Class Stratification and Socio-Economic Struggle in Festus Iyayi's *Violence*

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Abstract

This paper explores Festus Iyayi's *Violence* through a critical examination of borders – both spatial and symbolic – within its portrayal of Nigeria's socio-economic landscape. By contrasting the stark differences between the poverty-stricken masses and the affluent, yet brutal, elites, Iyayi reveals the underlying forces of socio-economic categorisation and class stratification. The novel highlights the violent imposition of class borders designed to restrict social interaction and limit movement for the lower class, while simultaneously proposing avenues for social transformation and the dismantling of these divisions. Through an exploration of exploitation and capitalist violence, *Violence* emphasises the active role of the working class in challenging and transcending social and economic boundaries. The narrative foregrounds the interplay between embodied memory, physical spaces, and the daily labour that sustains these hierarchical structures, suggesting that revolutionary struggle can disrupt the deeply entrenched social order. The paper also reflects on the broader implications of class transformation, asserting that the fight to overcome systemic oppression is not unique to the novel's fictional world but remains a crucial and universal struggle for social justice.
Keywords: Class border, border interaction, violence, body, resistance, Iyayi's *Violence*.

Introduction

Festus Iyayi's *Violence* is a critical exploration of Nigeria's socio-economic landscape, particularly through a lens focused on the dynamics of power, resistance, and class transformation. At the heart of the narrative lies the stark contrast between the impoverished masses and the affluent, often violent elites, revealing the deep-rooted socio-economic divisions that fuel class stratification. Iyayi situates these divisions within the framework of both spatial and symbolic borders, which not only demarcate space but also restrict the agency of the lower class, severely limiting their socio-economic mobility and perpetuating their subjugation. By illustrating the disempowerment brought on by these borders, the novel critiques the systemic exploitation inherent in capitalist structures, while also advocating revolutionary resistance and the dismantling of these boundaries. This paper endeavours to examine the complex relationships between power and resistance as represented in *Violence*, specifically how these elements play out in the interplay between embodied memory, physical spaces, and the labour that sustains these inherited inequalities. The novel symbolises the universal and ongoing struggle for social justice, where class transformation emerges as crucial for a more equitable society.

Trained in in the part of former USSR (now Ukraine) and in England, Festus Iyayi returned to Nigeria in 1980 and lectured at the University of Benin until his death in 2013. His experience of socialism in the USSR influenced his perception of economic injustice. It made him a radical

critic of the stark corruption and political degradation of the Nigerian government. His novels depict the plight of the masses in the context of ethnic wars and social disorder. His second novel, *The Contract* (1982), implicates political excesses. Interestingly, in the text's protagonist, Ogie Obala, who returns from studies outside the country, Iyayi presents the moral weakness of individuals faced with the struggle of choosing between socio-economic territories created by corruption. Caught between the stark contrast of wealth and poverty, Ogie compromises his resolution to fight corruption and joins his father, Chief Ewe Obala, and the other corrupt officials in the decayed system. Iyayi's Commonwealth Writers award-winning novel *Heroes* (1986) reflects on the Nigerian civil war. In *Heroes*, Iyayi presents the civil war as purposefully orchestrated by the political elites. He portrays the betrayal of the masses by the rulers who, for selfish political benefits, incited the masses (the ethnic groups) against each other in war. His last book, *Awaiting Court Martial* (1996), is a collection of fifteen short stories, united by the theme of individuals caught in the web of social decay. More than Iyayi's other novels, *Violence* vividly presents socially constructed and managed class categorisation through a representation of the gulf between individuals of different economic status and through the performance of inevitable verbal and non-verbal interclass interaction. *A*s will be discussed in this paper, *Violence* foregrounds the class border as consciously created and managed by the social elites in order to define and maintain identities.

