

Characters And The Issue of Self-Denial in Festus Iyayi's *The Contract*

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Abstract

The Contract by festus Iyayi seems to be the portrayal of Nigeria whose main scourge is greed that inevitably leads to corruption. In this novel, Iyayi creates characters among whom some are so greedy that they feel obliged to kill any moral and ideal to achieve their goals. The killing of one's moral convictions and ideals made by main characters is what this study refers to as self-denial. Our intention is to highlight the reasons and manifestations of this rejection of moral values through the agents of the status quo on the one hand and characters against the status quo on the other one. The will to change displayed by characters against the status quo echoes the author's will to help in the building of a new society.

Key words: self-denial, characters, corruption, greed, status quo, overvaluation.

Introduction

Iyayi Festus is undoubtedly one of the most revolutionary writers of contemporary Africa. Indeed, his trenchant criticism penetrates the Nigerian society which suffers many of the ugliest features experienced by post-colonial African countries. Taking this decadent society as his basic field of study, Iyayi presents in his works a succession of events and characters whose revolutionary nature ultimately aims at bettering the current society. In *The Contract*, he lampoons the Nigerian society which he considers to be on the decline because of its creeping perversion and immorality. Ayo Kehinde echoes Iyayi's intention when he writes that *The Contract* "takes as its thematic focus the foregrounding of the exploitation of the masses by the ruling class, betrayal of public confidence, administrative bureaucracy, highly decadent and socially stratified society that breeds and nurtures exploitation and oppression of the less privileged in society"(Kehinde, 2004: 230).

Quoting from Nkrumah, Armah writes that "man is regarded in Africa as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value" (Armah, 1967: 23). From the preceding, one can assert that African people are virtuous beings. The loss or denial of the virtues characterizing them may be the result of compelling external or internal forces. Any individual who willfully or unwittingly denies his spiritual being, integrity, dignity and value proceeds to self-denial.

Self-denial, as we use it in the framework of this study, is the fact of rejecting one's past, one's belief, dignity and integrity and refusing to meet one's obligations for one's own interests.

Self-denial in the Nigerian society takes many forms. Nevertheless, whatever the form, it is somehow closely linked to greed which is a by-product of corruption in a society where the average citizen is ready to take shortcuts and stoop to anything in order to get material wealth. What are the reasons and manifestations of self-denial? How do individuals live self-denial?

The following lines categorize self-denied characters in two groups: those who willfully deny themselves and endeavor to maintain the status quo or go further in this denial and those who, after realizing that they are dipped in self-denial, try to come out of it and are consequently against the status quo. These two groups will be scrutinized as the agents of the status quo on the one hand and characters against the status quo on the other one.

For Freud and his disciples like Carl Jung and Ernest Jones, literature is somewhat the transcription of unconscious fears and desires. They endorsed that through psychoanalysis one can see the covert dreams, desires and fears of a writer. This analysis which scrutinizes the repressed desires and fears and disgust of the author through the different characters will therefore be based on psychoanalysis.

I. The Agents of the Status Quo

In Iyayi's novel, individuals try to survive by adopting various options. Some choose to cultivate moral vacuum by striving to get deeper in self-denial, rejecting any possibility of change. These characters are Chief Eweh Obala, Chief Ekata, Mister Oluru and Mallam Mallam.

I. 1. Chief Eweh Obala and the contract overvaluation

Chief Ewe Obala is the Chairman of the Ogbe City Council. He is a powerful man devoid of moral values who viscerally impacts on his family and business sphere. Chief Obala symbolizes those who have cynically and criminally betrayed themselves and African independences. He is not a backbencher in matters of actions. He has completely denied his morals and ideals to become money and women-centered. And yet, years back, he was an honest man. Why then has he so changed?

As a young man, Chief Obala was so full of ideals that he was revolutionary. That compelled him to be a conscientious and exemplary worker with moral integrity. Immorality did not exist in his basic vocabulary and behavior. He had even sworn that he would never get involved in bribery; an act that earned him nothing but gossip and disdain. Indeed, elder workers were all filled with contempt for him. Instead of encouraging him, his superiors suspected he was after their positions. Consequently, everybody started frowning at everything he was doing to the point that he got no promotion, despite his eagerness to work and learn from elder workers. As a result, he became "frustrated, angry and bitter" (Iyayi, 1982: 121). Learning from this frustration and the widespread opinion that money is survival, he set up his own policy to get money.

