

Social Consciousness: An Analysis of Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*

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Abstract

Writers have a social responsibility of depicting varied experiences of life within a given cultural milieu. Their documentations have thus awakened the consciousness of people while responding to pressing issues of the society with clarity, plausibility and accuracy. African writers have tried reacting to various postcolonial issues in Africa by depicting the ugly and humiliating experiences of individuals in African societies. Hence, the image of poverty, squalor, deprivation and deplorable conditions depicted in the selected novel, *The Fourth World* raised a need for this research. This paper therefore adopts different perspectives as critical tools in order to understand the relationship between the characters' living conditions and their environment. In this work, Okoye's novel is therefore x-rayed through the critical lens of Feminism, Marxism, Postcolonial theory, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism and Environmental Psychology. The selected novel however explores various ways individuals especially the female gender is adversely affected by social, political, cultural and economic factors. The analysis of the novel reveals certain levels of corruption, marginalization, oppression, poverty, hopelessness and gender issues that aggravate the sufferings of individuals in society, thereby limiting their opportunities of attaining self realization and freedom. However, Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* is employed in this paper to critically explore the above stated views.

Keywords: Corruption, Postcolonial theory, Feminism, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism

Introduction

Literary texts are indeed a repository of sorts which explore and portray the historical, cultural, linguistic, ontological and cosmological particulars of a given society. In essence, African Literary creative arts are primarily pre-occupied with the ways and life of the African people, as such we find the writers' exploration of the worldview of the African cultural milieu; especially their creative works. Therefore, Literature is perceived as an important medium through which the literary artists document their experiences as well as the experiences of other people. Nnolim asserts that:

Literature still tills its crops in many virgin forests, and art continues to speak in many voices. It is now commonplace knowledge that contemporary African literature cannot be properly understood and appreciated as an isolated expression but must rather be viewed as part of the totality of human experience. (*Approaches to...* 16)

Writers are members of a given society whose acute sensibility is triggered by social, cultural, economic and political issues. In essence, writers do not write in a vacuum, but depict and analyze different situations in society; educating, criticizing and correcting social ills. Thus, they perform the role of documenting past and current issues which affect their society. This is to say that African fiction has continued to explore the prevailing experiences of people who are neglected and exploited in society. It also explores the political, social, economic, psychological, and cultural experiences of Africans. Achebe, in his article, "The Novelist as a Teacher" explains that:

The writer's duty is to explore in depth the human condition. African people must know and value their heritage, understand their history and possess a strong ethical code that condemns injustice and corruption wherever they occur. In African case, therefore, novel and history are the same - the novel is history, it is a record of the history as Africans have seen and lived it. (24)

Ngugi goes further to explain that, “a writer responds with total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive need; he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society”(46). Wole Soyinka also observes that “a writer possesses an inner light not available to the masses of his people and that it is his duty to use this inspiration and insight to guide his society towards a beautiful future” (7). Since independence, African writers have focused on different postcolonial themes such as cultural contact and conflict, disillusionment, struggle for independence, racial discrimination, gender inequality, cultural subjugation, oppression, exploitation, corruption and political instability etc. It is worthy to note that Postcolonial literature denotes any literary genres/texts that explore or criticize the activities of contemporary indigenous leaders who oppress, marginalize and exploit the poor masses for their own selfish reasons. The above assertions represent the problems challenging the political leadership and structure of the newly independent African countries. In Chike Okoye’s view, “it is basically the literature written by writers of countries that have gained political independence from a colonial power. They contain issues and experiences of cultural exclusion and division suffered by the colonial under the colonialist” (1).

Currently, the thematic factors in Postcolonial literature have been broadened as a result of different emerging trends, issues and changes in the African social cultural environment. Hence, African literary artists have tried as much as possible to react to these issues with all seriousness using their literary techniques. This research therefore presents multiple issues that affect many postcolonial societies in Nigeria cum Africa. Ifeoma Okoye’s *The Fourth World* presents a realistic view of events happening in the contemporary Nigerian society. Her selected novel explores the varied nature of human experiences such as oppression, female subjugation/ suppression, gender inequality and abject poverty etc. Thus depicting and exposing many social ills that have engulfed the Nigerian nation. In detailing the experiences of her characters, Okoye intrinsically reveals that in most postcolonial African societies, social vices such as exploitation, neglect, poverty, avarice, nepotism, oppression and political corruption have eaten deep into the social structures.