Critical analyses of *Violence* have highlighted themilieu, concerns, and linguistic aesthetics of the text as social realism. Critics such as Narasingha Sil (1993) and Innocent Chiluwa (2007) have focused on its Marxist ideology. Chiluwa sees the text as an explicit depiction of social injustice and a call for working-class revolution. He highlights the text's emphasis on the use of language for revolutionary ends. Using a praxo-discourse interpretative tool[1], he investigates Iyayi's use of language for socio-economic causes ("The Literary Artist" 6). In so doing, Chiluwa argues that the language of deprivation in the text is performative and justifies the revolutionary action of the working-class characters. He states,

> in the words and phrases *became silent, worked into the evening, became worn out, leaned against, tired out, exhausted, hungry* ... Iyayi draws the picture of extreme suffering as a result of poor work conditions and appeals to our sense of pity. He achieves cohesion through stylistic parallelism as he drives home the intense atmosphere of the exploitation of the Nigerian worker: *their backs ached, their stomach ached, and their head ached also.* (Chiluwa 9, emphasis in the original)

Chiluwa believes that Iyayi's radical ideological position against an unjust society is reflected in his use of language and images that mirror the deplorable condition of the working class. Like Chiluwa, Sil asserts that the text, projecting Marxist ideology, directly conveys the message that, having suffered from poverty and lack of opportunity, the oppressed must answer "violence with violence". Thus, he groups Iyayi among the writers whose works represent the climax of Marxist discourse in Nigeria (Sil "Nigerian Intellectuals and Socialism" 377-378).

Similarly, Niyi Akingbe, Christopher B. Ogunyemi, and Abosede A. Otemuyiwa (2011) argue that *Violence* reflects society's and Iyayi's radical ideology. They classify the text as socially relevant in its exposition of societal ills and its subsequent call for social change. For Akingbe et

al., violence in the text is both "an instrument and outcome" (306), since it is the means and the ends in the hands of the masses in the struggle to challenge existing power relations. I draw on this explication of violence as a form of protest by examining violence not only as a tool in the hands of the poor, but a tool in the hands of the elites, employed to ensure the maintenance of the socio-economic border in a top-down resistance to border crossing. Iyayi's delineation of his "characters into two significant classes, elites and working class" (Akingbe et al. 307) exposes a bordering which I hope to engage from the perspective of interclass interaction and identity negotiation. This perspective enables an envisioning of the details and processes of alterity fundamental to the place of literature in border studies. Examining the processes of interactions across social locations foregrounds the unique ability to capture the functional and complex aspect of the border in narrative.

Violence and the Units of Encounter

Class interactions in *Violence* centre on two major units of encounter in the different physical spaces. The first interaction (otherwise called intra-class interaction) foregrounds interactions within the classes: Idemudia and his wife in their weather-threatened room and Obofun and Queen in their mansion. The second level of interaction, which I term interclass interaction (trans-boundary in Newman's terms), highlights the intersection of classes in public and private spaces. Public interclass interactions occur in the parks and hospitals, while private interclass interactions occur in the chalets and bedrooms, where Obofun and Queen sexually oppress Adisa and Idemudia. These units of interaction are symbolic of social class realities and complexities in the Nigeria that Iyayi represents.

In the first scene of the text, Idemudia wakes up on a rainy Sunday morning, hungry and without any hope of food. He engages in a verbal exchange with his wife, Adisa, who holds him responsible for their poverty. Upset by his wife's inability to understand his struggle to earn a steady income and her threat to leave him for wealthier men, Idemudia gets up to leave the house, but his wife blocks his way holding onto his trousers. As he struggles to free himself, his trousers tear and he angrily slaps his wife, causing blood to trickle down from her nose. Idemudia and Adisa's conflict typifies an intra-class performance of frustration, through which Iyayi draws the reader into a graphic description of the living conditions of the poor. Iyayi also situates Idemudia and Adisa in deplorable socio-economic material conditions that expose their societal status. They live in one room in a mud house, almost empty except for an eight-spring iron bed, the floor so badly cemented that it weakens the brooms used for sweeping it (*Violence* 1). Adisa has to stoop very low in order to sweep, a symbol of the depth of dehumanisation of the working class, and an allusion to the sacrificial exchange of "her jewel", her sexual integrity, for money, which emerges later in the narrative as an important motif. Futhermore, Iyayi graphically foregrounds spatio-material distinction by contrasting Idemudia's poverty with Obofun's affluence, depicted by the latter's room of "polished floor", white painted walls, and high ceiling "where the air-conditioner softly blew cold air into the room" (*Violence* 123).

