

Literature and the Environment: Environmental Issues in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*.

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Abstract

The discovery of oil in Nigeria has paradoxically brought fortune and destruction to its people. Communities in the Niger-Delta region of the country have been suffering the negative impacts of oil exploration and exploitation in their areas. This study examines the relationship between literature and the environment with the purpose of exposing the negative impacts of man's activities on his environment. This study looks at environmental degradation by investigating how the activities of man invariably affect nature in the most negative way. The data for this work was collected from primary and secondary sources. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Ecocriticism, which is the study of representation of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment. The findings show that these authors exposed environmental degradation, oil spillage, poor waste management, deforestation, pollution, exploitation, unemployment, as some of the direct consequences of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of the country. The study shows clearly that the Niger Delta is steadily and painfully devalued and devastated by the activities of expatriate oil companies and their Nigerian collaborators.

Keyword: Degradation, Environment, Betrayal, Pollution, Detention, Oppression, Corruption

Introduction

Writers are greatly influenced by the social, cultural, economic, religions as well as political happenings in the society, and if a writer is true to his art, he ought to use those experiences and create a piece of work whose sole aim is to teach and enhance social growth. This is as Terry Eagleton points out: "Realist literature mirrors a given society in which it was written. It works primarily by emotion and experience. As art, it no doubt has a relation to social reality" (6).

Every writer reflects on the societal issues, values, events and happenings around him. These materials, documented in the works of literature in turn affect society and engineer changes which will lead to a prosperous future. Also is the idea that literature is a manifestation of the social world, issues and events peculiar to particular writers.

During the Romantic period in English literature, the writers of that era were known for adoring, worshipping, respecting and acknowledging the physical nature and landscapes such as mountains, lakes, valleys, rivers, oceans, forests, trees, and other living creatures. They believe that nature must not be tampered with and that anyone who does that must be punished severely. They emphasized more on nature being capable of playing negative and positive roles just like what we see in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and other parts of the world.

Literature as a field of study cannot be left unaffected by the turn of events, for the sustenance of ecology will require a trans-val nation in which literature must play a part in this increasingly industrialized global world, Literature plays a vital role in teaching the value of the natural world. Although ecology/environmental studies and Literature are considered as two different disciplines (the former science based and latter arts): literature is a cultural activity that unlocks the imagination and compels one to think and in the process, it reveals and emphasizes truths and are sometimes exigent.

Many literary works show that African culture is deeply rooted in Nature. Some common ecological themes include: seeing the ownership, allocation and control of land as belonging to spiritual reign, transmitting a view of plants, animals and other elements of Nature as being animate and alive with unique characters and preferences. Others include the transmission of ecological knowledge of plants and animals through proverbs, riddles and songs. Examples abound in all literary genres. For instance, Achebe's use of proverbs which passes ecological knowledge across, Ngugi's explicit description of the Gikuyu landscape, and many other literary works found in Africa. Even the absence of some of these features in recent writings in Africa is considered a tacit statement on the degradation of the environment.

This study however, concentrates on prose genre as one of the outlets that promotes ecological agenda. The prose genre has a great affinity with nature as a result of humanity's attempt to discover its identity as housed within the ecological world. The writings of these eco-writers in Nigeria reveal social and political practices borne out of rituals and a quest for understanding the natural and metaphysical elements of Nature in interpreting phenomena that were not understood. The result is the constant engagement with Nature in virtually all aspects of African cultural activities like festivals, naming ceremonies, burials etc. Nature has featured prominently in the works of many African writers as Chinyere Nwahunanya reveals:

From those we refer to as the pioneers or patriarchs of Niger Delta literature, we notice ab initio a dominant concern for the plight of man and the environment in the region. The literary responses were indeed aimed at highlighting the socio-economic, political, environmental and other problems that have affected the human population and the flora and fauna in the region. Writer-politicians like Dennis Osadebay were at their own time reacting to the situation of neglect and marginalization which the region suffered even after independence, (xiv)