This policy has won him fame since he is now Chairman of the Ogbe City Council. The burial of his previous ideals gains momentum through the overvaluation of the contract. Chief Obala is essentially responsible for the over-rising of the contract: originally, the contract was estimated at fifty thousand naira. With the approval of the administrator and some soldiers, it has been decided to push it up to five hundred thousand naira. After calculation, Chief Obala

once more raised it to three hundred million so that “over two hundred million will be available for sharing” (Iyayi, 1982: 83). Later on, he changes his mind and proposes five hundred million naira to the commissioner who accepts it. But, in practice, the contractor who wins the bid gets only ten million (Iyayi, 1982: 94). The rest of money is shared among the handlers of the contract and it directly lands in a bank in Switzerland. The money diverted from Nigeria is thus used to develop the Swiss economy. In his wish to save more, Chief Obala hinders the economic development of his nation. He is so money-drunk that he does not care about the country’s interests; he rather works for a Switzerland bank. In so doing, he becomes “a symbol of African economic dependency”(Pushpa & Jagne, 2012: 237). The Ogbé City Council operates, in this view, as a branch of this Swiss bank. By betraying his own ideals and sermon, he has betrayed the destiny of the Nigerian people who must strive to cast off their economic yoke.

A man with such a rotten soul can no longer stand Marxism, an ideology he used to believe in as a young, because he is not ready to share his wealth for the sake of a would-be equalitarian society. Such a refusal to share can be seen in his will to maintain his servants in absolute obscurity despite Ogie’s suggestion to supply them with electricity. Chief Obala thus shows that he is not he who will change the predicament of the downtrodden. Furthermore, Marxism is based on ideals and its application always results in revolutions. Revolutions in return sweep away the bourgeoisie, a class that lives by exploiting indigents. In fact, Obala is strongly convinced that “the Marxists are the revolutionary idealists, the undecided who always die first” (Iyayi, 1982: 124). For him, to avoid dying prematurely, one must become a realist, a “liberal realist [who] does not believe in revolution, [but rather] believes in allowing things to go on the way they are” (Iyayi, 1982: 124). More importantly, Obala tries to convince Ogie into being a liberal realist so he could inherit him after his death. He thus involves him in the sharing of the percentage of the contract. As Ogie showed reluctance at the beginning, Obala blackmailed him, saying he would better disown him of his heritage instead of letting him plot the collapse of his economic empire. In the wake of the sharing, Chief Obala was put in charge of conveying the money abroad. Then, the gap between him and his son reappeared. As a consequence, Ogie secretly decided to rob his part of the money. Unfortunately, that ended in Ogie’s death. This death alone is the proof that the kind of society epitomized by Ogie’s father contains the seeds of its own destruction.

In his rush for money, Chief Obala loses all moral and turns everything to his advantage, even the death of people. An evidence of his moral decadence can be found five years back, a

time when he got involved in a car accident wherein three people died and many more were injured. At the police station, he reported that his car had been stolen and when later on the police informed him that his car had been found, his only concern was to inquire whether it had been damaged or not. In addition to the preceding, Chief Obala is not flawless in matters of sex. He has had sex with the spouses of almost all his friends and contractors.

In a word, Chief Obala appears as a deeply decayed character. His self-denial, which stems from frustration at work, can be apprehended through corruption, selfishness, embezzlement, adultery and other crimes. Iyayi underscores Obala's putrefaction by showing him driving in a filthy environment; scenery which symbolism is in line with Etiowo and Etta's understanding of filth when they state that "the physical squalor represents the general spiritual and moral decay in the society. For the physical putrefaction is an outward manifestation of internalized decay" (2013: 202). Another character with such a decayed soul is Chief Ekata.

I. 2. Chief Ekata, The Silent Killer and Prostitution Manager

Chief Ekata is woefully famous. He is one of the most dangerous characters in *The Contract*. In addition to being thoroughly corrupt, he is deeply involved in criminal activities. Apart from the common self-denial, Chief Ekata uses the blanket of business to manage a sort of veiled luxury prostitution. For the sake of his business or interests, he does not hesitate to kill his potential competitors.