Iyayi provides an extended description of the physical and material lack that Idemudia and his wife experience to expose a section of the societal divide replete with constraints on individual action and identity. Idemudia's work is ordered by the chiming of an outside clock to which he has to listen "*intently*", and Adisa has no choice but to "*stoop substantially* to sweep clean" (*Violence* 1). Their material space and conversations depict hunger and deprivation of the necessities of life and the effect of this lack on family stability. Idemudia wonders what else he has not done. His question is justified as the text narrates his offloading of Queen's three trailer

loads of cement in the rain for a meagre wage, the resultant life-threatening sickness that takes him to the hospital, his return to hard labour after leaving the hospital, and the sale of his blood for money (*Violence* 156-157).

Iyayi extends the description of lack beyond the confines of Idemudia's room. He demonstrates the complexities of poverty, compounded by weather conditions.

> 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. Fortunately, rescuers, including Idemudia, had dug the child out in time. 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. (*Violence* 1/2)

Iyayi's descriptive and graphic language exposes the material and symbolic nature of social categories. The lower classes are trapped in a deplorable state where nature becomes a hindrance to their will to survive, since it prevents them from going out to look for work: "even one glance outside killed [Idemudia's] desire to go out. The whole street was immersed in flood" (*Violence* 13). The nudge of this space of deprivation, where Idemudia is both a victim and a rescuer, initiates a need to cross the class border. His need persuades him to act and to search for a better life; the life on the other side of the border. He goes out every day from this space of penury to Iyaro and First East Circular, a public extension of his private space where he, as well as other labourers, queues to be employed or bargains tosell his blood for fifteen cents. His employment is two-fold: his labour and his blood, his physical ability and his physiological resources. His survival, therefore, implicates dual border crossings: spatial and corporeal, both of which will be discussed in more detail in my analysis of trans-boundary or interclass relationships.

In terms of intra-class interaction, Adisa is presented as the voice, the constant nudge that brings class consciousness into the reality of the inhabitants. Her emaciated body, which Adélékè Adéèko aptly reads as evidence of class affiliation ("Plotting Class Consciousness" 180), is a physical sign of the depreciating nature of the lower-class territory. Her vocal nature and physique connote an irresistible call to action. What she complains to Idemudia about is explicitly visible on her body,and metaphorically visible in her struggle to keep the house in order despite the withered broom. Iyayi strategically presents a space where the diminishing values of the people and things (Adisa, the broom, the rain, the shrieking eight-spring bed, the collapsing houses) correspond with the deplorable nature of the life of the working class he portrays. For Adéèko, all these are "factors of economic relations …. [a] metaphor for class affiliation" ("Plotting Class Consciousness" 180). In other words, lack and surplus are the defining functions of the opposing territories.

Another level of intra-class interaction exposes Obofun and Queen and the upper-class excesses occupying a socio-economic territory that contrasts that of Idemudia and Adisa's. They are wealthy and influential. They are symbols of the life desired by the lower class. Queen is the antithesis of Adisa, who struggles with Idemudia without any hope of food. Queen already "owned two modern storey buildings in New Benin; one of the houses she lets out to the University at nine thousand naira a year and the University had paid rent for two years in advance. The things a woman could do!" (*Violence* 23). Her numerous extra-marital affairs with politicians are a bid to sustain delivery of free goods for her new motel and to keep her contracts. However, while uncertainty and deprivation trouble the territorial space of the lower class,

infidelity and corruption characterise that of the elites. A typical conversation between Obofun and Queen portrays both their affluence and disturbed space. In one of the scenes, Queen comes to the hotel to show her husband an ultimatum from the government that threatens to terminate her building contract, only to find that he is in the chalet with another woman. She later accuses her husband:

> 'Somebody saw you enter the reserved chalet with a woman [Adisa],' …
>
> 'So you were in there,' Queen accused him.
>
> 'Stop it,' he cried. 'I never ask you what happens to you. Do I?'
>
> Queen stood up. 'You do not ask because you do not care.'
>
> 'And why should I care?' Obofun asked. 'Anyway, let's stop it. There's nothing we can do about it. Besides we have already agreed …' (*Violence* 190)

A few paragraphs after this exchange, she makes her disdain for her husband clear,

> 'Well, go ahead and say it,' she demanded, little flames dancing in her eyes. '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…' (*Violence* 191)

Queen's interaction with her husband in the enclosure of their physical space exposes social elites preoccupied not with poverty and hunger, but with marital infidelity and abuse. They are internally divided and ravaged by familial problems. This is what Niyi Akingbe and Christopher Ogunyemi term "instability and collapse of a family structure among the elites, in which a wife pursues economic freedom so as to create an individuality and a separate personhood" ("Confronting Inequity in Nigerian Social Milieu" 151). Comparing the interactions between Idemudia and his wife with those between Obofun and Queen, one reads deprivation and the will to survive in the former, and affluence and corruption in the latter. While Adisa is the undaunted voice and presence urging Idemudia to a ceaseless struggle against social subjugation, Queen is an equal competitor with the husband in the struggle to maintain the status quo at the expense of morality.

The conversations in the different intra-class units reveal the rate at which bodies are compromised in these social spaces. When Adisa threatened Idemudia with the decision to cross the boundary at the expense of her sexual integrity, Idemudia's reaction was a threat to kill her if she dared give her body in exchange for money (*Violence* 16). In contrast, Obofun and Queen enter a contract of tolerance of each other's sexual excesses (*Violence* 190). Their agreement gears towards maintaining social relevance in a society that codes social difference on achievement and influence. Thus, they compromise their integrity with the political elites on whom they depend for contracts in order to remain socially significant. Empowered by their wealth, they determine the extent of class border permeability and require a similar compromise from the working class who depend on them for sustenance.

Iyayi further interrogates social relations at the points of interaction between the elites and the lower class – the interclass interaction. Beyond material correspondence (the social elites in big mansions and the hotels; the lower class in the city slums), Iyayi exposes the details of class bordering at the points where these material spaces become distinct domains of violence. He relates the public and private places such as the streets, the Ring road, the Iyaro Park, the First East Circular junction, the hospitals, the chalets, the hotels, and the bedrooms as theatres of socio-economic exploitation and physical and psychological exchanges for survival. These public and private places are theatres, where class bordering is violently performed, and where border crossing is enacted and controlled.

Socio-Economic Violence and Border Control

Social categories are interactive in nature. Individuals in different territories, physical and cultural, are either mutually or parasitically dependent. Where the border exists, "there is always someone who wants to cross it [in order] to get to the other side", hence the existence of checks and controls at the border (Newman, "Borders and Bordering" 178). Describing the physical or symbolic area of contact as a transition zone, Newman asserts that, although the borders that exist between social groups are not as impermeable as those between nations and states, both types of borders present similar modes of trans-boundary interactions and control ("On Borders and Power" 18). For him, border control (or management) involves measures of easing or restricting movement between territories. This section takes a deeper consideration of interclass exchange. It analyses acts of exploitation and sexual violence as systemic tools for border management. Interclass contacts in this novel occur at the points of need for the other. In the text, physical, financial, and sexual needs are the bases for the contacts between the borders.

For instance, Queen needs labourers to off-load her three trailer loads of cement before the rain destroys them. She goes to the street and hires Idemudia and three of his friends. Conditioned also by the basic need for food and the constant reminder to struggle against categorisation, Idemudia and his friends accept work at ameagre wage and to the detriment of their health. At this point of contact between the two borders, a sense of psychological violence is obvious in Queen's act of taking advantage of the desperate condition of her workers. Giving them an opportunity for better payment promises an enrichment of the working class and their eventual crossing into the elite territory, so she prefers to underpay them, an act that foregrounds violent border control which ensures restricted movement between the social classes. The relationship is therefore exploitative and parasitic in nature as she preys on the desperation and vulnerability of Idemudia and his like. Queen capitalises on the need, which forces the lower class out to the streets in search of survival opportunities. This explains her immediate engagement of Idemudia in another underpaid job after his return from the hospital, knowing that he cannot resist going out to the parks in search of work.

