

CLASS CONFLICT IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *NATIVE SON*

AND

FESTUS IYAYI'S *VIOLENCE*

BY

ONWUEGBUNA, MISHAEL

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, MANAGEMENT, AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES, MOUNTAIN TOP UNIVERSITY, OGUN**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project, written under the supervision of **Dr. Promise Adiele**, is an original research work by me. The information derived from the various sources has been duly acknowledged in the text and the list of references provided. This research work has not been presently presented anywhere as the award of any degree or certificate.

ONWUEGBUNA, Mishael

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by ONWUEGBUNA MISHAEL CHIDERA at the Department of Languages, Mountain Top University, Ogun State, Nigeria under my supervision.

Signature-----

Dr. Promise Adiele

Date

(Project Supervisor)

Signature-----

Professor Emmanuel Adedun

Date

(Head of Department)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to Mr & Mrs Onwuegbuna, also to my best friend Tano Wilson, and to Almighty God.

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ABSTRACT

Class conflict also referred to as class struggle is the political tension and economic antagonism that exists in society consequent to socio-economic competition among the social classes or between rich and poor. It is the constant conflict among the existing strata in every society. Class conflict have attracted lots of attention in literary discipline across the world, especially in literature. This is because every day, new class continue to emerge and there is a conflict between those who have money and those who do not have money. Class conflict is as old as man and in every society, there is class conflict. In the two novels there is continuous strife between the two classes-the lower class in *Native Son* is represented by Bigger Thomas and in *Violence* by Idemudia and the root of the class is exploitation.

Class conflict is dangerous because it has the power to affect the later turn-out of a person and leaves a lasting scar. The poor who depends on their labour power for survival are always neglected in the society as the rich controls and runs all the means of production and what they do is to exploit those who work.

The purpose of this academic research is to explore the meaning and importance of class struggle in the context of the selected texts. In order for class conflict to lessen, we need to adopt the Marxist theory which is simply the reaction of the exploited to get rid of exploitation and the exploiters.

Keywords: Class Conflict, Exploitation, Marxist theory, Dehumanization, Strive.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Every society is stratified along the lines that there are those who own and control means of production generally referred to as 'the haves' and there are those who depend on their labour power for survival generally referred to as the 'have-not'. Therefore, in every society, we have the 'haves' and the 'have not'. The 'haves' are regarded as the bourgeoisie and the 'have-not' are regarded as the proletariats. The bourgeoisie are also known as capitalists. They own and control means of production, while the proletariats are the working class; they depend on their labour power for survival. Class struggle is the conflict between the two classes in the society. It is the focus of some writers who recreates class conflict in their works. A typical example is Festus Iyayi in Nigeria and Richard Wright in the U.S. While the bourgeoisie are determined to exploit the working class, the proletariat are determined to achieve a better working condition for themselves. Thus, class struggle is rife in every society. At the root of class struggle is revolution. Majority of the working class feel exploited by the bourgeoisie and when their conditions become deplorable, revolution becomes inevitable.

Karl Heinrich Marx was a German philosopher, political scientist and historian. He is renowned for his contributions towards the attainment of an equitable society. He frowned at exploitation and came up with his own idea of how an equitable society can be achieved, devoid of class contradictions. For Karl Marx, the bourgeoisie exploited the working class who do not have any choice but must accept unfavourable working conditions in order to survive. Marx

came up with a theory of awareness which will galvanize the working class to reject exploitation and dismantle all structures of capitalism. This idea by Marx is what is generally referred to as Marxism. In literature, Marxism is a popular theory which, when applied, in the interpretation of a text, x-rays the society to identify class contradictions and inherent exploitative structures.

Thomas Brock reviewing an article by the Investopedia team posted on the internet remarks that, “according to Marx, every society is divided among a number of social classes, whose members have more in common with one another than with members of other social classes”.(2) Ordinary labourers have little power in the capitalist economic system simply because they do not own the means of production and as such, they are replaceable in days of high unemployment, economic recessions, further devaluing their perceived worth. To maximize profits, business owners have a habit of getting the most of the work out of their labourers while paying them the lowest possible wages which ends up exploiting them. The bourgeoisie also employ social institutions, including government, media, banking and financial systems, as tools and weapons against the proletariat with the goal of maintaining their position of power and privilege.

Since workers have little personal stake in the process of production, Marx believed they would become alienated from it and resentful toward the business owner and their own humanity. The bourgeoisie also employ social institutions, including government, media, academia, organized religion, banking and financial systems, as tools and weapons against the proletariat with the goal of maintaining their position of power and privilege. Ultimately, the inherent inequalities and exploitative economic relations between these two classes will lead to a revolution in which the working-class rebels against the bourgeoisie, seizes control of the means of production, and abolishes capitalism.

Thus, Marx thought that the capitalist system inherently contained the seeds of its own destruction. The alienation and exploitation of the proletariat that are fundamental to capitalist relations would inevitably drive the working class to rebel against the bourgeoisie and seize control of the means of production. This revolution would be led by enlightened leaders, known as the vanguard of the proletariat, who understood the class structure of society and who would unite the working class by raising awareness and class-consciousness. Because of the revolution, Marx predicted that capitalism would be replaced by socialism and then communism and in the final stage of human development; social classes and class struggle would no longer exist. Communism advocates for a classless system in which all property and wealth are communally, rather than privately owned. Socialism focuses on public ownership of the means of production, but individuals may still own property. Capitalism is an economic system characterized by private ownership and a system of laws that protect the right to own or transfer private property. In a capitalist economy, private individuals and enterprises own the means of production and the right to profit from them. Even with the economic inequalities in the capitalist society, even with the recession and depression, there have not been the thought of a free market. Indeed, a society without competition, money, and private property has never materialized, and the history of the 20th century suggests it is likely an unworkable theory. Social classes are hierarchical assemblages of persons that are usually based on wealth, educational attainment, occupation, income or membership in a subgroup or social network. In the United States, social class is a debated issue that has many competing explanations, representations and even discrepancy over its very existence. Many Americans recognize a simple three-tier model that includes the upper class, the middle class, and the working or lower class. The lower class is divided into the working poor and the underclass.

