

Female Representation and Festus Iyayi's Vision of African Womanhood in *Violence* and *The Contract*

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Abstract. Festus Iyayi's *Violence* and *The Contract* have attracted a lot of literary attention especially in the area of Marxist criticism. Framed on feminist criticism, this study aims to encode Iyayi's vision of African womanhood in *Violence* and *The Contract* which has scarcely been done. Through a careful study of the representation of female characters in these two texts, the paper posits that Iyayi denies his women positive identity by foisting on them the image of sexually loose women in their pursuit of economic existence. This sheds some light on his vision of African womanhood which this study argues is regressive. The paper concludes that the common parlance 'use what you have to get what you want' which Iyayi has unabashedly painted in *Violence* and *The Contract* is nothing but immoral lascivious living. The paper therefore recommends that no woman in trying to cope with the agony of existence should behave like any of the female characters in the texts under discussion. There are better and more honourable ways of making a living.

Keywords: Vision, feminist criticism, African womanhood, female characters, Festus Iyayi

1. Introduction

Festus Iyayi's novels have attracted a lot of studies especially in the area of Marxist criticism. For instance, Chiluwa (2007) examines Festus Iyayi's literary aesthetics and social vision in *Violence* and *The Contract* and submits that "drawing from the Marxist interpretation of society, Iyayi identifies and unmasks the evils of capitalist society and proposes the ideals of man's social and spiritual liberation" (p.98). Omoko & Ovie-Jack (2016) in re-assessing contemporary socio-political issues in *Violence* and *The Contract* aver that Festus Iyayi "as a Marxist writer, engages himself with the issues of corruption,

political mismanagement, social injustice, poverty and unemployment" (p. 167).

Ujowundu (2013) evaluates "Festus Iyayi's artistic exploration of the social, cultural, economic and political forces affecting Nigerians in *Violence* and concludes that Iyayi in this novel portrays "the inhumanity of the rich against the poor and the filthy, dehumanizing and degrading effects of the action of the ruling class" (p.311). Alli & Ademola (2019) explore the ideological discourse in Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, *The Contract* and *Heroes* through the prism of stylistic analysis and posit that the author hauls 'verbal missiles' at the corrupt officials to pass his message across and add that "let those who get the message be the touch bearers in the collective struggle to create a better, egalitarian society" (p.134).

Evidently, this study on Iyayi's vision of African womanhood in *Violence* and *The Contract* is a paradigm shift and feminist criticism forms the framework. One of the major developments in literary studies in the past decades is the emergence of feminist criticism. It operates at the level of theory and practice. The choice of this framework is informed by the fact that feminist criticism is more concerned with the representation of characters in works of art than with any other aspect of the narrative. Njoku (2001) argues that "feminist criticism looks at issues from the female point of view (p.196). She adds that it "focuses on issues of gender and inequality and subverts textual meaning from a perspective that is woman-centered ..." (p.201). This feminist critical approach, it is believed, will shed new light on Iyayi's novels under discussion. The study will be done in three movements. The first will deal with female characters in *Violence*; the second with female characters in *The*

Contract and the third with Festus Iyayi's vision of African womanhood.

2. Female characters in *Violence*

Here, the characters under consideration are Queen Obofun, Adisa, Salome and an unnamed woman.

2.1. Queen Obofun

Queen is the wife of Obofun. She ministers to passion and lust to the extinction of morality. She commits adultery with anything on trousers. She uses her body to get whatever she wants. Iriso, one of her clients, describes her "as a cunning devil" (30). She runs a restaurant and wants a regular supply of peak milk, beef, eggs and other things. Iriso undertakes to supply these items. To discuss the terms of the contract, she takes him into her bedroom under the guise of not wanting any distraction (31). While there, she invites him "... to help her undo the zip of her dress" (30). Soon after, Iriso "was on top of her, and promising her to bring all the things she wanted for nothing" (32). Caught in her trap, she pushes him away saying she has "to see the things first before she actually pays him in kind" (32). Iriso narrates his ugly experience with Queen to Dala, his friend, who says: "We've all heard about Queen in the Ministry. She uses her body to get what she wants..." (32).

