

Identifying The Colour Of Socio-Political Decadence In Iyayi's *Violence And Heroes*

Ogbeide O. Victor (ph.d)

Department of English and Literary Studies

Faculty of Arts

University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complexion of socio-political decadence in Festus Iyayi's *Violence and Heroes*. Beginning with the relationship between literature and the society it identifies corruption, deprivation, dehumanization, exploitation and moral degeneration as the sources of socio-political decadence in Iyayi's referent society. The way-out of the elite inspired decadent social and political polity the paper contends lies not only in a correct understanding of the system by the oppressed masses but in their conscientization and disalienation that will make them take up arms to overthrow the oppressive bourgeoisie and eventually usher in the much needed societal transformation.

KEY WORDS: decadence, polity, masses, bourgeoisie, corruption, conscientization.

IDENTIFYING THE COLOUR OF SOCIO-POLITICAL DECADENCE IN IYAYI'S *VIOLENCE AND HEROES*

Hippolyte Taine, unarguably the founder of the sociology of literature, categorized the novel centuries ago, as a kind of portable mirror which can be conveyed everywhere and which is most convenient for reflecting all aspects of life and nature. Art to Taine is a kind of collective expression of society, with literature embodying the spirit of the age. Perhaps in tandem with Taine, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren aver that literature is a social institution, using as its medium language which is a social creation. Literature, they say "reflects life and life is in large measure, a social reality" (1982:94). Indeed, the writer is a sensitive member of society. His fecund imagination is fired by the ideas, images and even characters from the larger society. The socio-political reality, no doubt, forms a background to his work. As Ngugi wa Thiong'O (1972:xv) writes;

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum. It is given impetus, shape and direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored.

Literature, especially the novel, not only focuses on the nature of society with its warts and all and the way the individuals express it but actually constitutes one of the most effective barometers of human responses to social forces. The writer, unlike other members of society, is compelled by his artistic calling to respond to the social circumstance. Ngugi states again;

A writer responds with his total personality

to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tension in his changing society (47).

If according to Ezekiel Mphahlele the writer is “the sensitive point in his community” (1973:15) then certainly he has no choice but to correctly reflect the social and political values in his society, for this is often, in the submission of Mutiso, “the most accurate index as to what that society is really like” (1967:3).

As a sensitive second generation African novelist, Festus Iyayi reflects in his works the nauseating socio-political post - independence reality in the Nigerian society. The vexatious social and political decadence that has become a diabolical recurring decimal in many African countries post - independence is hardly surprising to many people anywhere as the politicians who took over the reins of power from the colonialists were not really ready to salvage their own people. According to Eustace Palmer (1972:136).

Independence has propelled a new set of masters,
black this time into seats the colonial bosses used
to occupy. These new masters also acquire the same
status and symbols like the whitemen.

Moreso, they behave with the same arrogance and
condescension as the old bosses. This however,
contradicts the expectations of their countrymen.

Expectations were high at independence. The new inheritors of power at independence were looked up to by the masses; as people who would pursue with zest, the cause of building upon what the colonial masters had done, to make a viable nation. But unfortunately the new African rulers soon aborted the optimistic dreams of the masses as they saw their enviable positions as avenues to pillage the nation's wealth through corruption and inefficiency that gradually undermined their nation's resource base. It is all these that have led to a decadent socio-political polity in the society of many an African post - independence nation. This paper, therefore, sets out to explore the complexion of this socio-political decadence as reflected in Iyayi's *Violence* (1979) and *Heroes* (1986).

SOCIO-POLITICAL DECADENCE IN PERSPECTIVE.