The Fourth World and Literary Perspectives

The Fourth World is a post colonialist novel that addresses the major problems bedeviling the Nigerian cum African societies. In essence, postcolonial theory/criticism has had a major impact on literary studies because postcolonial writers bring into light the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin assert that:

All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem. The development of new élites within independent societies, often buttressed by neocolonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invader societies—all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction.(2)

In the context of a heterogeneous society, where the colonized often live with their former colonizers, postcolonial writers try to reassign new ethnic and cultural meanings to marginalized groups. Its literature attempts to construct new identities against these outwardly imposed borders. Hence, post-colonial African writing comprises a strong reaction against negative stereotypes constructed during the colonial period. African writers had to dismantle the myths of African inferiority, assert African cultures, combat the apartheid regime in South Africa and criticize corruption in Nigeria and other countries in Africa. The African writers like Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka, Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong’O, Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Ifeoma Okoye are extremely popular and have gained international recognition.

Generally, post-colonial writers and critics focus on writings from both colonial powers and from those countries that were colonized. Also,

novels that are postcolonial explore how the clash between colonizing countries from Europe and Asia and the countries that are colonized in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Australia create religious, political, social, and cultural friction. It also explores how people might feel about this friction. Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* is employed as a postcolonial African novel in order to further explore the consequences of colonialism; economic and psychological effects of imperialism on Africa. Okoye's novel has also explored the physical environment (shanties, slums, abodes under bridges) and its effect on the inhabitants with the pivotal theme of gender inequality, injustice, corruption, discrimination, exploitation and bad leadership. The views from postcolonial theory are so rich that they illuminate not only the abstract world of people's ideas but also interpret their everyday experiences. Okoye's novel mainly focuses on the female characters thereby vacillating between feminism, ecology (ecocriticism), ecofeminism and environmental psychology.

Feminism and post colonialism are concerned with the question of marginality. In essence, the colonized native in postcolonial theory and the woman in feminist theory are both marginalized individuals. Also, one important strand in postcolonial theory is the colonization of nature or the physical environment. The pollution, neglect and destruction of the flora and fauna of the colonized land in any form are all aspects of this colonization of nature. Feminism x-rayed through postcolonial lens appears divided and vulnerable to criticism. However, feminism points to many gaps in postcolonial theory such as the issues of double victims: the female gender as victims of colonial representations and patriarchal norms. Frankly speaking, both feminism and postcolonialism are concerned with the question of marginality. The colonized individual in postcolonial theory and the woman in feminist theory are both marginalized in different ways. Recently, there has been an exploration and theorizing of ecostudies and environmentalism. Ecocriticism has continued to pose great challenges in modern Nigerians scholarship. In Nigeria, environmental concerns have given rise to what Iniobong Uko termed "ecocritical literature" (21). This area of study in literature is overly concerned with the "peculiar relationship between literature and the natural environment" (21). Ogaga Okujade also asserts that "ecocriticism deals with African literary works which explore the issues of the environment while continuing to be

engagingly combative in order to redress the one dimensional ecogemetry of Africa and Nigeria”(xii). It is a field of study first explored by environmental activists and literary figures like Isidore Okpewho, Niyi Osundare, Ken Saro-wiwa, Kaine Agary and others. The study of their literary texts helps in delving deep into ecofeminism, thereby understanding the relationship between literature and the environment; and its effects on the female gender. Ecofeminism will therefore provide the basis for new perspectives on how the landscape also affects women and girls.

In essence, the physical environments become symbols of identity represented in the relationship between nature and the female gender. The novelist stance in portraying how injustice meted out on nature can negatively affect the female gender shows the extent the discourse on literature and environment provides the basis for understanding how human beings treat nature ethically and morally. There are also images of atrophy which helps in understanding the ecological discourse in the novel. Also, the treatment of environmental degradation and its effect on the growth and development of the female characters shows how the novelist utilized ecological praxis to understudy the complex and ever-changing danger faced by natural environments and the female gender in a postcolonial society. In order to fully explore the above mentioned views, this paper reviews the female characters in the novel and their ways of assimilating the environment and social circumstances. This is why the heroine of the novel, Chira frantically searches for ways of escaping the poverty that has smashed people’s faces while carving out a new identity. It is important to note that this research explores Okoye’s novel from different perspectives.