Iriso supplies the food items and Queen pays in kind as promised. After sleeping with her, he describes her as "the bitch...she will need other things, and if a man supplies them, she is going to use her body to pay for them. Harlot!" (101). She proves Iriso right by giving him another appointment. In another development, she pays for trucks of cement in kind. She reminisces: "the cement deal has gone off very well. She had been with the man only twice and the cement had come...she had no doubt that he would come again. They always come back" (89).

When Obofun raises issues with Queen over her intimacy with several men, she admits without any form of contrition saying: "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..." (191). Obofun retorts scornfully: "I know you will take any man. But thank God, Idemudia is sick. So you will have to wait for some time before you can have him" (191-192). Meanwhile, Idemudia is one of the labourers she hired to offload the trucks of cement she paid for in kind. She ripostes shamelessly: "I will take him when he comes out. I'd rather sleep with him than wash your pants which you have soiled by sleeping with other men's wives"

(192). Should Queen go this far? Is Obofun's marital infidelity enough reason to drive her into prostitution? Are there no better ways of registering her displeasure? Does female assertion call for immorality? This paper concurs with Chukwuma's doctrine that "women should see better forms of revolt than sexual..." (1999, p.226).

Queen is despicable. She has dangerous propensity to sexual immorality. She certainly has no qualms in her depravity. She "lost her conscience in the thousands of naira that poured in to her, in the confidence that she could use what she had to get a man, to do what she wanted. She didn't have any scruples any more, none whatsoever" (196). Disgusting! In the course of time, Obofun, decides to talk things over with her: "...I must discuss things with my wife...Tomorrow will see the beginning of a new day. I will call Queen and discuss matters with her...We are husband and wife still...Yes, I will patch things up with her..." (200). Queen blames her husband for her adulterous life during the discussion. Thereafter, she muses: "But why was Obofun angry with her? Hadn't he known what would happen? Why had he opened the Crown Supermarket and put her in charge of it? Why had he introduced her to all his powerful friends? He was to blame, not her" (201). Does this make sense? Queen is simply a harlot. Otherwise, she would have realised her folly at this juncture and begun to patch up things with her husband. She admits that they "were strangers to each other now" (203) but states that "there was nothing she could do about it" (203). She resolves to continue with her loose life with dour determination. Hear her: "From now on, I am going to do whatever I like whenever I like and wherever I like" (204). Obviously, her sense of morality has been mucked up with mud.

Discharged from the hospital, Queen hires Idemudia to work on her building site as a labourer. Within a few days, he leads a protest against the poor wages she pays the workers on the site threatening her with a strike. Meanwhile, Queen has just eleven days to complete that project; otherwise the contract would be revoked. Desperate, she decides to buy Idemudia over in cash or in kind against the rest of the labourers. Hear her: "Perhaps there is a way to get him. Perhaps Obofun is not wrong after all" (252). It should be recalled that Obofun had earlier derided her by suggesting to her to sleep with Idemudia. So when her offer of bribe of hundred naira which she later increased to three hundred naira did not work, she invites Idemudia to her bedroom saying "there is at least one thing which you cannot refuse from me" (291). Lying on the bed naked, she invites him: "Come in quickly...What are you waiting for... Take

off your shirt...Come in quickly, now” (295). Here, Queen’s moral degeneracy attains a crescendo. What a wife-whore! Idemudia confesses: “The temptation was great, greater than any amount of money she ever could have offered him” (295) but he refuses to fall. He rejects her offer saying: “I can’t...no, no, no. I can’t” (298). Surprised, she asks: “Why can’t you lie down with me?” (299). He answers: “You have a husband and I have a wife. It would be adultery” (299). Queen stupefied, asks: “And you have never slept with another woman? Apart from your wife?” (300). He answers: “Of course, I never have” (300). What a decent man! A new man indeed! Surprised and disappointed, she asks “if his wife, Adisa, had never slept with another man” (301). Oblivious of his wife’s sexual escapades with Obofun, Idemudia answers: “My wife has never slept with another man” ...“We are poor, madam, yes, very poor, but my wife does not sell herself” (301). On this note, she vengefully gives Idemudia detailed information of Adisa’s affair with her husband. Queen saw Adisa when she was leaving the chalet after sleeping with Obofun. So she uses it as a missile to shoot down the only man that rejects her body. Iyayi’s portrayal of Queen is bizarre and shocking.