Karl Marx wrote that the power relationship between the capitalists and their workers was inherently exploitative. There is no two ways around the fact that the capitalists would always practice exploitation on the workers and this inevitably leads to class conflict. A conflict which would ultimately lead to a revolution in which the working class or proletariats would overthrow the capitalist class and seize control of the economy i.e., the working class would rebel against the bourgeoisie and seize control of the means of production. The struggle between them is the engine of change and modification in the society structure. This revolution would be led by the head of the proletariats who are enlightened leaders, who understood the class structure of the society and who would unite the working class by raising awareness and class consciousness.

In Festus Iyayi's *Violence* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, two different conflicting classes of society are presented. In *Violence*, Obofun and his wife, Queen endlessly exploit Idemudia and his friends who, as labourers have no choice but to submit to the degrading structures of exploitation because they need the money to survive. Also in *Native Son*, Mr Dalton is presented as an opportunist and exploiter. He represents an American society torn between two conflicting classes, the blacks who are labourers and live in the impoverished parts of the society while their white counterparts live in viable and flourishing parts of the society. It is this kind of skewed and lopsided social structures in the two novels that the theory of Marxism as applied in this study cease to outline, examine and interpret.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The problem is that Marxist analysis of literature insists that a classless society should be realized. However, this study is of the opinion that a classless society cannot be achieved reason

being that nature has set a model, which we must live by. However, the rich cannot continue to exploit the poor because the poor deserves better living conditions. Everyone cannot be equal and as such, people at the lower class make every effort to make means. There seems to be an unending debate among scholars and critics regarding the more viable option whether capitalism should be maintained or socialism should be instituted. The poor are always fighting to achieve an egalitarian society i.e., a society that emphasizes equality and equal treatment across gender, religion, economic status and political beliefs which is difficult because the dream of every poor man or lower-class individual is to make money and be liberated. The world should appreciate that class disparity is a basic element of human existence which cannot be detached or eradicated. Class conflict will continue as it is geared towards achieving social equilibrium, however, this study is not in support of exploitation of the lower class but it supports the notion that the working class and the poor deserves better working and living conditions. This study uses Marxism as a model or a template to develop a new idea of Marxism and the new idea of Marxism while it borrows from the original tenet of Marxism, veers off to develop its own scope in line with neo-Marxism of the 21st century era. Neo-Marxism are new definitions, new ideas, and new explanations of the original Marxist theory. While the original Marxist theory argues for awareness among workers and prescribes revolution as the only means of achieving social equilibrium, the neo- idea of Marxism in this study argues that while social equilibrium is not possible, workers and the poor deserve better living conditions. In order to provide critical insights to these concerns, the research will conduct in-depth studies into Marxism, citing the work of other researchers and intellectuals who have studied the theory. As previously stated, Festus Iyayi's *Violence* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* will be used as primary texts.

1.3 General Aim and Objectives

The goal of this study is to identify and explain class conflict in the two texts chosen for this study and demonstrate how it constitutes major challenges in the society. The four objectives for this study are as follows:

- i. To identify and explain class conflict as a social menace in the texts.
- ii. To identify the psychological damage done to some characters through exploitation.
- iii. To examine and expose factors that promote class conflict in the texts.
- iv. To demonstrate the inevitability of class conflict with examples from the texts.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study explains why social equality in society is not possible but strongly argues for improved working and living conditions for members of the lower class in the society. It is also significant because it adds to the growing voices which maintains that socialism is not the best form of economic or social order. It is crucial because it demonstrates that the poor are not opposed to the wealthy having more money. They simply want a wage that is commensurate with their status. The lower classes are fighting to end the bourgeoisie's merciless dominance over the proletariat. According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “the working man sells his labour-power for its full ‘value,’ that is, for the pay required to create him again the next day, we can observe. But he contributes more than just his monetary worth. This is excess value, which is appropriated by the capitalist. As a result, the worker is robbed at the point of production without the capitalist's knowledge” (37). This is to say, the significance is to demonstrate that a worker can be plundered at the moment of production due to his excess value without the employer intending to do so.

1.5 Research Questions?

- i. Are there class conflicts as a social menace in the texts?
- ii. What psychological damage is inflicted on some characters through exploitation in the texts?
- iii. What are the factors that promote class conflict in the texts?
- iv. What factors promotes the inevitability of class conflict in the texts?

1.6. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative and descriptive, using textual thematic analysis. Themes of race conflict and economic warfare are thoroughly investigated in *Native son*. The study uses Marxist theory for effective analysis. This is due to Marxist theory's view of society, particularly capitalist society, as being politically locked down and restricting people's freedom. The two texts *Violence* and *Native son* are the primary source, while journals, the internet, and magazines are the secondary sources for this research.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Class conflicts: According to Marxism, there are two main classes of people: the Bourgeoisie and Proletariats. The bourgeoisie controls the capital and means of production, and the proletariat provides the labour. Class conflict arises when the proletariats work and struggle to attain a better form of living conditions while the bourgeoisie exploit them to expand their business capitalist enterprise.

Exploitation: exploitation is the act of using someone unfairly for personal gain. According to Marx, the exploiters are the bourgeoisie and the exploited would typically be the proletariat. Exploitation can be direct or indirect. It could be direct or indirect in a sense that in the capitalist

economy, workers are paid according to their value which is the source of all wealth. Capitalists are able to purchase labour power from the workers, who can only bring labour power in the market i.e., their labour power comes with a price. Once capitalists are able to pay the workers less than the value produced by their labour, surplus labour results in the capitalists' profit. This is the real meaning of exploitation in the context of class conflict.

Dehumanization: this is the denial of full humanness in others and the cruelty and suffering that accompanies it. It is the viewing and treatment of other persons as anything lesser than a human being. It describes a person who acts inhumanely towards humans and considers a human being as either an individual species or an individual object. Slaves are treated as such both in the ancient and in the modern times. In many capitalist societies, the proletariats are dehumanized by the bourgeoisie.

Emancipation: this refers to any effort to acquire economic and social rights, political rights or equality, often for a specifically disenfranchised group. It is being set free from the control of someone or something. It is synonymous to liberation, freedom. Emancipation explains crises and conflicts in terms of oppression by a power structure. Every proletariat wants to be free from the control of the bourgeoisie. This is why they work hard and put in lots of efforts in their day-to-day activities. They want to own power, property, and control so they need enough money and connections to be liberated from the title proletariat.