One of the contractors who bid for the contract is Chief Ekata. A very clever man, he uses all the means at his disposal to always obtain what he wants. His envious situation is not the result of mere windfall profits. He had thoroughly studied the Nigerian society and come to this conclusion: one of the greatest weaknesses of Nigerian males is women:

A woman, and a beautiful, young but mature one at that, was the short-cut to the Nigerian man's heart. Send a woman to a Nigerian man with a request that he jump out of the window of a forty-storey building and the man will jump. Send a woman to a man and the first thing he will do is to make a pass at her and inevitably, when satisfied, he will almost always grant her whatever request she has. (Iyayi, 1982: 69-70).

From the preceding, one can assert that "Chief Ekata's vast business organization grows through the technique of using women employees as lures to win favours"(Etiowo and Etta, 2013: 283). Whenever Ekata wants to hire a private secretary, he demands that she be a lady

and that the first criterion be the physical appearance of the candidate. Indeed, she must be beautiful enough to attract men. The second criterion is the candidate's ability to bury her moral values so as to sexually satisfy clients, whenever they ask for such favors. Whether she is skilled or not doesn't matter. In Chief Ekata's "ordre de valeur", work experience, certificates or diplomas are no match to beauty, the only and new degree there is. A lady may have all the qualification and expertise to be a good secretary. Nevertheless, if she is not beautiful, she can never be hired by Ekata. People like Ekata have turned, studies and diplomas into meaningless notions in Nigeria. Their devotion to physical appearance in lieu of intrinsic values is detrimental to the wellbeing of the whole society. Whereas western businessmen strive to be objective headhunters, Ekata rather indulges in sex-hunting. On the false pretence of recruiting her, for instance, Ekata draws Eunice into the cesspool of prostitution. Whenever there is an invitation to tender, he is accompanied by Eunice. After tending, he sends her to the person in charge of the contract with the aim of seducing him, like he did with Ogie. Competence is, therefore, not a matter of professional conscience but rather the secretary's ability to be used as a sexual object. Here, workers become commodities with a commercial value. Worse, they are denied the opportunity to feel good and draw satisfaction and pride from their job.

In addition to handling a covert brothel, Ekata acts like a wolf who lets nobody jeopardize his interests. If dead men could speak, Mr Oluru would surely testify this idea. He and Ekata once competed for the contract. With the secret plan to ultimately betray Ekata after having coalesced with him, Oluru proposed him to meet and talk business. Ekata, who was surely planning the same, came to the invitation with some poison and, taking advantage of a momentary absence of his friend, poured it in his glass of alcohol. The following day, Oluru died. Ekata went on to showcase his cynical character by crying more than everyone else and taking an active part in the organization of the funerals. After the burial, he confirmed his rotten nature by doing the unthinkable, that is, by seducing and having sexual intercourse with Oluru's widow.

To put in a nutshell Ekata proves to be a thoroughly decayed man who not only denies his workers their integrity and any opportunity to draw pride from their work but also denies his competitors, among whom is the unfortunate Oluru, their right to life.

I. 3 Mr. Oluru, The Victim of His own Greed

Mister Oluru is one of the wealthiest contractors in *The Contract*. For the sake of business, he has voluntarily turned his back on honesty and turned himself into an economic predator whose base greed led him straight to the graveyard.

The first idea that the reader gets of Mister Oluru is that he embodies the archetypal crook and unscrupulous man. To show this particular aspect of this character, the author identifies him with stench and shit spread on his way. Shit is literally spread on the streets and roads that Mister Oluru sometimes contributes to build.

Some years ago, Oluru managed to get a road contract. The contract consisted in building a section of road in Benin City. The objective of the project was to tackle the traffic jam problem which is seriously harming Nigerian citizens. The building of the road included everything from the tracing to the tarring. But to save money, Mister Oluru decided, in accordance with the contract handlers, to reduce the dimensions of the road. Thus, two feet were taken off the original dimensions and given the size of the population and number of cars and lorries in Nigeria, the reader can guess that this will obviously lead to some major traffic jams as it is already the case in almost all the big cities of Nigeria. Apart from giving new dimensions to the road, Oluru had decided, in connivance with the contract managers, to use a poor quality of tar with a thickness far below the conventional one. The money saved in the deal was shared among the contract managers, the mayor, the Attorney General and some top soldiers who could, at any time, influence the decision of a justice. Given the inadequate quality of the tar, the road did not last long and before the first rainy season, everything, every centimeter of tar was destroyed, leaving the road full of gaping potholes.