2.2 Adisa

Adisa, wife of Idemudia, bullies her husband during a quarrel saying “...If you go out, I am going out, too. I am going to find some means to feed myself” (15). Idemudia surprised, asks: “You are going to find some means to feed yourself?” She answers scornfully and defiantly: “Yes and why not?...Or perhaps you think you are the only man in the world?” (15). Idemudia warns: “... You let another man come near you and I’ll kill you... You think you are attractive enough to use your body and you say things which a woman never says to her husband...” (15-16).

On her way to see her husband who is now on admission in the hospital, Obofun gives her a lift. While in the car, Adisa’s mind runs riot: “The bells began to ring louder in Adisa’s mind now...She could see her aunt’s face and hear her voice saying , “you are still young and beautiful and many men will come running after you...You can take a room...”(73). He invites her to his hotel after he drops her off at the hospital. Adisa decides to honour the invitation: “She would go to see him to find out how he could help her and Idemudia would never find out...” (86). Why does she want to hide it from her husband if her motives are right? She reasons: “Going to see Obofun did not mean that she was going to give herself to him” (86). It should be recalled that she had earlier threatened her husband

that she would see another man who can provide for her. One is tempted to argue that Adisa seduces Obofun seeing that he is a rich man. This is because even before Obofun invites her, she remembered her aunt’s counsel to her to sell her body to make a living.

Adisa goes to the hotel to meet Obofun disregarding the warning from her inner self that she should not fall into his trap (115). Meanwhile, Obofun while waiting muses: “If she comes...then I think I am lucky.... How I should love to have her. Just once and afterwards it will easy. But the trick had better work” (119). On her arrival, Obofun makes good use of his trick by discussing business with her first. He proposes to give her ten cartons of whisky to sell on the condition that she pays an advance of fifty naira. Adisa tells him she has no money “not one single naira” (126). Taking advantage of that, he suggests that she can give him “a guarantee in another way... his hands...slowly going down to her breast” (127). At this juncture, Adisa begins to hear voices. Idemudia’s voice rings in her head: “I’ll find you out and I’ll kill you. I’ll tear out that thing which you think you have and I’ll throw it to the dogs outside”... (127). She cries “No! No! No! and stood up from the chair abruptly” (128). Obofun following her says “but you lose nothing and yet you gain everything. Tell me, what do you lose? Your virginity” (129). She replies “it is adultery” (129) and leaves the hotel. On her way home, Adisa reassures herself that “she could never commit adultery. Not on her life. ...There must be other ways of making money” (134). But this resolution is short-lived. Soon after, she muses: “Wasn’t that money preferable to this hunger...Should she give herself to him? (133). She reasons: “she needed the money, not so much for herself but for both of them together” (134).

Idemudia is discharged from the hospital but he has no money to pay the bills. So he instructs Adisa to see his friend, Osaro, to raise some money for them to pay the bills and that she should come back to the hospital with some clothes so they can go home together. On her return to the hospital, Adisa meets Obofun who again offers to give her a lift and seeing through her that “she is already half won”; that he “can easily tilt her now” (165), he takes her to the hotel instead of dropping her off at the hospital. While in the chalet, she asks herself: “And what have I got to lose? Nobody will find out. Nobody will ever imagine that I can be involved with such a man. We need the money and I must have something I can always do. Nobody will find out...Not even Idemudia” (168). She struggles with Obofun for a while but “it was an unconscious fight, her

consciousness had already given in and so the fight was weak” (169). “She knew that she was beaten...” (169). More so he has increased the amount from fifty to hundred naira. “She let him drag her into the bedroom” (169) and so Obofun buys her body with hundred naira.