Marxism: this is a theory propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the year 1845. The theory seeks to rouse all the working class and commoners in the society to reject oppression and exploitation while aspiring for better living conditions. It seeks to abolish all forms of social differences and collapse all structures of class differentiation. It preaches revolution as a means through which an equitable society can be achieved. The goal of Marxism is to achieve a

classless society where everyone is equal. To put it more directly, Marxism seeks to enthrone communism.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the class bent of this study, a critical theory that captures its various perspectives would be required to further develop the ideas in this study. As a result, Marxism would be used. This theory was chosen because its tenets outline the history of class conflicts and the arising tensions in social stratification. Marxism is a theory propounded by Karl Heinrich Marx, a German political scientist, historian, philosopher and social crusader. It is the science of the fundamental law which regulates nature and society. Karl Marx was a great thinker who was best recognized for his ardent anti-capitalist rhetoric, but he also gave substantial philosophical and cultural arguments. His works are separated into two periods: the philosophical, idealist, early Marx and the mature, scientific, and materialist Marx, but he oscillated between a concentration on consciousness change and an insistence on the primacy of material conditions for consciousness development. He was one of the most outstanding, important, and revolutionary minds of his time, having been born on the 5th of May in the year 1818 and dying on the 14th of March in the year 1883. He was the son of a successful lawyer, and he studied law at Bonn and Berlin, where he was exposed to G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy. He became a member of the Young Hegelian movement in university, which aggressively opposed the political and cultural establishment of the time. G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy inspired him to join the movement and build Marxist theory. He became a journalist, but due to the radical character of his articles, he was banished by the German government. Marx's central philosophical doctrine was Historical materialism, which holds that the economic antagonism between various social classes is the driving force behind human historical development. Marx became famous during his lifetime as

a result of his theories of capitalism, communism, and Marxism. While his own field of economics, Marxian economics, has largely fallen out of favour among modern mainstream thought, he was heavily inspired by classical political economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Marx's views have had a significant impact on society, particularly in communist projects like the USSR, China, and Cuba. Among modern scholars, he has a significant influence in the domains of political economy, sociology, and heterodox economics. Marx also mentioned social disparity in one of his works, claiming that it was a result of the arrival of the division of labour and, more importantly, that it was what led to the class society. Because bourgeoisie and proletariat are concepts from Marxism that go hand in hand with the research objectives, these notions will be able to explore how people in power misuse power and use it to inflict pain on the masses.

By studying Marxism, one can gain a better understanding of the relationships that exists among the various classes in the society. The theory focuses on how the capitalist class, those who have wealth and control every means of production, make profits by employing the working class and underpay them through brutal exploitation. It can be described as a method or theory of self-emancipation for the working class. It can also be described as a political, social, and economic philosophy that looks at how capitalism affects labour, productivity, and economic growth. Marxism emphasizes that the evolution of the state is defined by the conflict between social classes, particularly between the bourgeoisie, capitalists, and proletariat. Capitalists have a constant desire to seize control of the factors of production from the masses. The only way for the economy to grow is to take control of it away from private ownership. Marx and Engels observe that, “by bourgeois, we mean people in the modern capitalist class, owners of the means of social production and wage labour employers” (57). This means that the bourgeoisie own the

means of production such as factories, companies, and workshops, and they are also shareholders in companies. Bourgeois are also known as the "Haves", the rich, employers, and business owners of the time are today's Bourgeois. They make certain that their children attend the best schools and that they have no contact with the underprivileged (Proletariats). According to Marx and Engels, capitalism "chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe in search of a constantly expanding market for its products." It has to nestle, settle, and form connections all throughout the place" (63). The bourgeoisie has brought the rural under the control of cities and has overpopulated metropolitan areas in comparison to rural areas. It also caused autonomous or underdeveloped or peasant nations to become dependent on dependent or developed or capitalist nations, as well as the East to become dependent on the West.

According to Karl Marx, the proletariat's labour has been exploited by the owners of the means of production; people have been turned into machines for them, working long hours for low pay in order for the bourgeois to live comfortably with their families. Workers labour solely to survive and eat, not to live well, and they also work solely to send their children to schools, albeit not the best and because all they work for is to enrich the bourgeoisie, the Proletariat is sometimes described as slaves. When Marx wrote, "Masses of labourers, jammed into the factory, are organized like troops," he was referring to the proletariat (70). Since the task is now simple and easy for him, the wage rate of the workers has been decreased as a result of the broad use of machinery and division of labour. The wage rate is presently decreasing as the amount of work grows. However, the irony is that it is not as simple as it appears, because as the use of machines and divisions of labour develops, the load of toil increases as well, whether through longer working hours, increased labourer work, or other means. If life were a film or a book, the proletariats would be the protagonists and the bourgeoisie would be the antagonists. Marx later

split society into three classes; they are members of the upper class, often known as the bourgeoisie, who own businesses. The second group is the middle class, often known as the petty bourgeoisie, which includes lawyers, doctors, and small-business owners. They don't possess any means of production, but they want to be affluent, which makes them bourgeois. The lower class, often known as the proletariats, which is made up of workers and employees. The Marxist theory is mainly concerned with how the bourgeoisie regard the proletariats; they see them as people who labour for them and earn a wage from them. The theory also wanted people to see and understand this, so it may be put to an end before it gets out of hand.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many writers have written copiously on Iyayi's *Violence* and Wright's *Native Son*, interpreting both of them from the perspective of Marxism. This is because the writers in both novels presents two different classes where one class oppresses or exploits the other class. The presentation is done in such a way that members of the lower class in both novels are encouraged to revolt against their oppressors and become free from all forms of exploitation. These writers, although without explicitly suggesting it, prescribe communism or social equilibrium as the best form of society. This differs from the prescription of this study because this study finds that social equality is not possible. As a result of this, the study prescribes that the working class should become aware of their miserable conditions and aspire for better living conditions. It also challenges the capitalist class to appreciate and treat their class counterparts in a more humane way.