As a consequence, the newly built tarred road has turned into a muddy street which is not useable when it rains. Oluru's policy therefore profits nobody else but him and his accomplices as the road is making drivers and their passengers' lives miserable. And what is more, that road requires incessant mending at the expense of the taxpayers. Building roads thus becomes a Sisyphus task since, like in the Greek mythology, it consists in always coming back to square one. According to this mythology, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to push a rock to the summit of a mountain for many sins. Each time he was on the point of succeeding, the rock would roll back and all his efforts were in vain. Strikingly and unbearably, Mister Oluru, the sinner, is not the one who is condemned to push the rock in *The Contract*. It is rather the people who are condemned, through government disbursement, to pay for Oluru's sins. The money that the government could have used to raise Nigerians' living standards is thus wasted in the never-ending task of tarring. The people are thus unjustly punished as if they were sinners whose faults should be atoned for while swindlers and embezzlers like Oluru are living an untroubled life of luxury.

Oluru's decadence knows no limit as he went as far as turning his own wife into a prostitute. Indeed, each time there is a competition, he sends his wife to have sex with the contract managers so as to decide in his favor. To win the contract Ogie was managing, he is ready to proceed the same for he believes that giving his wife to satisfy a man is too small a sacrifice in comparison to the five million naira the sexual intercourse would yield. When one's own wife's value is seen in terms of naira, she becomes less important than tradable goods sold at the commodity market. This bespeaks the depth of the decrepitude Oluru and the gravediggers of the Nigerian economy are involved in.

Oluru's last attempt to make money at the expense of others leads him straight to death, an involuntary denial of his own life.

Some years ago, Oluru and Chief Ekata were good friends. But their friendship seemed to be on its last legs. Instead of trying to give a new wind to this friendship, Oluru rather wanted to once more betray his friend. His last finding consisted in making a proposal to Ekata who was equally competing for the contract Ogie was managing. As an experienced contractor, Oluru knew that competition for such a huge contract would be one of the fiercest. It would thus be better to eliminate some competitors right from the start. After he had glanced at the list of contractors, Oluru realized that the only one who could compete with him would be Chief Ekata. He thus decided to coalesce with him, with a treacherous idea in mind: "he would propose to this man that they team up, that they cooperate to outwit all the other bidders, then at the very last moment, he alone would sign the contract"(Iyayi, 1982: 105). What he had forgotten was that some years ago, he had used the same trick to get the stadium contract; a treacherousness Chief Ekata still remembered. To avoid being once more victim of Oluru, Chief Ekata accepted the proposal to team up with his competitor. The rendezvous day, he went to meet Oluru with some poison in his pocket and managed to choose a place which would eventually be very inconvenient. And when Oluru was busy finding them another place, Chief Ekata poured his poison in Oluru's glass. The following day, the poison produced the result expected by Ekata: Oluru died after having vomited a great quantity of blood.

Oluru's proclivity for cheating thus led him to his premature death. Another character whose base greed cannot go unmentioned is Mallam-Mallam.

I. 4 Mallam Mallam, Mister 'Quick Money'

Mallam Mallam is among the most thriving businessmen of Benin City. But unlike the young men of his generation who still display revolutionary ideas because of their ideals, Mallam Mallam rides roughshod over morality. He has come to the conclusion that social

revolution and idealism are mere illusions and foolish dreams in a society where people pay attention to you only when they can get money with you or count your houses, cars and even what you buy next. Driven by this reality, he successfully sheds skin to a person who looks down on moral and ethical values for the sake of money.

Just like Ekata and Olulu, Mallam Mallam is rotten to the core. To him nothing matters as long as he can quickly make money. In fact, he has no regard for the wellbeing of his country, let alone the people. In Benin City, people would say that he is very intelligent because he knows what he wants and how to achieve it. To achieve his goal, Mallam Mallam created a company specialized in providing the government with office equipment. Actually, the company is a fictive one specifically created to rob the State. Every time the State orders equipment it has sacrificially paid for, only counterfeit products are delivered by Mallam-Mallam's company. At times he does not even supply the equipments for which payments have been made by the State, thus contributing to the impoverishment and the ruin of his country.