Ecological writing has featured prominently in Nigeria that critics continue to call for more serious attention to these works. Chinyere Mwashunanya in his book, *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of Niger Delta* did well to trace the chronological rise of the nature friendly literature from different epochs and times. The book which is a compendium of essays, criticism and scholarship on the Niger Delta issues offers great insights that served as motivation to the present study which is hinged on the need for deeper investigation and evaluation of the several thematic issues surrounding the Niger Delta brouhaha. The book serves as gateway to Niger Delta literature as we are invited to feast on a literature that leaves more tears than laughter on our faces and more questions than the answers we collectively seek. Irrespective of the issues raised, it is interesting to see the quality of harvests and works influenced by nature and ecological issues and how much these writers and literary works take the lead in protest and revolutionary writings in Nigeria as Nwahunanya further notes:

In general, in all genres represented, the concern of the writers have been mainly on environmental degradation and its consequences; and moral issues such as crime and prostitution resulting from the influx of foreigners into an environment where unemployed young boys and girls are at the mercy of foreign and indigenous oil workers, and consequently suffer various kinds of abuse. Others confront issues such as health and disease, lack of infrastructure, the need for human capital development and capacity building and socio-economic empowerment and political marginalization of the region. The

implication of the depopulation of the region through migration is handled by some of the writers studied but many focus on the poverty into which the indigenes have sunk due to government neglect, (xix)

In all these, the interesting aspect is in the realization that environmental issues and concerns is beginning to take the lead in literary discourse and more writers are lending their voices to this all-important issue of our time as what affects the environment affects us greatly. It is also satisfying to see the bulk of what has been written and known with much still begging to be explored. The good news too is that these writings which is beginning to yield the desired socio-economic and political dividends as the world's attention has now turned to the Niger Delta area. But irrespective of these, these writers and their writings are still in dire need of more scholarly attention and discussions which invariably prompted the present study.

Since literature does not exist in a vacuum, the writers of this era have taken it upon themselves to checkmate and correct the ills happening in their environment through the representation of those negative happenings in their fictitious works. The rate at which the Nigerian environment is being neglected and abused is quite on the alarming side and as such requires a drastic and concerted effort to address the situation before it goes out of hand. And if this happens, it will spell doom for mankind. Even though the Nigerian government provides for the Ministry of Environment and also makes laws to protect the environment, yet much has not been achieved in the campaign to make the environment a better place. These abuses or neglect of the environment comes in different forms which include; poor town planning, lack of adequate sewage and drainage system leading to over flooding, gas'flaring from oil companies, oil spillage and the destruction of aquatic lives, bush burning soil excavation, dumping of refuse into drainages deforestation through cutting down of trees among others.

With the rising energy needs of growing economics, industrialization of more cities/town in Nigeria and discovery of more crude deposits across the country, there has been clamour to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Oil exploration contributes directly or indirectly to climate change in various ways. First, one of the products of oil exploration activities is gas, some escape into the atmosphere, thus changing the composition of the natural gases of the atmosphere. Secondly, other end products of these activities such as petroleum and kerosene are used to power vehicles, electricity generating sets and heating devices such as stoves used in cooking, contribute to environmental degradation. This is done through releasing of gases into the atmosphere.

In many literary works in English, nature has been a prime issue. The transformation in the social and cultural environments of the world has completely changed the representations of man's attitude towards nature in literary expressions. Trees have been cut down to make ways in the forest: bushes have been burnt to create wider roles for explorations of several mineral

resources; animals have been slaughtered in thousands to meet the increase demand in our hide and skin markets in a bid to explore oil and other natural resources. The ozone layer is under continual threat and will face greater threats as the world continue to pillage nature for her monumental growth and industrialization.

The theoretical approach adopted in this study is ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, as a theoretical approach, is used to examine the relationship between literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view. The emergence of Ecocriticism is traced to two important publications in the 1990s- *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and *The Environmental Imagination*, by Lawrence Buell. As a contemporary critical approach, in literature, ecocriticism examines environmental issues as foregrounded in literature with the aim of ecological revivalism. Another very important study of ecocriticism in Africa is *Eo-Critical Literature: Regreening the African Landscape*, edited by Ogaga Okuyade.