Postcolonial and Marxist Exploration into Okoye’s *The Fourth World*

Ifeoma Okoye’s *The Fourth World* explores the prevalent issues that have occupied the contemporary Nigerian society. The novel has also depicted different degenerating problems which have plagued the ordinary citizens since independence especially the female gender. It also paints a sordid picture of the postcolonial African society with many imperfections. Okoye in depicting the experiences of her characters reveals that poverty, oppression, maltreatment, corruption,

exploitation and discrimination have eaten deep into the fabrics of the society; hence, disillusionment, death and frustration have become so rampant. From a Marxist point of view, Okoye has presented an artistic construct with intrinsic socio-political and economic structures or social relationships. Mortimer Adler explains that the social relationship according to Marx and Engels is a “ history of class struggles where oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition with one another...a fight that each timer ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes”(419). Ernest Emenyonu, in the “Foreward” of the novel – *The Fourth World*, supports the above assertions by stating that “our mundane world has concocted a division of humanity into three convenient categories of First, Second and Third worlds that seem mutually exclusive, but in reality, this classification is simply a contraption that groups the world according to levels of industrial technological development; another way of dividing the human world into ‘haves’ and ‘haves-nots’. But there is a Fourth world whose citizenship is not defined by race, colour, geographical location, tongue or creed” (vi).

The above quotation thus summarizes the novel’s themes of class distinction, corruption and government negligence. The selected novel depicts the painful experiences of the poor masses; people who have been neglected, battered and impoverished in a postcolonial society. In essence, the novelist has succeeded in depicting a humiliating world of poverty and exploitation where citizens are denied the basic essence of life such as food, water, shelter, good environment, clothing and education. Emenyonu further explains that “the Fourth world is peopled by the true ‘wretched of the earth’, who squat in shanties, slums, and unsightly makeshift abodes under bridges day and night in both the developed and developing worlds. They are the homeless who have no place to lay their heads in both the most affluent and the not so-affluent nations of the modern world. The inhabitants of the Fourth world wear a badge of common identity-poverty- which is their common denominator” (vi).

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 postcolonial Nigeria. Emenyonu asserts that “the novel is set in Enugu in the Eastern region of Nigeria. But Enugu is only a microcosm of the universal world of the poor found everywhere on earth. It is the world of voiceless humanity, the ignored and despised found in rich as in poor countries, in the free world as in autocratic regimes, under democratic as in authoritarian governments. Wherever they are, poverty is their unmistakable identity. It is the badge they wear. It defines, stigmatizes, and earns them derision as the ‘other world’ (vii).

In order to clearly depict a humiliating world of poverty, Okoye craftily presents the structural inequalities which have deepened impoverishment and exploitation in her fictional environment of Kasanga. In the novel, the residents of Kasanga Avenue are satiric portraits of Nigerian citizens living in poverty, hunger, fear and massive unemployment with no hope of surviving. The relationships between different characters further paints a vivid picture which exposes the disparity between the privileged, the political class and the ordinary citizens, “the petty traders, artisans, scrap collectors, cleaners, labourers and beggars who left home at dawn and returned long after sunset” (*The Fourth World* 103).

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 excavations for house foundations. He did other menial jobs like cutting down trees, clearing drains and working in people’s homes from Monday to Saturday. He left home at six in the morning in the company of other labourers living in Kasanaga Avenue. Sometimes, he waited for labourers from morning until night for days before he got hired. He usually came home from work after dark and was often so tired he dropped off to sleep... (9)

In the novel, Okoye captures a life of despair as depicted in the experiences of individuals. She details the everyday life of the needy and downtrodden who had a given principle:

Borrowing was common among the residents of Kasanga Avenue. Their principle-that is the principle of most of them, as there were a few rogues among them-was that a borrower is better than a thief-Nothing was too little or too big to ask for. They borrowed food, cooked or raw. They borrowed items of clothing to wear to festive events. They borrowed money all the time. Borrowing did not make them go a-sorrowing as it did in other communities. (123-124)