Being busy running after money, Mallam Mallam has no time to pay visit to his friends to such a point that the notion of friendship is an empty shell to him. The same is true for love: he has a multitude of sexual partners and he is not ready to effectively fall in love. He utterly lives on the margin of society in a form of individualism and is an outright capitalist who cares for nothing else but quick money. Apart from money-making topics, no other discussion raises his interest as it is seen in his relations with Ogie to whom Mallam Mallam pays no more visit. But, as if by magic, as soon as Ogie informs him of his intention to take his part of the money generated by the contract, he jumps on the occasion and helps his friend make the blueprint for the robbery. He even takes part in the robbery as he devoted some time to calculate what he could gain from it. Unfortunately, during the robbery, Ogie is shot down by his own father who had mistaken him for a thief in his compound. With Ogie's death, one of Mallam Mallam's mischievous plans came to a halt.

Thus depicted, Mallam represents many African leaders and businessmen who are harming their country's economy and therefore hindering its progress. These corrupt men loot their nations by building and tarring roads, building hospitals and schools on paper but never in reality. They rather divert the projects money to build palaces or garnish their bank accounts in western private banks.

In addition to being thoroughly corrupt, Mallam Mallam is a womanizer who has no respect for married people. In his collection of girls, he prefers married women, saying he draws more excitement with them. Just like he feels no remorse for cashing checks for fictive goods,

he has an easy conscience when it comes to fornicating with married women. He even has the cheek to generalize his behavior saying, “The African has no conscience” (Iyayi, 1982: 19).

With Mallam Mallam, there is no possible end to self-denial as he contributes to the perpetuation of immorality. Fortunately enough, this does not apply to some characters who struggle unremittingly to end up with their predicament.

II. Characters against the status quo

This part focuses on characters that one cannot totally blame for denying themselves as they somehow try to bring their self-denial under control: they have realized that they sold their souls to the devil and they now look for ways to redeem themselves. Such characters are Ogie and Eunice.

II. 1 Ogie Ogbala and the Will to Change

Ogie’s life can be strictly divided into two moments: his life before the contract and the one he lived while managing the contract. Before being forced to accept the position of secretary in charge of the contract, he seemed to be a flawless man full of life. However, the management of the contract turned him into a greedy and money-drunk man. This section tries to scrutinize these two periods of his life.

When Ogie Ogbala comes back to his home country after graduating abroad, he is given a job by his father. At the beginning, Ogie’s father’s proposal was met with a stern refusal on his part because he knew that, in Nigeria, such a job would unavoidably dip him into corruption practices. As a young man, he had espoused revolutionary ideas and did not want to get involved in any activity that would ultimately tie his hands up, that is, that would make him lose his professional integrity and moral virginity. Notwithstanding, refusing such a job meant refusing to have a job altogether as the social context of *The Contract* is a country where the common woe is called unemployment. Indeed, whatever one’s diplomas, it is unthinkable to get a job if one is not sponsored either by a top government official, a plutocrat or a parent who has an influential position in a company. When the applicant for a position is a girl, she has no alternative but go through the “slaughter house” (Iyayi, 1982: 24). This means that she has no

other choice but let rotten men have a “*droit de seigneur*” on her; a sacrifice that will not even guarantee their employment but rather spur endless rendezvous in still other hotels.

Ogie is aware of this situation. Still, he wants to keep his true nature. He wants to remain a real human being who could serve as a role model for the society and future generations.

The reader of *The Contract* has an insight of Ogie’s position whenever he initiates a discussion with Rose Idebale. Indeed, the first day Ogie informed Rose that his father made him the proposal consisting in managing the contract, Rose said: “Then, you’ll soon be one of them” (Iyayi, 1982: 26). Ogie took Rose’s warning as an insult. He could not conceive that Rose who knows him could imagine him accepting percentages and botch a project of public interest. Nevertheless, as their discussion wore on, he realized that Rose was somewhat right when she voiced her concern. She even warned him that if he wanted to remain sane, he should be realistic: “Better to swim with the current [of the river] than against it” (Iyayi, 1982: 28). It is really after his discussion with Rose that Ogie effectively took notice of what was happening around him. He only felt disgust and shame. He had already been overwhelmed by these emotions on the day he returned to his home country after his graduation in England. That day, the squalor, shit and all the domestic waste that was literally covering the streets had tremendously disturbed him. The disgust was heightened by the images of ravenous and starving people that were projected by the people swarming in the airport facilities. Indeed, he saw “hundreds of faces that crawled around the airport buildings, staring or asking for favours. They were all hard faces with wild eyes that showed through the tightly drawn skins”(Iyayi, 1982: 15). A conversation with a taxi-driver increased this disgust as he was told that at the market, “even prices smell of the filth” (Iyayi, 1982: 8). The careless attitude of the government toward the people also shocked him and when he heard that some top personalities denied good roads to the people for their selfish use, he was really bemused. The shame resented at the airport and in the streets is also experienced with his father outright refusal to provide his servant with electricity.