Pedi Anawi remarks that "the characters in Festus Iyayi's *Violence* comes in two distinct categories. On the one hand, there are those who own the capital. On the other hand, there are those who do not possess the capital." (3) This means that the society is divided into two- the lower class and the capitalist class. Idemudia and his friends representing the stereotypical lower class and Queen and Obofun representing the capitalist who exploits the people for their personal gain Iyayi contrasts a vivid picture of the Nigerian society as being partitioned into two clearly

distinct groups – the Bourgeoisies and the Proletariats. Idemudia, Adisa, Osaro and the Jimoh family represent the working class burdened by poverty and made to suffer appalling work conditions and poor remunerations. This class of workers put in so much but are not able to benefit tangibly from their labour, thus they are locked in a vicious circle of extreme labour and extreme poverty. The Bourgeoisies are represented by Obofun, Queen, Iriso, Dala, Commissioners, General Igreke, Azonzo and the likes. This class of capitalists is portrayed as parasitic by Iyayi. The immense riches of the wealthy are derived from the exploitation of the working class. Ujowundu Cornel remarks that “the world of the masses ‘the Idemudias’ in *Violence* is in the world of abject poverty, penury, squalor and want. The poor people live in the slum of Owode Street.” (18) This means that most of working class in the society are made up of the masses and are subjected to poverty, want, and penury if they do not work. The rich inflict suffering on them by building houses where the poor are required to pay high rent to acquire and because they want better living conditions, they are willing to sacrifice most of their pride just to get food on the table.

Anderson Ugwu employs his readers to notice the importance of fighting to get out of poverty in a dignifying manner and not allowing the oppression and exploitation of the bourgeois just as Festus Iyayi uses the character, Idemudia, in *Violence* to explain this. Idemudia and his friends noticed this exploitation and when his friends suggested that they revolt, he brought up an alternative solution to talk to Queen about their plight and agree on a level-ground. According to Will Dobbie (2009), conflict emerges as a result of the proletariat and bourgeois attempting to dominate the forces of production. The proletariats, who provide the labor, are constantly at odds with the bourgeoisie, who own the tools of production. This is exemplified by the various disputes between the proletariat (laborers) and the bourgeois (Queen) when they organize and

down tools several times in order to seek greater compensation for their services on her numerous construction sites. Queen's reaction to the strikes typifies the government's weak and frequently insensitive response to workers' requests during Nigerian labor issues. Rather of improving workers' working conditions, Queen resorts to desperate measures to put down the strike, including using intimidation and, if necessary, sexual inducement to persuade Idemudia to call off the action. This is depicted in the several willingness to sell his blood on a daily basis just to be able to cater for the immediate needs of his immediate family:

And what hadn't he done to earn money? He had even sold his blood to make money. Yes, given out pints of his blood for as little as fifteen naira a pint. Sold his blood so that he and Adisa would not starve, so that they could survive (154).

His struggle against poverty describes the unfortunate fate of the poor unemployed workers burdened by hunger, joblessness, poverty and the non-availability of social amenities and security.

Karl Marx plainly stated in the communist manifesto that history is a series of class battles over the means of production. Whoever has control of the means of production also has control of society and may impose their thoughts and beliefs on the lower classes. Bigger, like the rich, white people, wishes for a better life, but discrimination is all too common, and it appears that the only way Bigger might improve his condition is if he were white. Bigger aspired to attend a flight school. "You could fly a plane if you weren't black, had enough money, and they would let you go to aviation school," Gus adds. (17) This demonstrates the capitalist structure that maintains Bigger and the lower class in a low-wage, hard-working proletariat class. Bigger, for example, is compelled to abandon whatever dreams he may have and is barred from visiting

certain locations. Discrimination was rampant, and it influenced how black people saw white people.

CONCLUSION

The concepts of class struggle and poverty define the history of all existing human civilization. As Class struggle has persisted through history, between freeman and slave, lord and serf, bourgeois and proletariat, oppressor and oppressed, poverty also gradually crept into the fabric of humans and has remained to date. Two broad ranks in constant opposition to one another, a fight that often end in a revolution changing the social order or at times leading to the common ruin of the contending classes and birth of other social ranks. Class struggle is an inevitable means to an end; it is not just a battle against capitalism, it is a constant revolt against any social system that creates an immoral hierarchy by which the weak and poor are exploited by the privileged. The class struggle between the proletariats and bourgeoisie mirrors the irreconcilable character of the class interests. A constant struggle is, therefore, going on between employers and workers over wages. Political struggle is also a brand of class struggle, demanding for a change in the social system. The duo of Richard Wright and Festus Iyayi are both American and Nigerian writers representing different generations of writers, yet both affirmed the existence of class stratification in the Nigerian society. While Richard shows the discrimination of the whites towards the blacks or negroes, Iyayi on his part delineates between men as there is clearly inequality and an unlevelled playing field brought about by education and politics amongst humans irrespective of gender. *Native son* and *Violence*, x-ray the extent of class struggle in the context of the African and American society. Subthemes such as poverty, violence, gender discrimination, sexual exploitation, corruption, etc. were also expressed. Thus, in both texts there are varying characteristics that determine the social classes of each generation. Class struggle

will not be easily eradicated or preventable until democratic principles, human rights, equity and justice are imbibed: “Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, until the colour of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes, until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race, the dream of lasting peace remain but a fleeting illusion.” (Bob Marley: 1976). The clarion call is for all humans irrespective of colour, gender, religion or social standing in society to embrace the principle of equity and create a level playing ground for all of humanity so that peace can permeate the world.