The Fourth World, Okoye's fourth novel is set in Enugu's rickety shanty slum of Kasanga Avenue. The shanties are connected to one another and to Kasanga Avenue by narrow and meandering footpaths. "The Kasanga Avenue, a main street of Kasanga settlement otherwise known as the Fourth world or Urban Jungle..." (*The Fourth World* 103) 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 was narrow, steep, unpaved and risky for many types of vehicle" (*The Fourth World* 103). The buildings that exist in Kasanga Avenue are 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 had been taxing, 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 floods at Kasanga Avenue despite paying their taxes as citizens. The floods mostly drown the residents of Kasanga especially vulnerable elderly women and children like Little Bebe, the only surviving child of Mama

Bebe (out of nine pregnancies). In depicting these experiences, Okoye has vehemently chided the autocracy of the bourgeoisie class in a capitalist system because the gap between the haves and have-nots has become so polarized. Hence, the marginalization and oppression of the proletariats by the bourgeoisies who control the economy is very evident in the novel. This explains why the novelist employed Marxist ideologies in fighting and exposing class distinction, corruption and oppression.

***The Fourth World* from Feminist, Ecofeminist and Environmental Perspectives**

Ifeoma Okoye, one of the most outstanding novelists in Nigeria retells the agonies women and girls experience in a male-dominated society. She daringly confronts the problem of female subjugation and marginalization within the cultural and social circles of the society. Her skillful writing style has gained her international readership and literary critiques. Allwell-Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu opine that as a Nigerian writer, Okoye subscribes to “hypnotizing the Nigerian literary audience not with sordid sermons on the stark realities of socio-political and economic existence in the country, but through an inspired but carefully delivered tale which persuades with the subtlety of the exploration of deeply-felt individual experiences” (114-115). An exploration of the Okoye’s novel urges the readers to consider closely various ways the female gender’s identity is defined in relation to men and the stereotypes associated with such prescribed roles and identities. Chira, is the heroine of *The Fourth World*. In the novel, Okoye explores the experiences of Chira, a beautiful, brilliant and an ambitious eighteen-year-old final year student of Federal Girls Secondary School (FGSS), Owerri who could not further her education as a result of the poverty that crippled her family. After the death of Akalaka, the father of Chira and bread winner of the family, life becomes tough and unbearable. Amos, Akalaka’s brother refuses to support Chira, Nodu and their mother financially. Amos, an unpredictable and traditional man mortgages Chira’s father’s land in order to conduct his burial and pay off his debts. After the burial, Chira’s uncle, Amos leaves them without any form of assistance. He is against Chira going to secondary school because of her gender. In fact Amos nonchalant behaviour towards Chira’s education is not surprising because “he had told her

father ‘to marry her off’ when Akalaka had gone to him for a loan to pay her school fees” (82).

The mean role of Amos, Chira’s Uncle during and after Akalaka’s funeral is not commendable. He became so autocratic and erratic when Chira told him to fulfill her father’s wish to mortgage his land in order to pay her school fees after his death. Amos shouted, “I said shut up before you make our ancestors turn in their grave!’ Amos screamed...Women don’t have any say in family land matters. They are not even allowed to be present when land matters are discussed. Because you’re at secondary school, you think you can meddle in men’s affairs” (83). Amos’ refusal to help Chira and her poor mother exposes them to suffering and hardship. In the novel, Amos represents the patriarchal modes that marginalize and limit the growth of the female gender.

Also in depicting Ogom’s experiences, Okoye also condemns the mentality of choosing marriage over education in the case of the girl child. Ogom is Chira’s best friend in secondary school at Federal Government College Owerri who dropped out of school in SS2 to marry a man in Washington (America). The narrator explains that Ogom uses marriage as an escape route from difficult academic activities in her school despite having wealthy parents. Ogom’s predicament is quite different from Chira’s; Chira likes education and she is determined to succeed but poverty becomes a strong barrier to achieving her dream. It is important to note that despite Chira’s warnings and advice, Ogom marries Chikeson. On arriving America, the reality of her decision stares her in the face as the supposed husband already has a white woman as a wife. The white woman threatens to report Chikeson to the immigration authorities if he leaves her for his new wife. As a result of her threat, Chikeson leaves Ogo stranded and frustrated. The frustration and discovery that her husband has been married causes a psychological trauma which nearly rendered Ogom useless. However, another woman, a victim of men’s chauvinism comes to her rescue and offers her shelter.