Later on, Ogie wilted under familial pressure and accepted the post of Principal Secretary with the idea of wrong-footing everybody and making things move the way he wanted. As a matter of fact, when Ogie started his job, he was full of good ideas as exemplified here: “I am going to be an example, he said to himself...I am going to be decent and straightforward and clear-headed about money” (Iyayi, 1982: 21). Even though he is compelled

to work in a hostile environment, his aim is to do what it takes to ensure good governance in the handling of the contract.

In order to achieve this goal, he does not even take time to eat; all his soul, energy and time are devoted to the success of his mission. Within some weeks, he reorganizes things to cultivate transparency in matters related to money spending. He also proceeds to an internal organization and all departments which were overcrowded with workers were reorganized.

When he had come into the council, there had been no records kept of important decisions, neither had there been records on money spent on various items. He had immediately set up a records department, even invited an auditor. Then too there was the internal organization. There had been too many people in some sections while others had starved. He had helped organize the staffing of the various departments (Iyayi, 1982: 47).

Ogie's reorganization of every sector as regards his job is somehow the will of Iyayi himself who deeply concerns himself with the changing of the Nigerian social, and by extension, African unlivable realities. For Iyayi, even though Africa is a poor continent, the current gloom partly results from mismanagement and misappropriation of public goods. Owing to this mismanagement, one does not exactly know how and by whom the money allocated to some social projects is spent. Iyayi sheds light on this concern in an article when he wonders who takes the money generated by the oil that Nigeria produces in very large quantities. For him, leaders do not manage the country's money in the interest of Nigerians; they rather manage it on their own behalf and interest. By reorganizing the company which is a miniature society, the author implicitly suggests a better use and distribution of the country's resources. This, as evidenced in *The Contract*, requires accountability and transparency through which everybody can see and check how the riches of the country are used. If this goal is really achieved, corruption will be kicked out of Nigeria and even Africa and this may pave the way for a real development.

The reorganization made by Ogie is actually what Iyayi himself could have done in his society if he had the means: every naira allocated to whatever expense would be recorded in a book in such a way that everything would be clear and transparent. Such reorganization would minimize overvaluing contract and other public expenses and foster development. The lack of accountability that Ogie is fighting against expresses the general muddle in which Nigeria

is enmeshed. Ogie was on the point of really giving a new vision to the way the funds granted to a public or state-owned organization should be spent.

Unfortunately, workers resent hard-workers. The disdain goes further when he who initiates change is a young man. On top of this, we are in Nigeria, a country where nobody cares about transparency and honesty; two values that are looked down as sins which need to be expurgated. So, instead of being acclaimed for carrying out a purge of the organization, Ogie's efforts were tagged as harmful. His colleagues rather saw him as a killjoy who must be ousted as quickly as possible. They consequently wrote a petition requesting his sacking. The official reason advocated was that Ogie was not a competent manager. They even advocated that he had doubtful diplomas. Petitioners hinted that Ogie should be prosecuted for forgery as exemplified in these lines: The petitioners also "demanded an examination of the qualifications of the incumbent principal secretary. They even suggested that his qualifications had been forged"(Iyayi, 1982: 45). Actually, the real reason is that Ogie made all bribery and swindling impossible. Workers were for the first time compelled to live only with their salary, as they were prevented from taking bribes and spending the state's money for their own good. But as lucky as he was, Ogie was not dismissed as requested by petitioners.

Workers' petition made Ogie understand how far people are coward, hypocrite and wicked. He realized by the same token that his seat was on a volcano and that he needed to do something. It is at that moment that he joined the hangmen of the people and started flirting with the devil.