CHAPTER THREE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

3.1a Poverty: Denial of Choices in *Violence*

Clothing, good health and proper medical care, better shelter, improved diet, dreams and expectations, joys and sorrows, quality education, high self-esteem, stable job and good savings, a desire to provide for the family, meeting people and making names, having fun, and general good living conditions are all basic aspirations that all living human being desires and values. Human dignity and worth are inextricably linked. But it is in the near-impossible choices with which human beings are frequently confronted that they differ. It is these impossible choices that form the hallmark of poverty: endemic dilemmas and challenges whose solutions are nowhere available, constituting horrible traps that make life more depressing. In these the poor feel negative, inferior, passive, hopeless and powerless, exposed to series of negative events and ‘bad luck’, including illness, depression, eviction, joblessness and job loss, criminal victimization, exploitation and general life stress. These encapsulate the horrors and tribulations that keep people like Idemudia, Adisa, Osaro, Patrick, Richard, Omoifo, and all the starving labourers at Iyaro in Festus Iyayi's *Violence* trapped in poverty and unable to escape. Poverty issues are not

only obvious, but also conspicuous in Idemudia. He is young and optimistic, but he lives on the precipice of disaster all of the time. In the evenings, he and his wife go to bed on an empty stomach, with no hope of a meal the next day. He calculates that he can go a few days without working for pay before running out of money – he always runs out of money and is deeply in debt.

Their lone kid has been sent to live with his destitute grandmother in the village, while they struggle in the city of Benin with hunger and poverty, living as they do in a wretched house with a leaky roof, a bed that "talks," and doors that "cry." Idemudia, against his will, beats up his starving wife for forbidding him from leaving the house unless he has given her the day's meals. And when he finally went out looking for job, he kept her hungry for a whole day. And this was neither the first nor the second instance.' (37) He sells his blood for fifteen naira on another time to feed his family (154), then unloads 1500 sacks of cement from three trailers into a ware house with buddies on an empty stomach for a pittance amid the hard conditions of an all-day rain. The narrator's description captures the men's pitiful situation perfectly:

The four men toiled for more than four hours to clean the cement. Osaro and Patrick stayed on top of the trailer, passing the bags of cement to Idemudia and Omoifo, who carried them to the shed, which was more than ten meters away, on their heads or backs. They roared as they worked at first.... However, their yelling gradually faded. (52)

They fell silent as the evening progressed, and as the hours passed, they became exhausted. On the ground, the men dragged their feet. The men on the trailer were fatigued and exhausted, leaning against the strewn cement bags. They were all hungry, too. Their backs hurt, their stomachs hurt, and their heads hurt as well. But they had to keep working because they were

hungry and needed the money to buy food. They didn't even exchange glances anymore. Hunger gnawed at their stomachs and tore at their hearts, almost making them dizzy. They breathed in thin, long, sharp gasps. They worked mechanically, yet resolutely, stubbornly, and without giving up. And there was the money in the back of each man's mind. It costs five naira. Nothing much, but enough to soothe the keen sting of hunger, each man knew (34).

His exploitation is a result of his poverty. He nearly dies from weariness and spends days in the hospital, and even if he made 100% of his salary from that work, he couldn't pay his hospital cost. Adisa, his wife, is in a severe financial predicament, unable to eat and pay her husband's medical cost. After considerable persuasion, she agrees to have an extramarital affair with Obofun in exchange for a hundred-naira payment and cartons of premium wine to sell. Unfortunately, or perhaps luckily, Idemudia is able to leave the hospital with the help of his friends and does not require the use of "sex money." Adisa's sacrifice was for naught because Idemudia didn't need the money in the end. This caused her to have a nervous breakdown because she had slept with Obofun because she didn't want to lose her husband. It could have been averted if they had arrived sooner. In essence, what happens to city dwellers, or job seekers, in postcolonial African countries remains a mystery. This is another theme for Iyayi in *Violence*. Musa Mushang discusses the plight of rural dwellers who move to the city in Rene Dumont's *False Start in Africa*: "These people will eventually finish up in the shanty slums of the capitals, where they will become society parasites." As a result, life in the city of the story is full of aches and pains, as well as conflict and hardship. Poor housing, malnutrition, unemployment, despair, agony, famine, cold, alienation, ill health, and suffering, as well as those listed in *Violence*, are examples of such experiences. In the novel *Violence*, the deprived masses of Owode Street are used as an objective and physical gauge of the characters and their material destitution.

Residents of the street are subjected to everything that suffocates joy, as well as all of the other essential aims for a decent living that were mentioned previously in this chapter:

The gutters were full of thick crimson water late at night, and the frogs croaked hoarsely. Flies were also there, and because the water was still warm, mosquitoes swarmed the area, doing havoc. There were countless puddles of water on the winding, unkempt, and uneven road. People waited in front of their homes along the street, waiting for the weather to change. Unemployed men and women sat on long wooden benches, their backs to the mud walls. The kids were mostly nude, underweight, and had sores on their legs that they used to ward off the insects. The bulk of them going down the street were barefooted, and as cars passed by, some of which were Mercedes Benz cars, they splashed the red unclean water on them, yet walked on, nonchalantly, safe inside. (69) Individuals and their physical surroundings – in this example, Owode street inhabitants – do have a relationship:

Truckers and bicycles were once again on the road. Despite the fact that the terrain smelled like rain, the human flood could not be stopped. It was already gushing violently down the street. The market was swamped with people and red water. Because of the severe rain, some of the dirt, filth, and decay ringed the stalls, the people, and their stuff, and the gutters separating the booths were overflowing with filth and decay. Others marched on them despite the fact that they were barefooted. It was difficult to determine if the dirt came from the people, their stalls, or the ruins. They were all completely mingled, completely interwoven. Idemudia and Adisa, who embody the story's despairing poor, would not have chosen to live in an artificial cage they refer to as a house, where their room's door "yawned with age and rust when it opened" (37).

Their single room contains a single wooden chair, table, cooking pots, kerosene stove, food cupboard, water pot, glasses with broken edges that they use even more than newer ones; their

sweeping broom, which is too short for comfort and is getting shorter due to the rough floor; and their pillow, which has worn patches in many places (206-210). The couple's difficult living situations are clearly seen in their feeding and dressing habits. In fact, the worn-out and shabby clothing they wear denotes that they belong to a lower social class.