The new International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2003), defines decadence as a process of deterioration, decay, a condition or period of decline” (331) Decadence is a process of falling away or declining from a prior state of excellence, vitality and prosperity. A decadent socio-political polity, therefore, is one that is in state of decay, ruin and disintegration. Every society is governed by a prescribed way of life otherwise known as culture. Culture is nothing but a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom, values and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Good behaviour is

crucial to the preservation of culture. Negative response to what is considered standard behaviour or culture brings about deviance. Under normal circumstances negative behaviour attracts sanctions in every society. However, when many persons in the society begin to react negatively to the generally accepted standard behaviour in the face of powerless sanctions the result is social decadence whereby the bad behaviour becomes the rule rather than the exception. The behaviour of deviants in society can bring about social decadence. So also is the introduction of strange or foreign culture into the local or home culture.

Every society is made up of leaders who take on the mantle of governance for the benefit of all in society. Good leaders are expected to be selfless or altruistic, patriotic, self-sacrificing and responsible in their role of helping to move their people to a greater tomorrow. Political decadence could rear its head, however, when leaders decide to compromise these hallowed values if either for some selfish agenda or some less noble ulterior motives that detract from the common good of the common people. Bad leaders bring about political decadence in society. A socio-politically decadent society is one that is riddled with corruption, ineptitude, exploitation, maladministration and moral degeneration. It is one that is an equivalent of an open theatre of inefficiency, selfishness and a plethora of social ills. In his recent thought provoking book aptly entitled *How Africa Underdeveloped Africa* (2010), S.C Igwe states that the present leadership in Africa has destroyed the hopes and legacies of the founding fathers of Pan-Africanism bringing to naught the masses' "belief and pride in African cultural heritage" (9) Events in Africa, he opines, have changed since independence and very unfortunately for the worse to the extent that;

Today, following from poverty occasioned by
African leadership, kleptocracy and its lack
of sheer good will towards good rulership, brain
drain which began especially in the 90s has continued
on unabatedly (10)

Collier and Gunning's finding is even more dangerously revealing;

Today, 32 countries in Africa are poorer than
they were in 1980 while sub-sahara Africa is
the lowest income region in the world (1999:13)

SOCIO-POLITICAL DECADENCE IN VIOLENCE AND HEROES.

One of the major indices of socio-political decadence is corruption. The World Bank often specifies corruption as the "abuse of public office for private gain". Proponents of this kind of definition like the Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker have even suggested the abolition of the state in order to abolish corruption. But corruption is not only found in the public sector. Vito Tanzi's definition, therefore, seems more promising;

Corruption is the intentional non-compliance
with the arms-length principle aimed at deriving
some advantage for oneself or for related individuals
from this behaviour (Quoted in Boris Begovic, 2005)

The 'arms-length' principle requires that personal or other relationships should play no part in the economic decisions that involve more than one party. It emphasizes equality for all economic agents and repudiates bias, for "if there is no bias, there is no corruption" (Igwe, 2010:107). The bias must be intentional to violate the arms-length principle because accidental violation of this same principle may not represent corruption. So also there must be some advantage for the individual who commits a violation of the arms-length principle; otherwise there is no corruption.

This act or process of becoming evil runs the whole gamut of pervasion, depravity, dishonest proceeding to bribery. Iyayi's society in the two novels which is a post-independence one is riddled with corruption which he says always starts with the people at the higher echelons of society. Osime Iyere, Iyayi's mouthpiece in *Herve's* tells us;

Always it (corruption) begins at the top and simmers
down to the bottom so much so that the messenger
becomes corrupt, the office cleaner becomes corrupt.
Always, it is a disease brought on the rest of the
people by the ruling class...They manufacture treachery,
cruelty, callousness and shamelessness and then peddle
these as commodities to the people (142).