The treacherous behavior of his colleagues awakened Ogie's internal dormant beast common to all human beings. Hurt like a wounded wolf or predatory animal which sees its likes as preys to prey on, Ogie now wants to make people pay for petitioning him. As a consequence, he ended up becoming a man devoid of moral and dived headlong into corruption. All his ideals varnished and he became a mere spiritual and moral vacuum. Still, he daily experienced an inner struggle to find a way out of the clutches of corruption. Yet, the loophole he has chosen to escape through was not the right one as it consisted in accepting the principles of corruption. Fortunately, like a flower growing on a dunghill, he did not drop his former ideals. Mixing principles of corruption and his ideals, he now wants to take his part of the stolen money and invest it in Nigeria whereas his father wants all the money sent abroad to avoid any unpleasant surprise. The stubborn will to get his part of the honeycomb at all cost brings about some profound change in him. The father, fearing a revolution which may bring about the seizure of

their bank accounts and real properties by the new authorities, prefers sending all the stolen money to Switzerland whereas Ogie wants to keep his part of the jackpot and invest it in Nigeria. The disagreement between the two men took a pitch and after a raw row, Ogie decides to steal his part of money from his father. Unable to fulfill his aims alone, he confides in Mallam Mallam and Chief Ekata who help him make the blueprint for this criminal and irresponsible act. On the D-day, they broke into his father's house and took one of the safes containing the money. Unfortunately for him, his father, even asleep, was keeping watch; and when he realized that the people who had just taken one of the safes were running in the darkness, he fired with no hesitation, killing his son Ogie. Ironically, this death definitely puts an end to Ogie's moral decrepitude. Denying his moral somehow takes the form of a physical denial which bears the seeds of redemption if one considers this death as the symbolic death of the putrefied society. Ogie's physical death, to some extent, means the impossibility of change as regards Nigeria whose numerous putsches have but worsened its already precarious situation.

Paralleled with Ogie's lack of moral is Rose Idebale's struggle to better her life by honest means. She is so idealist that she "sees, with bitterness, the collapse of human values and the triumph of material norms in today's society" (Etiowo and Etta, 2013: 287). She unremittingly struggles against her fate by hoping to register at the university. Ogie brings this hope to naught by dishonestly making her pregnant. As Rose wants to abort in order to resume her studies, Ogie betrays her once more by deliberately delaying the abortion. He displays an unprecedented wickedness that prevents him from sharing in Rose's grief. The young, kind and attentive lover he used to be turned into a raw and selfish man who does not care about other people's interests. Ogie's attitude clearly shows that what matters for him are his own interests which do not necessarily match with those of his fellow citizens. His mind is set on certain goals that he must achieve at all costs, whatever the means and ways. Ogie has lost his own ego to become a kind of cute man with a rotten soul. Nevertheless, even if his attitude is highly tricky and deceitful, one cannot totally blame him. Given that abortion is a crime, preventing it may be a way of compensating the economic crime in which he is involved. By obliging Rose to carry the pregnancy to its term, he undoubtedly wants to take part in the birth of a new society. Even though he "does not act positively to effect changes on the society" (Etiowo and Etta, 2013: 289-90), he sows the seeds of change epitomized by the pregnancy. The character who is on the point of effectively serving this purpose towards the end of the novel is Eunice.

II. 2 Eunice Agbon and the Exemplary Resignation

Eunice Agbon shares the same predicament as almost all the young men and ladies of her generation which is that of *the wretched of the earth*. This generation is even a cursed one if one considers the general gloom prevailing in the whole country. In this gloomy situation, many people try hard to cope with life. Those who are lucky enough get a job. However, in the case of Eunice, the job as such is a source of perversion which makes people forget what they are and bury their ego. In order to take control of her life again, Eunice resigns. This section highlights the causes and manifestations of her self-denial and resignation.

Eunice comes from a poverty-stricken family. She is also caught in this sort of whirlpool and somehow tries to get out of it. However, to her dismay, her attempts lead her straight to a kind of firing squad where she is turned into a sexual tool.

Eunice is a beautiful lady ensnared in corruption. When she was hired as secretary some years ago by Chief Ekata, she was glad because she was then among the few ones to escape the harsh living conditions subsequent to unemployment. However, this happiness did not last long. She would be very disappointed the very day she discovered the true nature of the job awaiting her. In fact, working for Chief Ekata is tantamount to killing oneself since the work conditions are such that a secretary is not a mere secretary. Eunice has gone through the “slaughter house” before getting the job. As time wears on, she has discovered that, in addition to her boss, she has to yield to all the partners of Ekata, thus experiencing a covert prostitution. But contrary to professional prostitutes, she gets no money for this debasing job attached to her official position as a secretary.