After hitting Adisa for refusing to allow him go out, Idemudia had no other pair of trousers to wear except the one "that was patched on its seat" — the latter's trousers had torn at the zip (15). Adisa has only one Christmas outfit to which she devotes her undivided attention. Moreover, economic improvement alone will not be enough to erase poverty. Simple health improvements would also have a significant impact. Several people perish as a result of diseases that may have been prevented or healed. The fact that basic causes account for a huge percentage of all fatalities highlights the ridiculousness of people's poverty. The lack of proper health care to meet residents' basic desire for good health is the sole cause of these deaths. We see horrible scenes of hospitals in poor condition in the novel *Violence*:

“Even at that hour, the University Hospital was full. It was a heart-breaking sight. There were a lot of sick persons that needed medical help. All of the long benches had been taken. The porch outside was packed with patients who could stand. Several of the people in line coughed a lot. Mothers carrying sick youngsters scurried around frantically. Those waiting had grave, solemn, and worried expressions on their faces.” (53)

Nevertheless, the patients have little choice but to seek medical care from these facilities, which may be mistaken for glorified dispensaries. These are haggard and disturbed people with wrinkles and cracks all over, people who have been engaged in a horrible and intense struggle with life and have always come out worse and worse battered with each bout, yet they still

struggle and aspire to keep their slim embers of life burning. Attempting to prevent death appears to serve no purpose; the amount of evidence of life is both distressing and unsatisfactory. Even while women wept, children cried, and men sat or stood in wards with steely watery eyes, coughing and spitting and going to the restroom on a regular basis, there was a stubborn determination in each pair of eyes not to give up life, no matter how filthy or degrading it was. As a result, they must continue to work in hospitals with insufficient beds; hospitals where patients are given prescriptions and told to go to a pharmacy to obtain the drugs; hospitals where two patients share a bed, each with a strange illness; hospitals where more deaths occur on a daily basis; hospitals where patients are turned away from hospitals because no one will be held accountable. This ward was like a pigsty, swarming with sick people as a pit toilet swarms with flies. (54-108). The impoverished patients in these hospitals are abused not just by their physical surroundings and the ruthless, uncaring hospital staff, but also by natural factors collaborating with them to further punish them: When she (Adisa) arrived, there were only a few patients laying in the corridor in front of the ward. They had nowhere else to go as the rain crashed down on them. The facility was crowded to the point of being a prison camp. The few beds were jammed with the majority of the people. In the areas between the mattresses, some people slept on the ground. Patients were treated cruelly, as if they were criminals. Idemudia shared a bed with a malnourished tiny dry man with a never-ending cough. While he wasn't coughing, he was yelling Anuoha furiously (76 - 77). Idemudia and his wife are unable to acquire healthy food due to their significant financial commitment. They do not, however, have a permanent job that would allow them to meet their basic needs, and they have no chance of finding one. Because they need food to exist, the food they receive falls short of what is required for a decent life. The irony we witness when Idemudia feels unwell after unloading the cement trailers on an empty

stomach is both theatrical and painful. The fact that hunger and famine account for a considerable fraction of all deaths exemplifies the absurdity of people's poverty. Idemudia feels ill because he hasn't eaten in two days, he goes to work hungry, assuming that his salary will allow him to eat a decent lunch. However, what happens after he's spent hours unloading cement bags is far more than he bargained for. 'The first thing is to get him something to eat,' the hospital doctor informs Adisa. He started writing a prescription.

'The majority of the medications you require are not available locally. To get them, go to Everyman's Chemists in New Benin.' Adisa gave a bemused nod. Chemists for everyone! What was supposed to happen with the money? The doctor began to talk once more. 'You must act quickly since he has lost a significant amount of strength.' 'Go get some milk, sugar, and an Ovaltine tin.' (61).

Adisa's cuisine is a wonderful caricature of a decent supper that she prepares for him. She bought one Bonga fish, three garri milk tins, a handful of bitter leaves, and half a bottle of palm oil at the market. At home, she had some salt and pepper. She took another glance around. Was there anything else she required? No, she was in desperate need of everything. She looked around to see what else she could buy with the money she had. Nothing else was available. (85) What are the choices that are impossible to make? Adisa may have purchased crayfish, meat, magi, semovita, stock fish, and any other condiments capable of emitting a pleasant aroma - a sign of good food. If Idemudia's poverty is conspicuous there are other characters in the novel like Patrick and the other labourers whom poverty has defined their lives too. In order to provide for his family Patrick has to disagree with fellow workers who want to embark on strike to force their client to increase their wage. Of Patrick the narrator says,

“Patrick had been out of any kind of work nearly six months. He didn’t want to lose the job he had found, come what may. His wife was pregnant and failure to earn a few naira this month would be catastrophic. He needed money badly and a strike threatened the only source of hope he had.” (266)

Poverty is defined by a lack of options, and the poor are constantly confronted with a surplus of impossible choices. The anonymity of the average man has become abstracted and shadowed. The novel's beggars, for example, are shown as social outcasts. Poverty has left them frustrated and on the verge of ruin. They're caught in a world that's both terrible and depressing. They yearn for the simple and predictable pleasures of life enjoyed by the wealthy, yet poverty restricts their options.

3.1b Exploitation: the upper class and lower class in *Violence*.

If it makes them feel better, the wealthy are always ready to step on people. There are wars between the higher and lower classes, which are both small in number. There is a struggle for survival, and everyone is willing to go to any length to obtain even a single square meal every day. We can see that Idemudia sells his blood for money in order to feed himself and his wife. When Idemudia's mother takes in her grandson, she plays an important role. This relieved the strain on the parents, who were finding it increasingly difficult to care for him. They can struggle to make ends meet without considering the boy's situation at home.

They are free to return home at any time, and even when Idemudia and Adisa dispute, the boy is unconcerned. At the very least, he won't have to go through what he went with his father abusing his mother. The unhealthy situation of “unfaithful” indulgence of Idemudia’s wife, Adisa is another important factor to consider. It is termed “unfaithful” because the futility of her action is

heightened when Idemudia's friends, Osaro and Patrick, settled the hospital bills of her husband, Idemudia. Even though culture disapproves of adultery and sexual liberties outside of marriage, Adisa's case is however understandable and possibly justifiable when seen in the light of the fact that she is ready to get help for her husband who is recuperating at the hospital. The hospital bills are actually what propel her to commit adultery. From another direction, Arisa's character resonates the ideal woman, who would give anything humanly possible for the man she loves. One of such instances is reflected as:

“No man is worth suffering for”, her aunt had said... our men test their manhood by their ability to beat their wives, not by their ability to protect their wives and provide for their children. You are still a beautiful woman, Adisa. But, Auntie, Adisa said, how could I leave him? Oh, Adisa, you are a beautiful young girl still and you will see how the men will run after you. That husband of yours is a fool. She shook her head. No, Auntie, she said, I cannot leave him. I couldn't stay in a room all by myself, and I would die if the hands of other men were to touch me. Honestly, I could not bear it. I would die!” (46-47)

This is one of the various dimensions of Arisa's affection and faithfulness to her husband. This, of course, is unlike the proudly and self-centred Queen, who is ruthlessly efficient in celebrating bad conduct and selfishness. The author proceeds to celebrate and contrast heavily the great ingenuity of the character of Queen as she utters thus, “From now on, I am going to do whatever I like whenever I like and wherever I like” (p.204). In essence, Queen is everything Adisa is not. Again, the writer uses the two characters to signify the contrasting nature of two characters. The character of Adisa is introduced in the midst of nothingness and emptiness while the character of Queen is shown in abundance and resourcefulness. Adisa is trapped in poverty like her husband

and yet she maintains decency. This is the situation the female characters find themselves in the experience of the systems.

3.1c the subject of oppression in *Violence*

In *Violence*, the theme of oppression is highly prominent. “An act of oppression, tyranny, a sensation of anguish or being weighed down, dullness of spirit, pressure” are all definitions of oppression (Chambers Dictionary, 1186). The offenders and perpetrators of oppression in *Violence* are the wealthy, the government, and government agents. Ordinary men and women are troubled, burdened, and frustrated; they are despondent as a result of their circumstances' ordeals. Children are born into the poverty that their parents have accumulated in a corrupt society where nepotism and favouritism are the norm. In *Violence*, the downtrodden appear to be beyond redemption. It can be associated with Ogbe hospital, which symbolizes the class distinction in the society and portrays the level of inequality in the society. While there is lack of beds in the male ward, empty rooms are reserved for special people of the society as evident in the novel.

The writer observes that:

“They have been referred here from the University Hospital because there are no beds there... We have no beds here either, he complained. Why, he can share a bed or sleep on the floor, the nurse suggested. Too many people are already sharing beds or sleeping on the floor ...What then do we do? ...Can you bring a mattress from home? Adisa nodded vaguely. That would reduce her to sleeping on bare iron springs. Or perhaps ... I guess he can share a bed with the patient from Asabi... (59-60)”.

Though ironic and satirical, Iyayi brings the reader to the disturbing condition at the hospital where life is meant to be saved. This is the society with so much resources and potential but what characterizes the existence of the majority is abject poverty.

Iyayi's *Violence* illustrates different levels of violence suffered by the citizenry especially the oppressed. The writer notes various deaths, injuries, disintegration, dearth of infrastructural facilities and unemployment in the society. He notices that there are broad ranges of strategies for prevention of death and injuries and for the provision of social amenities in the society. However, none seems to be effectively or sufficiently in place. These he sees as a systematic failure on the part of the government. The writer suggests to the people, in Africa, Nigeria in particular, to concern themselves more with the practical aspect than the theoretical aspects of revolution. He articulates exactly how today freedom struggles embody new passions and forces in relation to revolution. Amidst the happenings and devastating effects of violence, the writer suggests innovative solutions to the masses. The writer believes strongly that through revolution there would be potential improvement in the lives of the less privileged. Although the writer suggests revolution as a way out, revolution is another form of violence.

In conclusion, Iyayi makes use of contrast of characters to show an image of how the society is and the division that exists i.e., the rich and the poor. He draws on the sour relationship between the rich and the poor in an attempt to confront issues relating to societal edifices squarely. Iyayi focuses on his characters to demonstrate who is being exploited and by whom. The novel touches on poverty, the manipulation of the rich against the poor, and the indomitable strength of the human spirit, to persevere and succeed. On several occasions, the civilian and downtrodden are depicted as the unfortunate majority while the highly placed in the society are constantly reflective of the exploiters. It is the writer's ambition to project the poor as the

innocent ones of the crisis instigated by the bad leadership that failed to provide the basic necessities of life and the implementation of the constitution of the country to its citizenry. The detailed portrayal of Iyayi's *Violence* emphasizes the hostile and tragic turn of the entire events in leading to structural, psychological, and physical effects of the human lives. The writer urges the masses to be the agents of change against the glaring insecurity, unemployment, falling standard of education, poverty and corruption, through revolution. He, however, writes the text to weaken the position of the powerful and allocates primacy to the majority. The author emphasizes that the various segment of violence in the system could be tackled through the course of revolution, which will bring about unity and coherence.

3.2a the effect of racism on the oppressed and the effect of racism on the oppressor in *Native son*.

On the oppressed_ Wright's examination of Bigger's psychological degradation provides a fresh look at the repressive effects of racism on the black community in 1930s America. The relentless bombardment of racist propaganda and racial injustice that Bigger faces as he grows up has caused him psychological harm. Whites are depicted as wealthy sophisticates in the movies he watches, while blacks are depicted as forest savages. He and his family live in dismal and overcrowded quarters, facing socially imposed poverty and having little educational opportunities. The outcome is a combustible mix of intense rage and powerful terror in Bigger's attitude toward whites. He sees "whiteness" as an oppressive and hostile force working against him in life. Bigger does not see himself as an individual, just as whites do not see him as an individual. To him, all whites are the same, frightening and untrustworthy. Bigger's inadvertent killing of Mary Dalton does not overwhelm him with guilt as a result of his hatred and terror. Instead, he has a strange elation because, for the first time, he has proclaimed his own identity

against the white forces conspiring to destroy it. Throughout the novel, Wright depicts the ways in which white racism puts black people under duress—and hence puts them in danger. Black people face economic subjugation and are obliged to act submissively in front of their oppressors, while the media presents them as animalistic brutes. Given such circumstances, as Max contends, it is unavoidable for blacks like Bigger to retaliate with violence and hatred. Wright, on the other hand, underlines racism's cruel double-edged effect: while Bigger's violence is motivated by racial hatred, it only serves to exacerbate racism in American society by confirming racist whites' core concerns about blacks. Whites easily convert blacks into their own negative notions of "blackness" in Wright's portrayal.