By narratively constructing interclass interaction,Iyayi makes possible the imagination of social locations and the ways they function. Typical of fiction, the text explores problems of difference by animating the concept of difference in ways conventional historic documents cannot. It transforms abstract ideas of difference into an imaginative and more accessible form. In this way, fiction brings us closer to the complexities and difficulties of social difference that may ordinarily be beyond our individual experience. According to Sarah Chan in her study of the role of fiction in medical ethics, works of fiction enable a personalisation of ethical problems "that fall outside our experience: either outside our immediate personal experience … or outside the limits of our common experience" thereby "stretch[ing] the boundaries of our ethical

imagination" (399). We can say that fiction enables the reader an epistemological border crossing into territories that would have remained only abstract. In *Violence,*we encounter a physical and symbolic movement of characters, conditioned and propelled by need, along the spectrum of social territories, from the privileged to the underprivileged and vice versa.

The physical movement from inside the room to the streets and to the park is symbolic. While it extends the plot of the narrative, it implies a border crossing from the private to the public. It is an extension of the private; an encounter with the public where the social divide is represented because it is in this transition zone that each class interacts according to their status.

> In front of the houses along the street, people sat and watched the weather. Men and women, all jobless, sat on the long wooden benches, their backs against the rough mud walls… Most of the people who walked along the streets were barefooted and as cars passed, some of them in Mercedes Benz cars, they splashed the red muddy water on the people but drove on, carelessly, secure inside. (*Violence* 69)

The lower class is represented in the streets as jobless, loitering, uncomfortable, and barefooted – typical of societal underdogs. The upper class is privileged and separated. They are symbolically bordered off from the "other" by the walls of their Mercedes Benz, as they engage the services of the working class from within the car. Thus, an interclass interaction in the public place exposes an unequal relationship. With particular reference to the prevalence of car in the city space of Johannesburg, Megan Jones asserts that the car embodies power and difference. The car, she argues, underscores "both the acute economic discrepancies persisting in Johannesburg and the ways in which the boundaries constructed between the spaces of wealth and poverty are perforated" (Jones, "Cars, Capital and Disorder" 383). Jones' reading could relate to the figure of the Mercedes Benz cars in the socio-economically unequal society that Iyayi challenges. The car as a bordered and exclusive space depicts the dissimilar level at which the classes physically encounter themselves in the public space. Unlike the lower class, the social elites are secure inside their cars.

Another public space of class interaction is the hospital, which Iyayi describes as "a market of patients" (*Violence* 56). Here, though the characters also seem to be levelled by ill health,the provisions made for the patients are categorised. For instance, when Idemudia breaks down after offloading three trailer loads of cement for Queen under unhealthy labour conditions, he is denied admission to the word reserved for the elites.

> 'We have no beds here either,' he [the doctor] complained.
>
> 'Why, he can share a bed or sleep on the floor,' the nurse suggested. (59)
>
> 'Too many people are already sharing the beds or sleeping on the floor.'
>
> 'What then do we do?'
>
> 'The Senior Service Ward is *almost empty*.' [the doctor said]
>
> 'But you can't send him there,' the nurse said sharply. (*Violence* 60, my emphasis)

The narrator's emphasis on the health condition of the poor masses in this space contrasts with the narrative silence on that of the upper class in the same space, suggesting a difference. The poor patients are "haggard and distraught faces everywhere. Worry had eaten deep into the faces of the majority of them. Wrinkles and cracks were in abundance" (*Violence* 82), but nothing is said about the frail elites. However, what Iyayi achieves by bringing the classes within the same space of frailty is to show the commonality of being human and weak. This commonality is subverted through the codification and social localisation of the hospital spaces by the system, managed and controlled by the elites. In the hospital space, while special wards are designated for the wealthy, the lower class share beds in general wards. Where there are no more beds to share, they take a place on the floor – exposing not only a separation from "special" spaces but the lowest form of dehumanisation. Idemudia's rejection from the reserved elites' wards questions the state's prioritisation of individual status above common humanity and common heritage as citizens.