The representatives of this cancerously corrupt elite class in *Violence* are Mr. and Mrs. Obofun, Iriso, the police force and the hospital management authority. Members of this class are portrayed as shameless progenitors and peddlers of corruption. Obofun, now a businessman and big time hotelier is portrayed as an ex-civil servant whose days in the ministry were dogged and marked by countless scandals. Obofun obtains a housing loan when he is still in the service in the Ministry of Works. He uses the loan to build houses which he later rents back to the government at a high price without paying back the loan. When the rumour that he has not repaid the loan is rife, he simply moves over to the Ministry of Land and Housing. His present business empire was set up with the 20% of all contracts he awarded on behalf of the ministry and as a way of cover up. He uses his wife's name to register all the business ventures while still in service. When he has had his fill of sharp practices, he voluntarily retires but not before he has evolved a network of 'connections' in government for the smooth running of his private business. According to the narrative there is now a reversal of role as Obofun is now the one who bribes his former colleagues in the ministry with the 20% of every contract fraudulently awarded to him. Now, he is the proud owner of Freedom Hotel, Samson and Delilah Restaurant and a chain of other businesses.

Although still in service, Iriso fraudulently engages in diverting government goods into his own private use, most especially for fun with other men's wives. Queen Obofun is portrayed as a wanton but a shrewd woman who uses her body to get whatever she wants. Winning contracts is not her problem for, as far as she is concerned "the government is made up of people and everyman in this country has a price" (24). Introduced to the

business world by her husband, Queen initially relies on his influential hand notes to secure contract. But as soon as she discovers that her beautiful body can be put to her advantage she disregards her husband's hand notes. For the milk and eggs allocated to her by the corrupt Iriso for example, she offers herself. According to Iriso;

instead of telling me exactly how much she
would pay, she came out with it and said that
there are different kinds of payment
... she invited me to help her undo the
zip of her dress... very soon I was on top
of her promising to bring all the things
she wanted for nothing (32)

The trio discussed above are like the civil servant and contractors of General Gowon years in government in Nigeria. Iyayi might even be making a direct reference because on page 214 of the narrative it is reported that Obofun's 'connections' in government are either dismissed or retired and Queen's contracts face threats of being revoked. It will be recalled that after the overthrow of General Gowon, the military head of state of Nigeria, the new regime of Major General Murtala Mohammed in a frantic effort to sanitize the civil service, decisively sacked many of the corrupt so called super-permanent secretaries. The exercise, later called "the great pruge" led to the dismissal and retirement of over 10,000 civil servants, their offences ranging from corruption to open stealing and inefficiency.

In *Heroes*, the bishops, traditional rulers and the politicians are presented as mindless collaborators with the army generals to foist a war on the hapless masses. As far as Iyayi is concerned, the Nigerian civil war which forms the central focus of *Heroes* is nothing but a profiteering investment for the bourgeoisie. Osime Iyere, Iyayi's spokesperson says;

You need to examine the idea behind a war
this war has no idea, only greed (is) behind it
The unity of this country was not threatened until
the politicians and their partners in corruption
allowed their greed to run riot (111)

In collaboration with the army generals the members of the bourgeoisie can get away with anything in order to service their insatiable lust for money and power. Their greed and rapaciousness know no bounds in a society that they have made rudderless in order to criminally massage their ego. Iyayi says:

Have money and you can hijack public
cement from government ships on the high seas
and nothing will happen. Have money and
you will be made the chairman of the boards
of government companies from which you have
previously stolen and been ceremoniously retired.
Have a gun and you have the power to destroy (40)

According to Iyayi, the civil war has nothing to do with national principles to move the Nigerian nation forward. Rather, the army generals, the bishops and the politicians have misinformed and manipulated the hapless masses into a war that has become a cash cow for the ruling elite. Indeed the war is the war of the ruling elite and their collaborators to further pauperize the masses and promote their selfish interest.