It was only when Bigger meets Max and begins to see white people as individuals does Wright give any hope for stopping the racism cycle. Only when blacks and whites share a sympathetic understanding will they be able to see each other as individuals rather than stereotypes.

On the oppressor Racism has a negative impact on the white population because it inhibits whites from understanding the true humanity that exists inside the oppressed groups. Indeed, Wright's extraordinary ability to explore the psychology of both the oppressed and the oppressors is one of *Native Son's* greatest strengths as a chronicle of the effects of oppression.

Wright illustrates that racism is destructive to both groups, though for very different reasons. Many whites in the novel, such as Britten and Peggy, fall victim to the obvious fallacy of racism among whites: the unthinking sense of superiority that deceives them into considering blacks as less than human. Bigger is able to utilize Wright's sense of superiority in his cover-up of Mary's murder, demonstrating that it is a flaw. Bigger understands that a man with Britten's

preconceptions would never believe a black man could do what Bigger has done. Bigger does, for a time, manage to avoid suspicion.

Other white characters in the novel—particularly those with a self-consciously progressive attitude toward race relations—are influenced by racism in deeper and more complex ways. Though the Daltons, for instance, have made a fortune off of exploiting blacks, they aggressively position themselves as philanthropists sympathetic to the black American cause. We perceive that they maintain this masquerade in an effort to avoid confronting their guilt, and we recognize that they may even be unconscious of their own deep-seated racial prejudices. Mary and Jan exhibit a subtler sort of racism, as they intentionally seek out black people to befriend and treat them as equals, but ultimately fail to appreciate them as individuals. The consequences of this failure are catastrophic. Mary and Jan's naive assumption that Bigger will accept their relationship leads them to miss the likelihood that he will react with distrust and fear, which is a legitimate reaction given that Bigger has never been treated so warmly by whites. In this way, Mary and Jan are duped by their failure to perceive Bigger's individuality in the same way that an overt racist like Britten is duped by his lack to acknowledge Bigger's humanity. Finally, Wright depicts racism from both the white and black perspectives, highlighting that even well-intentioned whites exhibit prejudices that feed into the same black conduct that validates racist whites' sense of superiority.

3.2b Hunger

The poor characters in the novel are always hungry and as such, they are forced to go to any length to satisfy themselves...says “a hungry man is an angry man”. They took on menial jobs as the stereotype prevents them from getting good paying jobs. Bigger’s friends- Gus, G.H., and Jack always plan and execute robberies on the blacks together. One day, they decided to steal

from a white shopkeeper, Mr. Blum, but because they were afraid of the consequences if they should be caught stealing from a white man, they abstained from following through on their plan. Bigger started working as a chauffeur for Mr. Dalton so he could earn a living. It was from this, things went awry. He met his doom when he accidentally killed Mary, Mr. Dalton's daughter and also out of fear, killed Bessie, his girlfriend. Wright forces us to see into Bigger's mind and to understand the devastating effects of the social conditions in which he was raised. Bigger was not born a violent criminal. He is a "native son": a product of American culture and the violence and racism that permeate it.

3.2c Fear

The central topic of Wright's *Native Son* is the fear that people are compelled to live in as a result of the systemic racism that exists in American culture at the time. The book is originally divided into three parts- fear, flight, and fate. Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of the novel, is so scared of being accused of rape that he murders Mary Dalton on purpose. To cover up his wrongdoing, he acts irrationally, recklessly, and immorally once more. Bigger's fear of being discovered consumes him, and he continues to act strangely. He murders and rapes Bessie, and when he is apprehended, the white community focuses solely on his murder of Mary. All of this could have been avoided if Bigger hadn't been afraid of Mary's mother accusing him of being in Mary's room. The dread was fuelled by the time's entrenched racism and stereotypes. Of course, Bigger is guilty of both Mary's and Bessie's murders, which is crucial. Despite this, the legal system continues to fail him, as he is not given a fair trial or the opportunity to defend himself. Anything uttered in Bigger's defense falls on deaf ears, with the tabloids portraying him as a bloodthirsty animal and Buckley utilizing the case to boost his own political career. Even Max's zealous defense is largely ineffective. The American justice system's slogan is "equal justice

under law," but Wright portrays a judiciary so tainted by racial prejudice and corruption that the concept of equality is meaningless.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter provides conclusion and suggestion. After finding and analyzing the social condition in capitalist society and class struggle against the capitalist's oppression in *Violence* and *Native Son* the writer gives some conclusions and suggestions to the readers.

A. Conclusions

After analyzing the data, the writer concludes the result of the research, they are:

1. In the novel, *Native son* by Richard Wright, the writer found the social conditions which is racial prejudice, exploitation and poverty, while in the novel, *Violence*, the writer found the social situation in the capitalist society. The social conditions in capitalist society show that there are class distinction and human exploitation.

- a. The writer found class distinction divided into two classes. The two class are:

i) The Upper class are the people that have vast power in the economy, they are also called bourgeoisie. They manipulate the working class. They are Mr. Dalton and the capitalists, Obofun and Queen, Iriso, Papiros Clerides.

ii) Lower class are the people that don't have power and they work for the upper class to survive. They are known as the working class (proletariats). They are as a victim of the upper class because they always get discriminating and inhumane treatment. They are Idemudia and the poor in *Violence*, Bigger Thomas and the black community in America in *Native son*.

b. In human exploitation, it shows that lower class is exploited by the upper class and this ends up determining their death, activity, love, and punishment.

3. The writer finds class struggle by lower class from capitalist's oppression. The capitalist relies solely on gains and exploitation. The upper class that has political and economic power to exploit the lower class. It proves that the lower classes are not powerless. They have become the victims of the capitalist system. So, the lower class wants to be free from the capitalist/society's exploitation. They struggle against society's exploitation by leaving the society's camp and finding a revolution to destroy the Society.

4. Class struggle showed in the novel has the same goals with Marx's theory about getting free from oppression and exploitation. The writer's use of Marxism in this work is to create awareness for the working class to position themselves for better working conditions.

B. Suggestions

1. For further research, the writer suggests that to learn more about class struggle in capitalist society in literary work.

2. In analyzing sociology, not only doing the social aspect of character in literary works, but also considering the sociological aspect of the author or the reader.

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