Barry (1995) notes that, the relationship between literature and environment is located within the framework of eco-criticism. Thus, in ecocriticism, literary scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways through which literature treats the subject of nature. Some ecocritics brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. In the United States, ecocriticism is often associated with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), which hosts biennial meetings for scholars who deal with environmental matters in literature (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996, p. xviii). ASLE publishes a journal—*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE)*—in which current international scholarship, on environment are found.

Environmental Issues in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*

The Fourth World, Okoye's fourth novel is set in Enugu shanty slum of Kassanga Avenue. The shanties are connected to one another and to Kassanga Avenue by narrow foot paths. It explores the prevalent issues that have occupied the contemporary Nigerian society. The novel also shows degenerating problems which have plagued the ordinary citizens. Ifeoma Okoye expresses a deep sense of dismay over the activities of the African leaders and their failure to provide the basic needs of the citizens. Hence, in the novel, she skillfully confronts pertinent thematic factors that have negatively affected the living conditions of people in Nigeria. In order to clearly depict a humiliating world of poverty, Okoye smartly presents the structural inequalities which have deepened impoverishment and exploitation in her fictional environment of Kassanga. In the novel, the residents of Kassanga Avenue are satiric portraits of Nigerian citizens living in poverty, hunger, fear and massive unemployment with no hope of survival.

Kassanga Avenue, a main street of Kassana settlement otherwise known as "the fourth world" or urban jungle captures a vivid picture of hardship and continuous suffering, an environment of flooding, darkness, where there is no direct access to public transport and electricity because the residents were poor and could not bribe the electricity officials. The narrator explains that "Residents had to walk for forty minutes on average to get to the four O' Clock market, from where they could take a bus to any other part of town, The market was the Residents' only link to the rest of Enugu and civilization... but the road to the market is narrow, steep, unpaved and risky for many types of vehicles"(103). The building that exists in Kassanga Avenue is mostly dilapidated shanties. Rain passes slowly through the leaking roof of the shanty

Chira and her mother occupied. "She had placed pots and pans and plates all around to collect the drips and stop the room from being flooded. It has been tasking, moving from one spot to another to empty each of the eleven containers in turn before they filled to the brim again"(146)

In the novel, constant neglect of the drainage system Causes heavy flood at Kassanga despite paying their taxes as citizens. *The Fourth World* as a fictional work presents the picture of the dirtiest, roughest and underdeveloped environment. The novel depicts a society whose environment has been damaged, neglected and abandoned by the government. The citizens only depend on their personal struggle to survive various faces of hardship.

The 'third world' refers to the poorest countries of the world located in Africa, South America and parts of Asia. Now, with these countries, Okoye has located a grimmer fourth world, whose unrelenting poverty on its inhabitants leaves you reeling in its viciousness. In this, Okoye is a mistress of graphic portrayal of grim reality lived out by a majority of citizens for whom there is no redemption from the poverty they are mired in by wrong socio- economic systems erected to keep them down forever.

In the novel, the occupants of the Kassanga Avenue failed also towards their environment. They also neglected their duties to their environment because they didn't take any corrective action like cleaning the street, clearing the drainages and even putting a community effort to see that they at least live in a clean and decent environment. Again, when the environment wasn't comfortable enough for the Kassanga occupants, they kept making it worse by pouring more dirt to the already dirty environment thereby creating more illness and environmental pollution.

Chiralum is one of the bright girls living in Kassanga Avenue. Her father, Akalaka, though poor, believes in her daughter and wants her to go far in life, farther than his limited horizon allows him. In spite of his abject poverty, as a precarious labourer for hire, he starves himself and his wife just to see that Chira gets good education, as the only ticket to the better life his ill fate cannot offer him. With the little he has, Akalaka sends his daughter to the prestigious

Federal Girl's Secondary School, Owerri. Akalaka, the father of Chira is depicted as one of the victims of the vicious cycle of poverty. According to the narrator:

Her father was a labourer on building sites. The job included mixing mortar and concrete and carrying head pans of the mixture to the mansions. He also moved cement blocks to wherever they were needed and dug excavation for house foundations. He did other menial jobs like cutting down trees, clearing drains and working in people's home from Monday to Saturday. He lives home as early as Six in the morning in the company of other labourers living in Kassanga Avenue. Sometimes, he waits from morning until night for days before he gets hired. He usually comes home from work after dark and is often so tired that he drops off to sleep (19).