Iyayi seriously indicts the armed forces and the police for their individual corruption, inefficiency and treachery. In *Violence* for example, the image of the police has been completely battered by their incurable appetite for bribery. For members of the police force “a case is a serious case if it offers limitless opportunities for demanding and receiving bribes” (81). Even more treacherous and decadent are the antics of the officers of the army who reek of fraud and gross military indiscipline. Olu Otunshi, the commander of the Federal Army at the Asaba front in *Heroes* whose principle is that “the war cannot be won by being virtuous” (46) is notorious for his devilish scheming unbecoming of a real army commander. He sends his troops out to do battle with the same army now his business partner. Even so, Otunshi sends his troops to the battle field a few days to their pay day so that he would fraudulently claim the salaries of the victims of the war in connivance with the pay master. This kind of unholy alliance between the pay master and the army commander to defraud is rife in the society. Iyayi says it is like a web of an evil connection between the generals, the politicians, traditional rulers, the police commissioner and the permanent secretaries. No doubt, corrupt leadership constitutes one of the major planks in the evil edifice of socio-political decadence. And as observed by Confucius the Chinese philosopher century ago, if the rulers do not covet things that do not belong to them the ruled would not steal even if they are paid to do so. There is little wonder, therefore, the prevalence of social and political ills in the polity today. Ezukanma (2009) was right in his submission, “the conducts of the masses are only a reflection of those of their leaders and the vices of the people only mirror the vices of their leaders” (15).

For many army officers in *Heroes*, the civil war is nothing but an opportunity to rob openly. The method adopted is simple “capture a town and the first place you make for are the banks and blow the safes open with grenades and steal the money” (148) Indeed, Iyayi’s portrait of society is one in which the clergy are nothing but actually politicians in “cassocks” and ‘turbans’ and the philosophizing professors and traditional rulers are forever praise singers of those in government for their own selfish ends. War in this socially and politically decadent society is seen as another avenue to make profit by the elite. Iyayi tells us:

It was in the expectation of profit that the business community fanned the flames of the war, why the politicians fed canned meat to the dogs of war, why the professors rationalized the war, why the generals gave the signal for the killings. The greed for profit and power is at the bottom of this war and manifest itself everywhere in the conduct of this war (148).

DEPRIVATION AND DEHUMANIZATION

As stated earlier, Iyayi traces the socio-political *malaise* in the society to the door step of the rulership and members of the bourgeoisie who in their unbridled greed for wealth and luxury deny the common man the basic means of survival and any vestige of self-respect. This, itself is dehumanization and naked violence. According to Iyayi,

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 getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and properly

(185)

Iyayi argues that when a deprived and dehumanized individual takes to crime the blame should be heaped on the rulership that has in the first place visited violence and crime on such an individual for, in the final analysis crime is only the attendant result of deprivation. While Iyayi decries the unimaginable gulf between the wretched life of the poor in their penury and the easy life of the rich in their opulence and plenitude in *Violence*, members of the bourgeoisie are singled out as those whose violent acts and diabolic silence precipitate and finally culminate in the Nigerian civil war. While the Obofuns, the rich couple, are busy thinking of ways of increasing their ill-gotten wealth, the Idemudias are struggling to keep body and soul together in their poverty. The lives of the latter are already denuded right there in their village when their dreams of getting educated gets aborted midway as both of them are forced to become school dropouts not because of any academic weakness but because of their farmer parents' inability to pay their school fees any longer. Thus, despite the fact that they are the producers of cash crops that sustain the federal economy the farmers are denied the means to educate their children. Wherever he goes in the city Idemudia's lack of education stands out like a sore thumb. In the face of a starving wife and a riotous stomach he resorts to occasional selling of his own blood cheaply to make ends meet. Iyayi portrays him as a beaten and defeated individual and a failure of a husband whose self respect has long kissed the hard soil of poverty.

The life of Idemudia and his suffering friends runs a striking parallel to that of the rank- and- file soldiers in *Heroes*. The rank- and- file soldiers on both the Federal and Biafran sides join the army mainly because, having been denuded at their prime by the various political and economic forces or systems operating in society fighting in the war becomes a means of livelihood. There is the tendency for members of the bourgeoisie to live in Government Reservation Areas and sundry posh areas of the town while the poor are left to sort their lives out with cockroaches and other vermins in dilapidated houses. In Owode, for example, where the Idemudias live in *Violence* overflowing has become everybody's nightmare. Every time it rains, it always wreaks havoc and now it has assumed a disturbing source of worry to the peasant residents;

Two days before, two houses had collapsed on the street
A small child had been trapped in one of the buildings
under the fallen mud walls.... for the people who

lived in the mud houses on Owode street, there was now another major preoccupation: which house would be the next to fall? (2).