By employing ecological literary critique, also known as ecocriticism, this paper dives into the discursive landscape in Okoye’s *The Fourth World* and illustrates how the landscapes in her novel reveal the

socially and morally sensitive issues, such as feminism, environmentalism and nationalism. A qualitative literary exploration of her novel reveals that the discursive landscapes in her novels are socially and morally conducted. In this research, intertextual analysis reflects a manifestation of ecofeminist dualism in her novel. Therefore, there are dualistic connections between the female gender /nature and Kasanga residents/nature. The spatial difference between the Kasanga residents and other cities in Enugu has its ecological and environmental implications. The ecological and environmental implications are attached to the polluted or flooded environment, fallen trees, poor housing and drainage systems.

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 struggles to survive various faces of hardship. In describing the physical environment of Kasanga 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 pools filthy brown water” (*The Fourth World* 103). The narrator explains that:

Kasanga Avenue was a destroyer of people’s bodies and minds. 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 a lack of education or skill. It meant losing children to illnesses because of dearth of clean water, a filthy environment and insufficient proper food. Kasanga Avenue was a maximum security prison for people who had committed the crime of allowing them to be born into poverty. (95)

The above depicted fictional environment of Kasanga Avenue; in the Eastern part of Nigeria captures a specific setting dominated with the problems of pollution of the biosphere and deforestation. The novel

portrays an environmentally polluted society, neglected and abandoned by the government, where residents' survival depends on their individual struggles and personal luck. The 'Main hospital', government owned hospital where Akalaka, Chira's father was admitted clearly depicts environmental degradation. The environment of the Main hospital is strikingly dirty. The drainages are blocked and thus breed mosquitoes which declare war on patients and people who take care of them. According to the narrator, "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 'Patchy Legs' at primary school because of the hundreds of mosquito-bite scars on her legs" (*The Fourth World* 34).

Frustration and disillusionment characterize Okoye's description of the government owned hospital which records deaths on daily basis. The government of Kasanga claims to spend billions of naira in providing healthcare facilities and drugs; yet the masses have no access to them. According to Kodili, Chira's mother: "the hospital provides nothing, my daughter, '...The patients provide everything they need. I have bought tablets, injections, plasters for your father's treatment. I've bought everything. Everything, Chira, even cotton wool. The nurses always tell me that the medicines are not there in the hospital's...uh...uh..." (*The Fourth World* 43). The above quotation exposes the rot and decay in the nation's health system. Hence, the nonchalant 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.

In the novel, government's negligence (malfunctioning), poverty, environmental damage, discrimination and corruption are the major thematic factors explored. Chira is denied the same right to visit her dying father in the hospital, while a man dressed in a traditional outfit of rich textured brocade is allowed to visit his brother when the visiting hour is over. This is a clear case of discrimination and class distinction between the rich and poor. This also shows the inequality that exists between the two classes. This paper gives an insight into the shifting relation between the Kasanga environment as well as the consequences

of environmental practices on the female gender. The relationship between the natural environment and the female gender is evident in the novel. Okoye presents both natural forms such as trees, roads and the female gender as being neglected as a result of government's negligence and the activities of human beings. The bond between the female gender and the natural environment is buttressed in the novel with a tree acting as a shield to the helpless women whose relations are on admission in the hospital. Outside the hospital, some women are seen sitting under the mango trees which offer shelter to them. These women are resting under the trees because the hospital does not provide shelter to them. They are neglected and abandoned to their fate (19). Again, the condition hospital populated by Kasanga residents is likened to that of the guava tree at the hospital with "dozens of rotten and smelly fruit that lay scattered on the ground" (26). This depicts the decay that has engulfed the society circles of the society.

Indeed, the novel presents the issues of the environment and 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 eke out a living; her concern is however dominated with the problem of deliberate deforestation. In mama Egodi's words to Chira, she says: "they razed everything to the ground. That tree under which you sit to plait women's hair, the mechanic shops nearby, the stalls, the kiosks, all were razed to the ground kpatakpata"(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 reason given by the narrator according to the rumor at the market is that "a rich man bought the place and is going to build a big hotel or something there" (144). 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.