Iyayi also presents the node of interclass encounter using the metaphor of wrestling. Referring to the haggard faces of the poor patients, the narrator states, "it was evident that these were people [the poor patients] who had been engaged by life in a terrible and fierce struggle and that they had come out of each bout worse and still more badly battered" (*Violence* 56). He deploys a similar metaphor of wrestling and battery in Papa Jimoh's police experience, when he is unjustly arrested for a lost key in the company where he works as a driver. Subjected to inhumane treatment in the prison for two days, he comes out with his "human pride flat[tened] out, knocked down by this cruel bout with *other* human beings" (*Violence* 82, my emphasis). By this, Iyayi presents socio-economic boundaries as conflict zones and interclass interaction as contested. By "cruel bout with [the] other", he suggests an existential struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor. The idea of a cruel bout with reference to socio-economic class struggle echoes the first generation's cultural and ethnic border conflict discussed in the previous chapter. Okonkwo's wrestling with Amalinze formed the background for the social struggle that is narrated in *Things Fall Apart*, which is replicated in Okonkwo's fallout with the colonialist. Okonkwo's and Biafra's conflicts with the new colonial culture and with Nigeria respectively are historical moments of border struggle that leave the weak territory badly battered and, in the case of the latter (Biafra), nominally erased.

In *Violence*, the city presents sites of amalgamation and individualisation. Here, Walter Mignolo's (2000) and Newman's (2003) ideas about the existential conditions of migrants as liminal beings are applicable to Idemudia and the rest of his class, who are at the economic threshold of society. Mignolo believes that migrants "are always dwelling in the borders, whether they reside in the heart of Paris, Berlin, London, New York, or Los Angeles" (*Local Histories/Global Designs* xv). For Newman, stricter border management restricts migrants' access to basic rights "regardless of place of their location in geographical space which may, as is often the case, be in the very heart of the capital city" ("Boundaries" 132). Idemudia's migration from the villages to the city, occasioned by the animosity that exists between him and his father, and his search for a financially enabling opportunity to take care of his divorced mother and siblings, is an economic migrancy that lacks resultant social transformation. Despite his locatedness within the larger space of the city he remains at the margin, exploited by the upper class whose affluence is socially and spatially signified.

Beyond human interaction, the city's topographical network – the connection between Owode Street, Ekanwam Road, and the Ring Road at the centre of the city – evokes a sense of hierarchy and an inevitable trans-boundary interaction. The narrator describes that both Owode Street and

Ekanwan Road lead to New Benin, the centre of the city, and that these roads intersect at the Ring Road. The busyness of the junction is such that human traffic halts the flow of movement and subjects people to a state of confusion. Hence, the narrator explains how both the rich and the poor navigate the Ring Road with similar feelings of pressure. The Ring Road is symbolic of an inescapable chain of interaction between the classes. Adisa "circled the Ring Road along the stalls of the market which flowed with people and red water" (*Violence* 85). Iriso, a supervisor in the Ministry of Agriculture, and Queen also navigate the Ring Road with the same feeling of pressure. The Ring Road merges predators and their prey. The latter drive in exotic cars; the former walk and work under the scorching weather: "truck pushers and cyclists were out again on the road. The earth smelled strongly of the rain but the human flood could not be held back" (*Violence* 85). The crowd described as a "flood" metaphorically evokes the image of the overcrowded cities of Nigeria in the second generation. The Ring Road is also a metaphorical class leveller, where the privileges of the social classes are subsumed into the reality of a postcolonial society. It is a node and a point of intersection that presents borderlessness in the intermingling of classes. By this topographical network and its enactment of compulsory interaction, Iyayi seems to signal the need for border inclusivity.