The dishonorable life of Idemudia, as shown by Iyayi, is aptly captured in this bitter ironic statement concerning his poor situation, a somewhat resigned lifestyle.

If the house in which he lived fell, he knew he would lose nothing except perhaps his own life. He wouldn't lose much property. He hadn't any to lose (2).

In *Heroes* the rank and-file soldiers are crowded together in the shabby, stinking and unprotected former secondary school dormitories in the war front. Their beds have no mattresses. Their pillows have no pillow slips and are brown from the sweat of past use. They are torn in many places so that pieces of foam continually came out and have to be pushed back. Iyayi tells us that the "pillows stank, the soldiers stank as they slept in their uniform and boots. There was no water... the dormitories stank but the soldiers were always tired, so they slept" (108) There is not even a stand-by anti-aircraft gun to protect the poor dormitories from any possible aerial attack from the enemy whereas there are two, one on each side of the commander's quarters. Brigadier Otunshi lives in a posh white house with all the state of the art conveniences like the Obofuns at their freedom Hotel residence.

In *Heroes* the officers are busy winning and dining at their officers' mess, a place the rank-and-file soldiers dare not venture into. While the rich can afford to dispose of their excess food into countless already overflowing dustbins in *Violence*, Idemudia and his poverty-stricken and forever hungry friends salivate like Pavlov's dogs. Patrick's calvinistic submission that it is God's work is nothing more than religious abstraction for like Osaro correctly avers "it is not God's work, its man made" (20). The same disparity of treatment rears its ugly head at Ogbe Hospital where the poor patients have to share beds or sleep on the bare floor whereas the senior service ward is almost empty. It is as if one is back in Alex La Guma's stone country where prisoners are treated separately on the basis of colour and race.

EXPLOITATION AND SEXPLOITATION

In the socio-politically decadent society that Iyayi portrays, social intercourse between the rich elite class and the poor masses hardly takes place except when the former wants to exploit the latter. In *Violence*, Queen becomes the very embodiment of exploitation characteristic of the upper class. Her avowed policy of employment as a contractor is based on sheer exploitation: employ more people but keep the wages down. For offloading about five hundred bags of cement she reluctantly pays a paltry twenty naira after haggling. She even counts the four five naira notes three times to make sure it is not over! Together with her slave driver of a site engineer, Mr. Clerides Palpires, it is hire and fire of her workers. Her workers are over

worked and poorly paid. Her engineer's high handedness and contempt know no bounds as he dismisses workers on a daily basis.

Iyayi describes how hard the soldiers are engaged in fierce battle with all sense of commitment and patriotism against the enemy and accuses their officers as slave masters, who in conjunction with the other members of the syndicate, scramble for profit while the soldier in thousands are dying in the battle, paying dearly with their lives in their attempt to salvage the nation in the war front. The officers often abandon their troops at the mercy of the enemy in the war front on the pretext of going for reinforcement. Brigadier Otunshi, for example, with some pleasure seeking officers abandon the troops at the bridge for the head of state's wedding in far away Lagos. He returns from the wedding as a "general" in the army. A hapless federal soldier, sergeant Audu laments the loss of his men in an ambush while their officers escape, having to be driven out of danger. In spite of this catalogue of betrayals by the officers of the army sergeant Audu tells us what will ironically happen at the end of the war.