Adisa goes home from the hotel satisfied: “Her sleep was deep and peaceful, like one who hadn’t slept for a long time...” (205). Amazing! That she betrays her husband by selling her body and also that she keeps him waiting the whole night are not enough reasons to take sleep away from her eyes. Waking up, she “smiled in the half dark” (205) on seeing the envelope that contains the money Obofun gave her. Then she says: “Judas had sold his master for thirty pieces of silver. She had sold herself for one hundred naira” (205). “...So I am no better than a harlot...A prostitute for one hundred naira anyway... I am a prostitute! A cheap woman!”(205-206). She rationalises her act soon after: “...He may kill me but I did it for him. Only for him” (206). Again, justifying her lewdness, she wonders:

How can he kill me for it? God knows how ashamed I am now. But he knows too it was a sacrifice I had to make for my husband’s sake. Greater love hath no man than the man who laid down his life for the life of a friend. I have done that. Committed adultery for his sake. Surely I shouldn’t be punished for that (207).

Adisa’s use of scripture to justify her sin is unpardonable. Jesus laid down his life to reconcile man to God but she laid down her life to give vent to her lust. After all, the hospital bills which she claims pushed her to sell her body was not paid from the hundred naira Obofun gave her. Osaro and Omoifo, Idemudia’s friends, raise the money to pay the bills. Again, by divine providence, a job awaits Idemudia at Queen’s building site even before he was discharged from the hospital. This means that their being in perpetual want because of joblessness has been taken care of. So how does the hundred naira relieve them from the poverty she so much amplifies? Just as Judas’ thirty pieces of silver was not profitable to him, so also is Adisa’s. This is because in a later development, Idemudia tells his wife “I don’t think I will need that money you borrowed from your aunt” (233). She had earlier attempted to cover her tracks by lying to Idemudia that she borrowed some money from her aunt, Salome, to pay the hospital bills.

Shame and guilt will forbid many descent women who are cajoled into Adisa’s sin to touch the envelope. The money will become leprous. But not

so with Adisa. She begins to figure out what she would do with it. Hear her: “They would move to a better place and open up a small kiosk of a shop. There she would distribute the whisky”...she would go out to buy some meat...she would eat well from now on” (207-208). Then, she reflects on the oath she took on the day of her wedding: “...You must not flirt, you must not commit adultery...” (208). She dismisses it saying Idemudia “must know that it wasn’t my fault, that I was driven to it by my consideration for him, for my hunger, by our general poverty” (208). Obofun sends five cartons of whisky to her with a message that “he would be waiting for her as soon as she could come out” (218). Having remembered her marriage vow, one expects Adisa to reject the whisky and also to send the envelope back to Obofun as a form of restitution. Rather, she expresses her displeasure over the shortage of the number of cartons he promised her: “Hadn’t Obofun promised her ten cartons?” (218). The only time she bemoans her folly is when Idemudia expresses his gratitude to his friends, Osaro and Omoifo for raising the money for the hospital bills. She muses: “How could she have given herself to Obofun only to hear this morning that she needn’t have done it, that it had all been useless, that she had been a fool? She felt near to tears” (224). The strong reason she gives for selling her body is hereby proved futile.

Back at home from the hospital, Idemudia asks Adisa where the cartons of whisky came from. She lied to him that it is Salome, her aunt that gave them to her. He queries her for not informing him first before accepting them and then asks her the question that is weighing on his mind: “Why didn’t you come yesterday?” (229). She told him she could not make it because she went to look for money and that her aunt, Salome, lent them twenty-five naira. Unsuspicious, Idemudia is impressed and plans to visit Salome to thank her “for the money and the whisky” (231). But Adisa discourages him saying “I have already thanked her enough...The proper time to thank her will be when we return the money” (231). Idemudia insists that he would see her anyway. Seeing Idemudia’s resolve to visit her aunt, she informs him that Salome “is leaving for Badagry...this evening. That is where she buys the whisky” (231). She has lied again. One sin leading to another. Undoubtedly, Adisa lacks moral fortitude. One wishes that she sticks to her earlier resolve that there are better ways of making money (134).