Interclass interaction also involves an intimate dimension communicated, among others, in sexual and corporeal violence. Sexual and corporeal violence in the text reveal a physical and symbolic border crossing from the public to the private. There is a crossing from the streets to the bedroom or chalets, and symbolically from the exploitation of labour force to that of the body. In the public, borders are fundamentally collective: they constitute an 'us' versus 'them' binary. But in the private, the border is more individualised than collective. Even though the individual is part of the class he/she represents, in the instance of sexual abuse, class differentiation is etched onto individual bodies and memories. Sexual abuse is embodied personally. Obofun and Queen, in their respective bids to violate Adisa and Idemudia, call them from the "there" of the latter's poverty to the "here" of the former's place of affluence. Here class bordering is performed on the material space: a movement from the mud house and the littered streets to the mansion. This physical border crossing from the streets to the mansion/bedroom exemplifies power. By entrapping the lower class in their space, the upper class achieves a massaging of their ego and an assertion of power. In addition, in this spatial movement, they play on the psyche of the vulnerable through an exposure to affluence that serves the purpose of enticing bait and a perpetuation of alterity. Spatial border crossing into the privacy of the upper class' bedrooms and enticement by the affluence of the material space tests the resistance of poor characters.

When Obofun deceives Adisa and takes her to his room, he entices her with the "flagrant display of wealth" in the room, thereby subjecting Adisa to an internalisation of socio-economic inequality. She thinks: "so one man could live so well while others like her starved to death" (*Violence* I68). Obofun opens the wardrobe, exposing goods he intends Adisa to sell, knowing her need for money for her husband's hospital bill. Adisa rejects his offer but he will not take no for an answer. He forces himself on her. He "weighed down heavily on her and her fight was nothing but the last spasmodic movement of a dying animal … and her body was tense but cold and her eyes were vacant, as if she was not here" (*Violence* 169-170). Adisa, though deprivation and need weaken her resolve to totally resist, nonetheless struggles against Obofun's advances, exposing a constant bottom-up pressure and challenge of the border. Recalling Newman's reference to external pressure on state border control, interclass interaction entails "the 'bottom up' process of change, emanating from the daily practices of ordinary people living in the

borderland region" at the margins ("On Borders and Power" 15). On another note, Adisa's rape is a violent and transgressive crossing through her corporeal border. Her sexual violation in exchange for money is not an invitation into affluence, but a creation of an awareness of lower-class dependency and hence maintenance of a border. Obofun's act presupposes violence that is economically empowered and an exertion of patriarchal power. His violation of Adisa is an objectification that ensures class border maintenance; a top-down resistance to border crossing. He desires not to enrich Adisa but to reiterate in her the need to continuously trade her body for her survival.

Similarly to Obofun's sexual violence, Queen's failed seduction of Idemudia is an interclass interaction that also discloses sexual violence aimed at achieving subjugation. Threatened by her labourers (of whom Idemudia is the foreman) who have decided to go on strike unless she increases their wages, Queen desires to maintain the power dynamic through Idemudia. She invites and takes Idemudia into her bedroom and offers him money and sex. However, interclass interaction between Queen and Idemudia exposes a non-compromised border. Unlike Adisa's internalisation and consideration of economic injustice, Idemudia negotiates his identity in relation to moral values. He weighs a symbolic border crossing into affluence at the cost of his integrity. He decides not to compromise borders and rejects Queen's offer of money and sex for financial satisfaction and group sabotage. His resistance epitomises Iyayi's exposition of the revolutionary spirit of the working class that defies being broken by poverty and oppression. Feeling her power challenged, Queen retaliates by exposing Adisa's infidelity to him.