At a given time, Eunice, who seems to be a passive woman, realized the impossibility for her to get out of the whirlpool. Coming from a poor family, she knows that poverty denies man money just like death denies life and sex. She also knows that she got her current job thanks to her sexual appeal and body added to a mind that does not care about morality. As underscored by Iyayi, “She wanted to be alive always and for Eunice, life was concentrated in her sex, like colour in a diamond, in a rainbow or in a flower. Sex and money. These were, to her, the aims of life” (Iyayi, 1982: 138).

When one willfully reduces one’s life to sex and money, one cannot but contribute to one’s own debasement. In her will to make money, Eunice willingly turned her sexual parts into a kind of article with commercial value which could be sold and bought at any time.

Fortunately, the author does not only depict Eunice as a sexual object. He depicts her as somebody who has not totally lost values. Indeed, she still embodies some positive characteristics and beauty. When considering her attitude toward Ogie, one is forced to recognize her efforts to conceive a child in order to guarantee a future she hoped would be different from the current mess. She believed that the fruit of her lovemaking with Ogie could have helped in the birth of a new society. Unfortunately, Ogie forced her to abort. The abortion does not impact on her moral. On the contrary, it triggers her quest for change. This quest for change is matched with her unadulterated beauty. Indeed, as if to convey a special message with the presence of Eunice, Iyayi shaped her in such a way that she is personified physical beauty. In the idealized world Iyayi wanted to build, beauty is not an ephemeral thing that fades with age. On the contrary, it matures “with age as the green in grass matures with the passage of time (Iyayi, 1982: 138). Eunice’s beauty matured in the form of awareness that triggered wisdom and audacity to redeem herself.

Eunice’s will to redeem herself was brooding. Yet, she was hesitant. Her meeting with Rose definitely put an end to this hesitancy as Rose enticed her into leaving her cynical boss. “I think you should leave Chief Ekata” Rose had said. She remembered what her answer had been. ‘I have thought about it a great deal and I am putting in my letter of resignation at the end of the week.’ (Iyayi, 1982: 204). Eunice effectively resigned with neither pity nor sympathy for Chief Ekata who had used her as a sexual object for his own gain. If she could roll back the wheel of history, she would effectively contribute to the birth of a new society as it is seen in her efforts to help Rose deliver Ogie’s baby.

In real life it is said that what matters is to get up each time one falls down. This means that one may dive into dirty water but manage to come out and get clean into a pure swimming pool. This pool is a kind of water of life where beauty prevails. In order to portray this aspect of life in his novel, Iyayi shaped Eunice so as her beauty did not fade with time. So, if she got involved in the mess, it is just to pick up good people and drive them toward beauty. The fact of being an epitome of beauty convinces the reader that whatever the gloom, beauty will prevail. That is why at the end of the book Eunice operates as a midwife for Rose Idebale who would help society change by delivering a baby conceived with Ogie whose attempt to change the dog-eat-dog world results in tragedy. In her relationships with Rose Idebale, the reader realizes that Eunice is goodhearted; that is to say that she has an inner and inborn beauty. No wonder she is the only character who effectively succeeds in shaking off the yoke of devil by resigning.

And this can be construed as a symbolic resignation of all workers who are crippling under the load of immorality for a collective revival.

In a word, even though Eunice has been turned into a sexual object, she resigns and in her will to redeem herself, she becomes the midwife of her rival who is on the point of delivering a baby for a better society.

CONCLUSION

In *The Contract* one can notice that self-denial seems to be the fate of Nigerian and by extension African people. From the top officials to the small clerk, everybody is somehow obliged to deny himself by turning themselves into parasites preying on their fellow citizens to live or survive. Self-denial manifests itself in the form of corruption, assassination, covert prostitution. By pointing out the evils that cripple the people, Iyayi “wants to free man from man’s inhumanity” (Urama, 2010: 26). To achieve this freedom, characters working under enslaving conditions strive to get free by resigning. As for the society, a new one is on the point of being born. This birth is symbolically represented by the pregnancy that Rose Idebale is carrying despite all attempts to make an abortion. This pregnancy alone ushers in a new era.

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