On his hospital bed and unable to buy medicines required to treat him, Akalaka tells his only daughter the sum total of his hard, fruitless life and his ambition for her, "my life has been a struggle. I don't want you to go down the same path, my daughter... I have five portions of land in Umuba... My plan is to sell outright one if the remaining three portions to raise money for you to finish at FGSS next year. What is left I will use it to start you off at University"(11).

Unfortunately, Akalaka dies within a few hours after making this crucial provision for her daughter's future. Akalaka's poverty stricken life even hunted him even in his death because the priest that was supposed to bury Akalaka questions Chira about her father's nonpayment of church dues. He went further to stress that if Chira's father could send her to school, why won't he pay for his church dues and besides the priest emphasized that Akalaka must not be buried "All you need to do is put his body in the grave and cover it. Like a dead chicken that rots before it is discovered and so cannot serve as meat. Your father will face his maker when he gets up there" He pointed to the ceiling.

With the death of Akalaka, Chira is unable to continue her education. Her uncle denies her access to her father's lands, and was too harsh to even take all the money that was realized from the burial and left them with no penny to survive when they get back to their already complicated, frustrated and hard life. She drops out of school a year before her father's death, Chira finds things far worse after. She doesn't just drop out of school; she and her mother are unable to fend for themselves.

The Fourth World is a searing indictment of the world's warped socio-economic arrangement that leaves the world's vast population in abject want and without any means of improving themselves. Kassanga Avenue in Enugu is the Ajengunle slum in Lagos and several other such ghettos and shanties the world over, where the inhabitants are at the mercy of an unfair economic order that they cannot understand or overcome. As the author notes, "The residents

of Kassanga Avenue came from different parts of the country. They were no longer divided by their different languages. They were no longer divided by their different religions. They were no longer divided by their different ethnic origins. They had learnt from experience -sad and enduring experience- that their enemies were not one another; their enemies are unemployment, meager earnings, hunger, disease an unhealthy environment and poor housing. They had learnt that their survival depended on their solidarity and so then had fused into one indivisible community'

In describing the physical environment of Kassanga Avenue, Okoye clearly depicts ways human activities have affected the physical landscape. "The early rain had filled the myriad potholes that littered the avenue with dirty flood water, which slowed Chira down on her trek. She gingerly stepped on the few patches of dry land, deftly avoiding the pool's filthy brown water".

Ifeoma Okoye in a different way explained the symbolic meaning of 'the fourth world', the psychological trauma and mindset of those living in Kassanga Avenue thus,

Kassanga Avenue was a destroyer of people's bodies and mind. Living there meant not being able to see a doctor because there is no money. It meant not having a good job or not having a job at all because of lack of education or skill. It meant losing children to illnesses because of death of clean water, a filthy environment and insufficient proper food. Kassanga Avenue was a maximum-security prison for people who had committed the crime of allowing them to be born into poverty (95).

The above excerpt shows not just the environmental pollution of the Kassanga Avenue but also the living condition of the people living there. These set of people are so poor that leading a decent life or even sending their kids to a nice school and eating at least two square meal is a problem for them. The novel portrays an environmentally polluted society, neglected and abandoned by the government, where residents' survival depends on their individual struggles and personal luck.