2.3 Salome

Salome is Adisa’s aunt; a bad example to her. She advises Adisa to leave Idemudia since he cannot

provide for her and play the harlot by “taking a room in the city where other men would come to her” (50). She shares the gains of her lewdness with Adisa to encourage her to toe her footsteps: “The children have always coughed and cried even when their father was here. And not only had they cried, but I, also. But now it is very different. I do not cry any more, and at least, the children are alive. ..46). Adisa ruminating on her aunt’s loose life says: “My aunt had to find the money for the rent, for feeding and for clothing the children and herself. Who can blame her if she chose to live the way she now does?” (46). Should her husband’s irresponsible lifestyle push her into prostitution? Must she sell her body to earn a living? Are there no better ways of making ends meet? How about Buchi Emechta’s Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980) who in a similar situation of excruciating poverty shows her mettle in resourcefulness by engaging in petty trading to sustain her family.

Adisa confesses to Salome her affairs with Obofun and how she lied to Idemudia that she borrowed the money from her. Salome impressed, says: “So you are no longer blind...I am glad you are beginning to see reason” (253). She adds: “I have found men to be selfish and ugly. They want a woman, they get a woman and they use her and ditch her into the gutters. My husband made my life a misery. So I learnt to distrust all men” (254). Adisa and Salome’s friendship reflects negative female bonding sisterhood practices.

2.4 Farmer’s wife (Unnamed).

She is caught red-handed by her husband sleeping with another man. On that fateful day, the man returns early from the farm only to find “his wife in bed with this man...” (225). The husband, mad, butchers the man and later kills his wife. Osaro argues that the deceased might have tempted the farmer’s wife with money (227) and then asks Idemudia what he thinks about the incident. He answers: “I don’t know...I agree that the way it is done matters. But I don’t suppose my wife will ever commit adultery and he glanced at Adisa. So the question will never arise” (227). What an irony! Osaro asks him again what he would do to Adisa if she commits adultery. Idemudia rejoins: “How can you say that in the presence of Adisa? Well, I will answer it...I know she would never do it but if she did and I found out, I would kill her. Just as the farmer has done” (227).

3. Female characters in *The Contract*

Here, the characters under consideration are Eunice Agbon and Mrs. Oloru.

3.1 Eunice Agbon

She is an employee of Chief Ekata; the public relations secretary for Chief Ekata and Construction Company. Part of her job schedule is to fetch contracts for the company through sleeping with government officials. Chief Ekata uses this as a bait to catch contracts because “he had realised a long time ago that one of the greatest weakness of the Nigerian male was the female... Send a woman to a man ... he will almost always grant her whatever request she has” (69-70). He affirms that “he was a living example” (73). So when he hears about the Ogbe City Council contract, he sends Eunice to Ogie Obala, the principal secretary in the council, who is in charge of awarding the contract. He instructs her: “You must persuade Mr Obala to come out tomorrow evening to dinner with us. If you fail, our business folds up...You understand of course what that means...So, use all the means at your disposal” (74-75). “Eunice Agbon understood at once” (74) and vows to crack Ogie at all costs (75). Her only fear is that Ogie should not be “old and unimaginative” like the men “she had gone to these past weeks...they treated her as if she was nothing but flesh” (75). While delivering her message to Ogie, she seductively “...placed her hands behind her chair so that the pinnacles of her breasts were thrown upwards and they were sharp and unyielding and inviting” (79). Then “she laid the bait. Perhaps you could have launch with me?” (79). Ogie looks into her sensuous eyes and “saw the snake and the apple in them” (79). He could not resist the temptation. He muses: “What does it matter if I have this lunch with her and then take her afterwards” (79). He accepts the invitation saying “we will have the lunch and I’ll pay for it for keeping you waiting...Afterwards you can go back and tell Chief Ekata that I will see him at seven at the Wayo Hotel”(79). Eunice’s “life was concentrated in her sex, like colour in a diamond, in rainbow or in a flower. Sex and money. These were to her the aims of life” (138). Kouakou (2014) opines that Eunice “...willingly turned her sexual parts into a kind of article with commercial value which could be sold and bought at any time” (p.15).