After this war many generals will write accounts
in which they will attempt to show that they were
the heroes of the war. The soldiers take the dirt
and the ambushes and the bullets with their lives
and yet what happens? Always the officers are
the heroes. Always the generals, the officers take
the credit (86)

Considering the number of post war works that have been written by many former officers of the Nigerian civil war claiming to have championed countless exploits during the war sergeant Audu is no doubt right in his "prophecy"

Sexploitation as used in this paper means to exploit sexually. Members of the ruling class will stop at nothing to get what they want. Against the highly unfavourable working climate at the construction site Idemudia conscientizes the other workers to go on strike for more pay. The threat of an impending strike action is a piece of bad news to Queen whose time to complete the building contract is fast running out. Like her offer of a block increase of N5.00 a day, her making Idemudia the new site foreman to cause disaffection among the workers too fails. She at last decides to lure Idemudia to have sex with her to call off the strike. Although she fails woefully to lure Ideumdia into adultery with her, her husband, Mr. Obofun had succeeded in luring Idemudia's wife Adisa to have sex with him. It must be recalled too that the medical doctor at the Ogbe Hospital only agreed that the sick Idemudia should share a bed with a terminally sick patient after he had surveyed Adisa with his adulterous eyes. In *Heroes*, Iyayi chides the ruling elite for inciting the rank-and-file soldiers on both the federal and Biafran sides for their own selfish ends. To save their side from the enemy the federal soldiers

took the (Biafran) women, raped them in front
of their children and husbands and then, as
if that was not enough drove long sticks
through their vaginas, into their wombs.

(61)

MORAL DEGENERATION

Iyayi minces no words in emphasizing that a major factor contributing to the social and political decadence in his referent society is the issue of the vacuous lifestyle and the unsavoury conduct of the members of the bourgeoisie class. Their wanton bastardization of the very essence of the family system has led a great deal to the moral pervasion in the society. The Obofuns in *Violence*, for example, lay more emphasis on the pursuit of wealth and leisure at the expense of the well being of their children. Between Obofun and his wife is a kind of unwritten law of mutual infidelity which both seem hell bent in fulfilling. Queen, a heavy drinking woman, boasts shamelessly to her husband:

I have slept with your friends! I have enjoyed
myself as much as you have. And whose fault
is it? I should have sat here, shouldn't I, washing
your pants after you had soiled them by sleeping
with other men's wives (191).

In the midst of such extra marital affairs and soiling of the marriage bed without scruples one is hardly surprised at the degree of moral depravity in the society. One is hardly surprised too that the Obofun's children are left to themselves. While Esien's report from his school is nothing to write home about, Lilian is being raped in her father's house by her classmate! The moral pervasion in Obofun's house is symptomatic of the general moral decay in the wider society. The Obofuns' case is no doubt a bold statement that the heedless pursuit of wealth destroys and dehumanizes.

Wealth is like a double-edged sword that cuts both ways. While the Idemudias of this world think that their suffering is as a result of lack of wealth, it is interesting to hear Mr. Obofun with all his wealth:

Oh God, I am so unhappy, so unfortunate.
But why couldn't I have been more fortunate? (200)

In *Heroes*, Iyayi questions the moral justification for the head of state to be celebrating a state wedding when a war is raging on and thousands of people are either being killed or rendered homeless. Even more reprehensible is Brigadier Otunshi's promise of a wedding present, the capture of Onitsha, to the head of state. He does not even wait for the supposed "capture" of Onitsha before he and his officers head for the wedding. The wedding is not only unfortunate but ill-timed in totality. Indeed, while the rank-and-file soldiers are being slain daily at the war front their officers content themselves with wining and dinning with women of easy virtue at their officers' mess. The "war" commander presides and has the grace to invite officers to the dancing floor:

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I invite
you to eat, drink and dance (149)

Unable to hold back his amazement about the reckless attitude of the so-called officers, Osime Iyere who attends the party only as a journalist asks in bewilderment; “And they say that there is a war going on.” (150)

Out of sheer anger unbecoming of a war commander, Otunshi orders the execution of one hundred and eighty prisoners of war. This is not only an act of war crime but militarily unethical. Even so, carefully examined one is forced to conclude that Otunshi is more guilty of desertion than the thirty seven “deserters”, he kills unjustifiably. His moral and military judgment in the execution thus becomes questionable as it leaves much to be desired.