Furthermore, the main hospital; government owned hospital where Akalaka, Chira's father was admitted clearly depicts environmental degradation and corruption. At the hospital, she is confronted with the nurse with 'screwed-up face' and the unsympathetic matron. At the hospital, nurses, matrons and doctors treat rich patients and their relatives differently, and are antagonistic to help needing poor people like Chira, Kodili and other Kassanga residents. And treat "the man dressed in a traditional outfit of rich textured brocade. His movement seemed ostentatious and exaggerated to her (Chira), the type of swagger some people acquired as they climbed the social ladder according to one of our teachers at FGSS'. The man was treated well

by the nurses, matron and other workers of the hospital. The environment of the main hospital is strictly dirty. The government is supposed to provide shelter for the women taking care of their relations in the hospital but instead, they are seated under the tree. They are neglected and abandoned to their fate. The drainages are blocked and thus breed mosquitoes which declare war on patients and people who take care of them. He states that:

The mosquitoes hiding in the blocked drains in the hospital premises resurfaced in their hundreds in search of human blood. They declared war on Chira. She hated them, their bites made her skin itch and if she dared scratch the spots, she ended up with tiny blisters that left black scars when they healed. She had been nicknamed 'patch leg' at primary school because of the hundred of mosquito bites scars on her leg (34).

The government of Nigeria claims to spend billions of naira in provision of health services, healthcare facilities and drugs in the country yearly; yet the masses have no access to them. Ifeoma Okoye through this work exposed the rot in the country's health system and other sector. The hospital is poorly managed to a point that you go outside the hospital to get some things needed for your treatment. According to Kodili Chira's mother:

The hospital provides nothing my daughter... the patients provides everything they need. I have bought tablets, injections, plasters for your father's treatment. I've bought everything Chira even cotton wool. The nurses always tell me that the Medicines are not there in hospital's ... uh... uh (43).

The above quotation exposes the rot and decay in the nation's health system. Hence, the non-challant attitude of the health care givers and government has led to the death of many, including Akalaka, Chira's father who later becomes a victim of the vicious circle of decay and hypocrisy.

Indeed, the novel also presents the place of women in that environment. In the novel, Chira and her mother, Kodili resort to doing menial jobs to survive. They plait women's hair under a tree near the market since they could not afford to rent a shop at the four o' clock market. In depicting the above experiences, Okoye raises a growing concern for the poor who find comfort and shield under a tree to make a living for themselves; her concern is however dominated with the problem of a deliberate deforestation. In mama Egodi's words to Chira, she says:

They razed everything to the ground. That tree under which you set to plait women's hair, the mechanic shops, nearby the stalls, the kiosks, all were razed to the ground kpatakpata ...A rich man that bought the place is going to build a big hotel or something there (144).

It is important to note that the destruction is done without considering the condition of the women who use the trees as umbrellas to protect themselves from the scorching sun or the environmental implication of cutting down trees. The demolition was done without a prior notice. The reason why it was cut down was simply because a rich man bought it in order to build a big hotel or something also which is very unfair. The above act depicts environmental degradation which is viewed in this novel as one of the effects of capitalism. The rich disregard, exploit and manipulate the poor who are defenseless as a result of their economic status. The above extract also shows the big gap between the rich and the poor in the society. The poor ones are getting poorer while the rich are getting richer to the detriment of the poor citizens.

Furthermore, not even the prospect of marrying Maks, a rich man, to rescue Chira and her mother from the grip of poverty changes anything. Maks is a very rich, selfish man who couldn't help Chira because his plans of marrying and controlling her life didn't work out the way he planned it. He represents the rich politicians in our society that has a lot of wealth but cannot stop at exploiting and forcefully taking that little a poor man has. Maks is as mean as they come; his chauvinism is such that denies women any form of personal development. He is uneducated and so does not see any need for his wife to go to university, as Chira aspires. But Chira is a proud female student, who believes in personal development; she has her teacher back at FGSS, Miss K to thank for her independence of mind that Maks seeks to deny her. Maks, a secondary school dropout is a front for some highly placed people in government. He sells crude oil for them. And he also helps them take public money illegally out of the country and bank it for them. He helps them invest some of the money and gets huge commission for working for them. Chira considers marrying Maks to make her hypertensive mother happy, she undertook a trip with Maks to the Governor's house, to attend the governor's birthday. The Governor is rich; he had many investments overseas and had houses in all the state capitals. Ifeoma Okoye is angry again. "The food on the long stretch of tables would feed all the residents of Kassanga Avenue for two months...fried chicken drumstick that looked as big as new born baby's thighs". This is to imagine the height of hunger and poverty these people are facing. Ifeoma Okoye goes further to attack the ruling class elites-and their collaborators like Maks who squander tax payer's money on irrelevant and frivolities like birthday celebrations, burials and leave the people in misery and hardship.