Again, Ifeoma Okoye depicts the plights of the female gender by presenting women who see marriage as a passage to escaping poverty

and the actualization of new self-Identity. However, Okoye presents women who marry due to poverty, parental and cultural pressure. In the novel, Kodili, Chira's mother sees marriage as an escape route from suffering and poverty when she married Akalaka at the age of sixteen. She becomes disappointed because her married life taught her a bitter lesson and plunged her deeper into the river of abject poverty to the extent that she loses her identity. She sees marriage as an escape from a home where labourious work and hunger were constant tormentors. Kodili laments to a friend: "I expected that being married would make life easier, but it has not" (17). Mama Egodi, a resident in Kasanga Avenue who marries at a very tender age also regrets her life of poverty and widowhood. Her regret is hinged on the death of her husband and children to an accident while they are hawking to eke out a living.

The above experiences of the female characters raise a growing concern on the place of the female gender in African society. This burning issue is currently experienced by some young girls in contemporary African society. Some African cultural societies create gender inequality which impinges on the growth and development of the female gender. In the novel, Amos, Chira's uncle is a good example of the patriarchal chains that bind women's feet together without mercy. He trains his son in the university; while he declines training and supporting Chira because she is a woman. Again, there are structural inequalities that exist in the division of labour between men and women as depicted by Okoye in her novel; women in Kasanga Avenue are mostly uneducated and as such do petty jobs in order to make ends meet. This is to say that cultural backgrounds underpinned by male chauvinism prevent women from taking major decisions which affect them after the death of their husbands. Kodili's and Chira's unsuccessful attempt to mortgage Akalaka's land is a good example. It is worthy to note that Amos refuses to invite them in selling the land simply because they are women.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to explore how Okoye's *The Fourth World* succeeds in representing realistic African cum Nigerian experiences. These experiences are depicted in a clear and simple language that ordinary people could understand. The language of expression is so

oratorical that it mimics and mirrors everyday life of the people.

In many African countries, significant efforts have been made to promote equality and debase marginalization over the years in order to improve the living conditions of people; yet, selfish individuals in society have greatly undermined these efforts. In exploring the Kasanga Avenue, the novelist exposes series of social discriminations, marginalization, oppression and squalor that characterize that social environment. Also in depicting the experiences of her major character, Chira, Okoye intrinsically explores the conscious cultural and social marginalization underpinned by patriarchal structures which has impinged on the general well-being of women as well as the Kasanga citizens. In essence, *The Fourth World* deals with post-independence disillusionment as seen in the marginalization of individuals, environmental predation and oppression of the poor. Women like Kodili, Egodi and Chira see marriage as an escape route from poverty and suffering. Chira, succumbs to Maks pressure of marriage because of poverty and her inability to raise money for her mother's medical treatment. Maks and the Governor represent the rich class who torment poor citizens like Chira with their amassed wealth. Maks is a secondary school dropout who becomes rich by helping some people in government to sell crude oil and take illegally embezzled public funds out of the country. The Governor neglects the suffering masses but lives in luxury to the detriment of the poor citizens. According to the narrator, "The Governor was very rich. He had many investments overseas and had houses in all the State capitals" (271). Chira's visit with Maks to the Governor's house, to attend the governor's birthday exposes the luxury and excessive waste displayed by the rich Governor in the novel. The narrator explains that "the food on the long stretch of tables would feed all the residents of Kasanga Avenue for two months. She saw fried chicken drumsticks that looked as big as new-born baby's thighs" (272). Okoye therefore condemns and attacks the oppressive ruling class elites and their stooge like Maks who embezzle public funds on personal.

The oppressive activities of the ruling elite culminated into Kasanga rebellion. Characters in the Avenue such as Chira, the heroine, Jude Pebble (Kasanga doctor) and Omume Uche (Mirror Head) are all nationalists and activists who dedicated themselves to spreading radical

consciousness amongst Kasanga residents; hence, there is no doubt that Okoye reflects her deepest concerns for the downtrodden citizens of Kasanga Avenue. The damaging consequences of the dreadful flood and the poor living condition of the people result to Kasanga uprising pushing the youth residents of Kasanga to stage a peaceful protest in other parts of Enugu. The novel therefore raises a major concern for the masses to revolt against any unjust order which violates human rights. As a writer, Ifeoma Okoye creates her fictional work by exploring different social and environmental concerns in order to interpret human experiences. These interpretations are thus weaved around different theories or approaches in order to clearly buttress the problems that have raised the novelist's consciousness.

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