3.2 Mrs. Oloru

Master-slave relationship characterises the bond that exists between Mrs. Oloru and her husband, Mr. Oloru. She is defined in his terms. One of her legitimate wifely duties as dictated by her husband is to sleep with men to fetch him contracts. So, bent on winning the Ogbe City Council contract, he sends her to sleep with government officials so that they will

swing the contract in his favour. Hear him: “Perhaps, he would have to send his wife round again to the administrators and others...this contract was worth several millions. So what were a few men’s pleasures with your wife compared to five million naira? Nothing. Absolutely nothing” (119). This is nothing but violence. But why should Mrs. Oloru accept this? Is she so ‘thingified’ to use Udumkwu’s words that she has lost her sense of decorum? Kouakou (2014) commenting on Mrs. Oloru servility opines that “when one’s own wife’s value is seen in terms of naira, she becomes less important than tradable goods sold at the commodity market” (p.8).

3.3 Iyayi’s Vision of African Womanhood

Iboroma (2017) has argued elsewhere that “a writer dialogues with his environment and puts in writing the outcome of the dialogue which usually serves as a mirror to the people and the society. The writer’s dialogue with his material world and the strategies he employs largely reveal his vision of life/society” (p.79). Sadly, the outcome of Iyayi’s dialogue with the material world which he gives back to the society concerning the African woman is that she is lewd. His delineation of the woman in this wise violates not only the principle of order regulating the accepted standards of sexual behaviour of the material world but also the moral appropriateness of the texts under study. The two texts are silhouetted against a Christian background and adultery of course is an anathema in the Christian faith. Incidentally, all the main characters in *Violence* understand this and make reference to it at some point. For instance, Adisa’s initial response to Obofun’s advances is “it is adultery” (129). Even Queen, the prostitute, while in the hotel with Iriso asks him: “Can you imagine another man telling your wife ... it does not matter to commit adultery?” (100). Again, at Queen’s question: “Why can’t you lie down with me?” Idemudia answers: “You have a husband and I have a wife. It would be adultery” (299). So one wonders why Iyayi takes such a retrograde step in his construction of female characters. He paints in his works a demeaning image that denies the African woman her full humanity.

Further on, liberating women from debilitating patriarchal mores has often followed the Marxist track of dramatising class oppression and economic exploitation in works of art. For instance, Opara (1994) analysing some of Sembène Ousmane’s works avers that Sembène’s “Marxist orientation influences his sexual politics” (p.96) and that he “...inundated his works with positive dynamic new women...”

(p.97). This study concurs with this assertion. A good example is Sembène’s Ramatoulaye in *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (1976) who takes over the mantle and fends for a large family in the face of untold hardship during the 1947 strike of the Dakar-Niger railway workers. She did not sell her body to carry out this duty. Also, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, a Marxist, highlights in his novels “the potentialities and dynamism of the woman and represents her as a highly conscious and individualized person” (Okafor, 1994, p.131). It is disappointing that Iyayi whom many critics have adjudged a Marxist-oriented writer toes such a degrading path in his portraiture of the African woman. Why does Iyayi for instance make Idemudia who by the patriarchal standard is more vulnerable to adultery stand while he makes Adisa fall? It all borders on his distorted vision of African womanhood.