More so, the federal government tends to neglect such areas like Kassanga Avenue, abandoning them to perish in such slums and forgotten areas. If those areas were strictly planned and developed by the government, there will not be a problem when it rains. The fact still remains that the ruling class has never considered the suffering and plight of the people living in those areas just like what we see in Ajegunle Lagos. Whenever there was rain, it was very unwise to

come out and even after the rain; Kassanga Avenue becomes a dirt dump for anyone who cares to see thus:

Only a few of the residents were able to find standing or sitting space on the narrow strip of land between the shanty and the wide gutter in front of it. The rest stood on the street across the gutter. It had rained earlier in the day and as usual the gutters, overwhelmed by the flood water, had distributed their filth contents All over the area, leaving the muck behind as the water returned to its normal Level (59).

The above extract is to show the height of environmental decay that was seen in Kassanga Avenue. Looking at the effect of such environment to kids and the people living in Kassanga Avenue, it could cause a deadly ailment or untimely death because of the kind of environment that they were exposed to.

Growing in the street of Kassanga not only exposed Chira to, the hard ways of life but also, made her quite 'exceptional in her school. Her experiences at FGSS and the insensitive and hurtful comments made by those who used Kassanga Avenue to assess her and degrade her had made her see the avenue with new eyes. At a point, she despised Kassanga Avenue and wondered why she wasn't born rich or rather why her parents were poor. She wondered if the avenue is a cursed place thus:

... As a small girl, she had played with her friends around the deep gutters, often retrieving from them discarded items like empty plastic bottles and cans and selling these treasures to dealers. These days the mere sight of the slimy, greenish scum that floated on the surface of the gutters made her cringe as if someone had emptied a can of mucky and wriggly worms all over her...she had come to see Kassanga Avenue as a cursed place, as a place where people had been deprived of good education, good health, good jobs and basic amenities; where they were deprived of dignity and honour. A place where people's toil would never bring any improvement to their lives (104).

This above excerpt shows the level of poverty and decay in 'the fourth world'. The dirty environment of Kassanga Avenue took toll in their lives. The environmental decay didn't just end with their environment but also their lives because the living condition of the people is nothing to ride home about. She could not stop herself from hating Kassanga Avenue and had become so ashamed of living there that she rarely told people where her home was. Often, she would give a vague answer or description if someone was persistent in their question.

Kassanga Avenue residents always tried to ignore their symptoms as long as possible because of the cost of treatment. If the symptoms persisted and the pain became unbearable, they would go to Jude's Medicines Stores on the avenue for help. Jude charged much less for treatment than the hospitals and allowed the residents to pay by installment. The residents would go to the hospital only if Jude's treatment failed to make them better.

It was as if their poverty-stricken lives had something to do with their environment; People suffer from hunger and need. Begging was a normal thing in 'the fourth world'. Mama Egodi's children, Egodi and Donatus, who lived in the Kassanga Avenue and was greatly loved by Chira, are killed by a racing lorry as they tried to cross Obiagu Street. They were coming back from hawking bananas. Their death shocked the entire Kassanga community. Some even blamed mama Egodi for such evil that has befallen her. But the truth still remains that poverty made it that if they do not hawk, they will not eat or even go to school. Okoye's story evokes tears from our eyes with her solidarity and empathy of the poor. Okoye can no longer pretend and chant the escapist religious slogan of 'it is well'. This is the kind of miserable life that was obtainable in that avenue. The government should rather be blamed for not providing a good living condition for the poor, they should be blamed for neglecting and; looking down on the plight of the poor masses and should be blamed for not providing work opportunities for the poor and yet they shut down their means of livelihood by cutting the trees where they avoid the scorching sun when plaiting the women's hair.