At first, Idemudia is terribly hurt by the discovery that Adisa slept with Obofun. He rushes back to confront his wife. But when he enters the room where Adisa is fast asleep, he is restrained by her fragility. Looking at Adisa, he sees a victim of class border violence, and he understands the reason for her compromised bordering – her giving up to Obofun in exchange for N100 and bottles of whiskey to sell. This flash of understanding is an epistemological border crossing; a movement into awareness. He moves from a lack of knowledge as to why Adisa has compromised the border, to the acknowledgement that she has made the sacrifice for him. He realises that all the poor are victims of one form of corporeal compromise or another: he has compromised the border of his body by selling his blood for money, Adisa has slept with Obofun, and Adisa's aunt lives as a prostitute in the city to feed her children (*Violence* 46). He realises that many of them continue in the same pattern of living, allowing various forms of crossing, especially through the wall of the body, in order to survive socio-economic pressures and violence.

The crossing of borders – the breaking of the corporeal territories by the needle which pierced Idemudia's body as he sold his blood for money (*Violence* 156), the forceful rape of Adisa by Obofun, and the piercing of Iyese's female genitals by Isa Pallat in *Arrows of Rain* (*Arrows* 166) – figuratively and literally evokes dominance and a forced border crossing. Though their bodies belong to them, they seem not to have power over their corporeality due to societal forces resulting from intra-class pressures and interclass attrition. For Newman, these forces are consequences of "internal pressures of change, or externally imposed processes of institutional exclusion" ("On Borders and Power" 19). Violence against the bodies of the vulnerable leaves them with the feeling of defeat as social victims, and at other times deprives them of their voice. The narrator captures Idemudia's deflated spirit at the sale of his blood in these words:

> Momentarily, he had shut his eyes and shivered from the sudden pain when the woman broke the surface of his skin with the sharp end of the big needle before plunging further

> into his vein … and each time after he had sold his blood, he had returned home, subdued and for a reason he could not understand, ashamed. (*Violence* 156-157)

A similar sense of loss befalls Adisa at the point of Obofun's penetration:

> She gritted her teeth and her body was tensed but cold and her eyes were vacant as if she was not here but far, far away… [she] had been impassive, [Obofun] had felt at one stage as if he was making love to a dead woman. (*Violence* 170)

Exploitation, rape, sexual blackmail, denial of voice, and other societal conditions that subjugate the poor to sell their blood or to compromise the border embody structural violence geared towards social-border management. In Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,violence is initiated by the violent, "those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognise others as people – not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognised" (32). Freire believes that the initiator of terror is not the violated "but the violent, who with their power create the concrete situation which begets the rejects of life" (32). Queen, Obufun, and the other elites exert power that subjects Idemudia, Adisa, and the other poor to the status of perpetual "rejects of life", and forms in the psyche of the poor an inescapable prison that either awakens the revolutionary spirit to break off from social imprisonment or keeps the victim in a perpetual exchange of the body for survival. For Idemudia, a revolutionary spirit is awakened when, finally, he leads the labourers on the strike against Queen and the inhumanity of class border which she symbolises.

Conclusion

Iyayi's *Violence* examines the boundaries and management of borders through the spatial and symbolic positions – and dislocations – of its characters. By contrasting the destitution of the masses with the cruelty and affluence of the elites, the text highlights socio-economic categorisation and its violent enforcement. It reveals the complexity of class divisions, where borders are fiercely imposed to restrict social mobility for the lower class. Through its exploration of socio-economic stratification, the novel proposes models for de-bordering and societal change. In portraying capitalism as rooted in exploitation and violence, Iyayi emphasises the pivotal role of class struggle and revolution in realising social transformation. The novel critically revisits Nigeria's history, intertwining past and present traumas to underscore its relevance as a socially committed work of activism. *Violence* scrutinises socio-economic divisions in relation to bodies and spaces, particularly within the context of daily human labor, a core part of the urban network. This structure, dictated by hegemonic forces, requires de-bordering to liberate the oppressed. Ultimately, the novel portrays resistance: Idemudia's rejection of bribery and sexual advances exemplifies the ongoing struggle to challenge and dismantle oppressive borders. Conversely, Adisa's passivity in the face of sexual violence highlights a psychic destabilisation for the social elites, forcing a reconsideration of both power dynamics and collective responsibility. Through these narratives, the novel underscores the persistent need for societal change – the deconstruction of barriers not only between social classes but within the very framework of human relationships.

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