There is no doubt that Iyayi has succeeded in portraying in the two novels in focus a socio-political polity in decay. It is a stinking society where the few wealthy ones lord it over the countless poverty stricken ones. Frantz Fanon puts it even more succinctly when he states that “in these poor underdeveloped countries the rule is that the greatest wealth is surrounded by the greatest poverty” (1983:38) It is a depraved society where greed, selfishness and meism supervise virtually all the affairs of people, even the supposed esprit-de-corps of the people in uniform. This kind of society, says Olaniyan (1988:38) is;

alienation –ridden, is pillared by avarice and runs
an unbridled rapine. It warps the ethical code of
man and undermines his moral development... it
dehumanizes man and mortgages his human feelings
for the venal needs of survival, it degrades human attributes
such love, honesty, fellow feeling...it is suicidal to attempt
to be good in such a society

CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIO- POLITICAL DECADENCE

A socio-politically decadent polity is an open invitation to what Wole Soyinka the Nobel Laureate has called “season of anomy”; a state of complete normlessness or disorderliness. Under this circumstance might becomes right and jungle law becomes enthroned. As has been observed in the two novels, members of the ruling class with all their might can get away with any crime. Mr. Obofun, for example, has deliberately refused to pay back the loan he took from the government while in active service. Rather than prosecute the Obofuns of society for their deliberate refusal to honour their pledges to pay back their loans, though able, for the development of the economy the same government finds it convenient to send tax collectors into remote villages to harass poor farmers who can hardly afford two meals a day. While the fundamental rights of the masses are trampled upon the law enforcement agents are put in the service of the rich ones in the society. In *Violence*, Pa Jimoh is detained for many days for a crime he knows nothing about. Queen boastfully tells the hapless Idemudia not to think of going back to work in her site because she has instructed the police to arrest him if he tries to. Justice is denied the poverty stricken masses.

Social and political decadence is the grave yard of development in the society which in turn leads to joblessness and poor economy. In Iyayi's referent society the massive fraud in high places has led to untold poverty to the extent that young and able-bodied men resort to doing any thing from

selling their own blood to joining the army in order to eke out a living for themselves. While ladies like Auntie Salome take solace in prostitution if they must survive in the face of joblessness and poverty deliberately created by the ruling class to further pauperize the masses, married women, frustrated by their inability to buy ordinary soup ingredients because of their high prices in the market resort to fighting to the point of nakedness. Corruption always thrives in a socio-politically decadent society. Except there is a positive way forward in this kind of crucible, society becomes chained to the marble of underdevelopment, class striatedness, injustice and poverty.

WAY FORWARD AND CONCLUSION

Georg Lukacs has argued that modern writers should do more than merely portray the ennui of late bourgeois society. Arguing for the need for writers to take up a critical perspective on the society thereby revealing positive possibility beyond it, he stressed the imperative for going beyond mere portrayal of the decadence in the socio-political polity. This is because according to Terry Eagleton, “the reflection of a distortion will become a distorted reflection” (1976:58) Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1969:69) has equally tasked African writers not to simply “stand aloof and view the society” but to “seek out the sources, the causes and the trends”. In view of the alienating social arrangement and untold decadence that characterize Iyayi’s society in *Violence* and *Heroes* what then is the way forward?

Iyayi believes that since the social and political decadence in society is man made it will require man to eliminate it. In his exposition and demystification of the nature of the so called naturalness of the social ills, Iyayi does not cease to underline their eventual alteration. However, he first of all suggests correct historical perception of the alienating order that breeds socio-political decadence. In *Violence*, Idemudia begins by seeking the pervasive iniquities in individual personal terms. He initially blames his father for his unwillingness to finance his education and for beating his mother. He despises his father and vows never to beat his wife in future as the father has done. But after what amounts to a painful passage through the furnace of experience, he realizes that poverty is indeed never by choice and that there are many structures in the society tailor-made, to keep the majority as penurious scavengers. He quickly understands his wife’s infidelity rather than beheading her as he had earlier threatened. According to Olaniyan, “Idemudia now realizes as the sage said over a hundred years ago that necessity is blind only where it is not understood” (1980:306) .