Another good example of the effect of environmental degradation is death resulting from the excess flooding and rain. There was never a happy ending whenever it rained; it either affects the environment or the people living in it. There has been series of death in Kassanga avenue as a result of lack of building plans for both the roads and houses in the avenue as people mistake the muddy spoilt road overflowing with water and the deep gutters when it is raining thus:

... flood cascade down Kassanga Avenue like a mountain river. The deep gutters and the road had fused into a dangerous expanse of surging muddy water ...the Year before, a small girl and an elderly woman both residents of the avenue, had perished in the great flood of Kassanga Avenue, as the press had named it the annual deluge. Journalists had described the previous year's disaster as avoidable and had likened it to the ones that had occurred before. They have called again on the state government to do something about the erosion in order to save the lives of the people living in the settlement. The residents, press had pointed out, dutifully paid their taxes each year and deserved a safe environment to live in. Kassanga Avenue and its environs was being neglected because of the class of People who lived there, they said, people who had no one to speak for them (146-147).

From the above excerpt, we can see that people from 'the fourth world' perish yearly from the plan less building and over flooding which actually can be avoided, if necessary, measures are taken by the government. For the journalist to say that 'they have called again the state government to do something about the erosion' means that they had been alerted before now about such development in such areas but has been neglected umpteen times because those who live there do not add value to the lives of the rich people or rather, they should suffer because they deserve to be poor. Some teenage residents of the slum, without the knowledge of their parents, had staged a peaceful protest to other parts of Enugu. But 'Hoodlums' joined, looted and manhandled those they came across during the protest. The police was called and typically, gunned down four young protesters. Two of them were poor residents of Kassanga Avenue. Ifeoma Okoye calls on the state government or rather those involved in the development of the communities involved to come to their aid and make such unlivable slum a living place for the poor citizens who has no one to speak for them except for the avenue of literature where the plight of the poor masses is exposed and a solution is further proffered for the betterment of the society and the people.

Conclusion

Having acquainted ourselves with the topical discussions contained in the novel, it could inarguably be said that literature serves as a mirror through which a society can be viewed or captured. The bulk of this study has been sustained by the problems of environmental degradation of the Niger Delta environment and the world at large as portrayed in the novel; *The Fourth World*. There is also the issue of neglect of the problems in the area by the country's government and of the surreptitious activities of oil companies and their local collaborators. Effects and incidents in the novel are effectively literary elements used by the novelist to portray ecological degradation; that the novelist to a large extent has fulfilled basic eco-criticism principles with her works.

Thematically, the novel deals on environmental degradation, oil exploration, and pollution, lack of planning of buildings, waste management and other ecological problems in Nigeria especially in the Niger Delta region. In the novel, place and characters are portrayed from the point of view of a patriarchal system where men determine all and everything that becomes of the other. This portraiture lends credence to Judith Plant's position that ecological degradation may be attributed to patriarchy- the dominant. world social system. This perspective to eco-criticism supports Plant's view; thus, if the environment ails, human as well as non-human nature is bound to be adversely affected.

This is precisely the case with where characters and place are portrayed from the patriarchal perspectives, a man's world devoid of feeling for the life and sufferings of the other; where there are various forms of pollution, environmental issues, all leading to one form of

environmental degradation or another. Where a character's life and fate is determined by the kind of environment he lives in. Human efforts to combat evil only brings about worse evils and nothing really changes, even as the novel ends with no resolution of the crisis. Conspiracy of the few beneficiaries of the ecological loot and degradation perpetually sustains the evils, and as long as the rest of the humanity is led and controlled by this group of persons, the hope of ecological sustainability remains indeed blank.

In *The Fourth World*, Chira also played the role of creating ecological consciousness in the lives of the people living in Kassanga Avenue. It is worthy to note that the writer has judiciously treated and discussed the burning issues of environmental degradation and proper planning of plan less building, areas, and slums in some forgotten areas which may lead to numerous problems and effects like erosion, death and so many other things. However, it is my observations that more writers are needed in the fight to awaken the consciousness of the government for the betterment of our environment and society. These writers will also have to look at other aspects of environmental degradation like bush burning, soil excavation, filling of rivers, streams fishing with chemical products which have not gotten much attention from the writers.

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