Nnolim (1999) submits: “We encourage personal upliftment through education and economic independence for women...we all will equally condemn ...efforts at shoving before our noses unwholesome freedoms that lead to immorality...” (p.54). Sadly, none of Iyayi’s women is empowered through education. Rose Idebale (*The Contract*), the only female character who aspires to attain independence through education (25) did not survive Iyayi’s potter’s wheel. She commits fornication and gets pregnant in the process. She plans to get rid of the child not caring “what the Catholic Church or the national laws said about abortion” (81). Here again, Christian religious mores are being infringed. She reasons that if she fails to do that, “...then her whole future would be in jeopardy” (81). She asserts: “...I want to be a human being...An educated one. The quality of a person matters” (156). If Iyayi had allowed Rose to achieve her goal, she would have been a role model in his fictional world inundated with women who lack quality. Again, Queen whom her husband empowers to achieve economic independence through legitimate means blames him for that: “Why had he opened the Crown Supermarket and put her in charge of it?” (201). She prefers achieving economic existence through debauchery.

Not only that, Nnolim (1999) argues that “when no holds are barred, when women who are custodians of morality are in the vanguard of scandal ridden behaviours, society must then be on its way to self-destruction” (p.51.) To save the society from running into self-destruction, Cyprian Ekwensi for instance, metes out punishment to the prostitutes in *Jagua Nana* (1961). For example, he denies Jagua Nana, the celebrated prostitute in African fiction, the fulfilment

of motherhood. This at least will serve as a warning to the younger generation of women that society frowns at deviant behaviours such as prostitution. Iyayi did not make any of his women suffer for their licentious living, not even Queen whose moral degeneracy eclipses that of Ekwensi's Jagua Nana. Indeed, one is gravely worried by the way Iyayi condones sexual freedom in his women and if this is not checked, it can actually lead the society to self-destruction

In addition, all Iyayi's women are defined by their relation to men either as wives, girlfriends or lovers serving the interest of man in a patronising manner. Iyayi repulsively reinforces the negative image of women as sex-objects in his portrayal of Eunice and Mrs. Oloru. Closely related to this is his characterisation of the female characters. They are presented as one-dimensional character. They share the same orientation and see the world in the same way. They are stunted and unchanging as opposed to the male characters, Idemudia and Ogie, who are fully developed. Queen for instance is described as a 'bitch' at different times by Iriso, Obofun and Mr. Clerides and she remains a bitch till the end of the novel unlike Penda, the celebrated prostitute in Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1976) who despises prostitution and becomes the leader of the women in their fight for justice during the railway workers strike. Rather than up-dating the female status to reflect the changing times as Sembène does with Penda, Iyayi debases the image of the African woman in his works. If Ekwensi and Sembène whose aforementioned works were published earlier than those of Iyayi could redeem the image of the African woman, one wonders why Iyayi immortalises the negative stereotypic image of the woman as prostitute. This is rather retrogressive. There is nothing in his women that is uplifting. They are mere objects performing demeaning functions.

4. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has shown that sexual immorality forms the parameter for the definition of womanhood in Iyayi's novels under study. His Marxist orientation does not in any way influence his sexual politics. In short, sexism is inherent in Iyayi's vision of African womanhood. This is evident in the sexual and self-effacing roles he arrogates to the female characters. His women are no respecters of moral tenets. They indulge in deviant behaviours such as adultery and fornication with impunity. Acholonu (2004) argues that "...the moral value of literature does emphasise the need for literature to present us with model heroes and heroines whose

moral rectitude assures and promises hope and faith in humanity" (p.61). Disappointedly, none of Iyayi's heroines play any role model function that promises hope and faith in humanity. Sexual promiscuity is their *raison d'être*. His obsession with coition is rather repulsive. In short, his delineation of women in this wise negates the variety of ennobling roles the African woman plays both in life and in literature. His portraiture debases the image of the African woman. All in all, Iyayi's unflattering portrait of his women reveals his vision of African womanhood which this paper submits is regressive.

The common parlance "use what you have to get what you want" as Iyayi has unabashedly represented in *Violence* and *The Contract* is nothing but immoral lascivious living. The study therefore recommends that no woman in trying to cope with the agony of existence should be a Queen or Adisa or Eunice or Mrs. Oloru. They do not play any role model function. There are better and more honourable ways of making a living.

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