the under-privileged is deprived of their rights as citizens. Hare and Blumberg (8) observe that problems of deprivation in capitalist state is made complex because people have a variety of needs, like hunger, thirst, sexuality, achievement, affliction, curiosity and so on. There is no way to satisfy all these, so the masses react violently if they discover that they are unduly deprived of their rights. The aim of this reaction is to moderate and modify social and political behaviour of people in the society, thereby creating a change in the existing arrangement of power structure and its consequence on the political and economic system.

Arthur Nwankwo, (7) observes that military indiscipline in Nigeria, coupled with their oppression and deprivation of the masses, through a forceful means, has given rise to corporate violence. Festus IYAYI demonstrates this type of violence in Violence, by showing the coercion caused by the masses in the hospital during the mini-drama, he further shows that there are some psychological violence owing to mental torture and deprivation. Mental torture develops due to deprivation gap between expectation and

capabilities. Moreover, expected satisfaction and actual satisfaction theory of Davis (p.6) show this clearly, by an illustration with frustration aggression theory.

The concept of "Violence" as a social factor means that the social factors enumerated above lead to violence. These social factors are caused by social political stratification of the capitalist society, which permits class distinction, abject poverty and wealth with their peculiar form of arrogance and division along the line of social class. Violence creates a clear picture of a typical capitalist society, with all these social factors that jointly work to depress the masses.

However, the defending counsel in the satiric drama in the hospital tries to summarize the view that violence is caused by social factors when he states:

In my understanding, acts of violence are committed when a man is denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and his family properly, of gaining medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly. (Violence, p. 185)

He also claims that the capitalist society encourages all forms of violence and corrupt activities, when he says that:

"It is definitely the lack of opportunities that drive people to crime, madness, prostitution and adultery" (Violence, p.184-5)

Stressing further on this point, the counsel for defence claims that the way the society is arranged both economically and politically is responsible for the cruel brutalization of the individual as he notes that:

We often do not realize that it is the society, the type of economic and hence the political system which we are operating in our country today that brutalizes the individual, rapes his manhood. (Violence, p.185)

To exonerate the poor masses who respond violently to oppression and other social factors

that negate their survival, the counsel for defence claims:

We often do not realize that when such men of poor opportunities react, they are only in a certain measure answering violence with violence (Violence, p.185)

In reaction to this social anomalies, orderliness and inequality, IYAYI uses the “defence counsel” to vouch for total revolution, which would involve every member of the oppressed class in the society:

What I would like to see however is not just a handful of men to take up arms to rob one individual. I feel and think it is necessary that the oppressed section of our community ought to take up arms to overthrow the present oppressive system. The system has already proved that it operates in violence (Violence, p.185).

IYAYI pathetically unveils the fact that violence is caused by a variety of social factors, which include violent economic and political structure of capitalist society that give undue preference to wealth, thereby encouraging vices:

When in one public hospital in the same society one patient can sleep in a large air conditional room, whereas other ordinary patients men and women and children have to sleep in corridors, on mats or had cold and roughly cemented floor or share beds, this is violence. (Violence, P.186)

He further claims that:

When in the same society whereas one man has more than enough to feed himself, his dogs, cats, children and monkeys and other men are weak and thin from hunger and their children are suffering from kwashiorkor, this is violence, ... it is violence consciously maintained and whetted and intensified by those who operate the system. (Violence, p. 186)

IYAYI carefully projects a true picture of a capitalist state which encourages exploitation and oppression of the poor masses. These factors

leads to the perpetual poverty of the working class, who wallow in abject poverty.

The fate of the proletariats could be better illustrated with the vicious circle of proletariat’s poverty below:

The novel illustrates that attempts of the working class members of the society to break this circle, leads to violence. Festus IYAYI argues that the masses should break the vicious circle of poverty by embarking on violent revolution so as to change their perpetual state of poverty. With this revolution the misplacement of values in the society would be corrected. Ngugi (28) that:

Violence in order to change an intolerable unjust order is not savagery, it purifies man, violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social over is criminal, it diminishes man.

IYAYI’s Marxist or socialist stance is shown in the way he explicates the violent demonstration in the satiric drama and the strike action of Idemudia and his friends. This is in accordance with Karl Marx’s idea that the working class members of the society have the capability of changing their harsh situation through unified effort. UNESCO’s position on violence and protest is that:

Peace cannot consist solely in the absence of armed conflict but implies principally a progress of justice and mutual respect among people A peace founded on injustice and violation of human right cannot last and leads inevitably to violence.

The solution to Nigerian social and political problems is revolution because without a change in ideology peace, unity and progress will always evade a capitalist nation. Frantz Fanon (74) believes that violence will only yield when it is confronted with a greater violence, he claims that:

Violence alone, violence committed by people, violence organized and educated by its leaders makes it possible for the masses to understand the social truth... .

The hallmark of Violence, is that violence is a response to frustrating circumstance. An average Nigerian is disgusted and dismayed when his goals and aspiration in life are thwarted by human frustrating factor. The response to this is violence. Contrary to this proposition by IYAYI, Remi Anifowose (9) remarks that:

At the moment, however, there is no evidence that the unemployed and their disadvantaged segment of the Nigeria society, regard their salvation as dependent solely upon transformation of socio-political structure of the society through collective violence.

Apparently the idea of revolution is not likely going to change the social factor which perpetuate violence Fabola and Thonvbere (5) posit that:

Where it has been the tradition of dominant class to localize the unequal and exploitative relation of production and exchange the state can hardly meet the basic need of the people.

Finally the socialist stance of IYAYI in Violence is caused by social factors enumerated above and the gulf between the “Have Nots” which widen considerably. The social inequality becomes glaring in the life style of the peasants and members of the capitalist class. Egharaevba (20) describing the contrast between the ruling class observes that:

All the foot of the hill where peacock in magnificent edifice displays here glory, were some dilapidated building inhabited by people who seem to be married to poverty.

On his own part, Patrick Fagbola (75) asserts the contrasts between the masses’ slum settlement and the wealthy members of the same society when he observes that:

The city of Lagos, like any city had a portion that was reserved for the wealthy, the powerful and important. This portion is referred to as Ikoyi.

We can observe from Violence, that human violent act are caused by a variety of social factors, which include the urge to satisfy social and economic needs. To solve these myriad social problems that lead to violence, the society should ensure that people’s need are met and institutionalized poverty are completely erased.

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