Like in *Violence*, Iyayi’s constant vigorous demystifying logic “pulls down all the shadows in the horizon and behind the Biafran–Nigerian façade in *Heroes*” (Balogun, 1993:55). The leading character Osime Iyere is presented as a firm supporter of the federal cause. He accepts the Federal government’s contention that the war must be fought in order to protect the Nigerian state from descending into the mire of tribalism as orchestrated by the Igbo. But as the novel progresses the contradictions in the argument begin to appear. Iyere realizes that the war transcends the brutal conduct of the soldiers on both sides. Far from protecting the citizens, Osime Iyere sees painfully how the federal soldiers are slaughtering civilians indiscriminately like their Biafran counterparts. At the Asaba front, the federal officers

engage in endless rounds of partying as the rank-and-file soldiers are sent into the battle to die. In Lagos, General Gowon remains oblivious of the carnage in Asaba as he celebrates his wedding with “the vulgar insensitivity typical of his class” (Balogun, 1993:56).

The above contradictions provide evidence of Iyayi’s thesis that the war originated less in tribal sentiment than in class interests. Iyayi reduces the war to intra-class rather than inter-class squabble. This is the basis of Iyere’s conclusion after reflection that the real war which is presently suppressed is the inequality between the bourgeoisie and the working masses irrespective of spatial boundaries. He comes to realize that what is needed is not a redefinition of land boundaries but of the quality of life of the people living within the boundaries. The real basis for solidarity therefore, should be class rather than tribe, for after all, members of the ruling class are bound together by mutual interest. Against this background the leading characters in the two novels transform into a state of awareness as they grasp the correct understanding of their respective situations. To Iyayi, this is the very basis of the disalienation process which automatically leads to the next stage: conscientization and his clarion call for all oppressed sections in the community to take up arms to overthrow the present socio-politically decadent system.

Idemudia organizes his co-labourers surviving threats and blackmails and mobilizes for a decisive strike action at the construction site. In *Heroes*, Osime Iyere suggests that what is needed in order to change the oppressive situation is a “third force” whose role would be ideological in that it would fight the ruling class propaganda and enable ordinary Nigerians, irrespective of tribal origin to recognize their interest and reject the division that oppressive leaders seek to promote between them. The combined forces of the Nigerian masses would then take up arms to destroy the entire ruling class of whatever tribal affiliation. Osime Iyere declares himself the first recruit of this third army and vigorously pursues his ideological struggle with zest conscientizing the soldiers. His message is summed up in a striking image of Gowon and Ojukwu, though seen as foes to each another, but in reality are fellow members of the oppressive ruling class, fleeing together from the Nigerian people because in the war to end all wars, they would be on the same side where they actually belong. Iyayi believes that when the above steps are taken the alienation-ridden and socio-politically decadent system will become a place where all the members of the working classes belong.

True, Iyayi may have failed in the submission of Narasingha (1993:372). “to create the image of the authoritative African revolutionary caught up in the untidy world of multiple pulls and pushes” that is, assuming that that kind of “lone messiah” is still relevant in today’s world. But there is certainly no mistaking his artistic vision and sensibility which form the nucleus of his ideological stand which was reiterated in an interview with Kunle Ajibade;

I write because I want to see changes that
would transform the lives of the people.
My writing is directed and dedicated to those
who are interested in bringing about a positive

change in our society (1990:1)

Surely, deliberate conscientization and disalienation in the Brechtian style are no doubt right steps in this great goal of societal transformation away from the stinking moral and spiritual turpitude of the bourgeoisie.

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