Homeless Children, Witnessing as Aesthetics and the Diary of a Street Biographer: Onyekachi Onuoha's *Earth Corners*

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Abstract
Onyekachi Onuoha's *Earth Corners* (2019) establishes a creative intervention that seeks to remind society of the shared responsibility towards the underprivileged and the underdogs of the earth, especially the millions of vulnerable children left to the vagaries in the streets at 'the backside' of sprawling urban centers. Through the 'eye-witnessing' narrative technic, the author magnifies the prevalent moral atrophy and the decline of humanity in the 21st century socio-cultural system, where the well-adored values that firmed up the fabrics of traditional societies and promoted shared social goals, especially in African cosmology, seems to have been blown away by the ruptures of postmodernity. The phenomenon of stranded, abandoned or uprooted children, as vividly captured in the Onuoha's collection of short stories, locates its microcosm in Nigeria which has been ironically reputed as a country generously endowed in material and human resources, yet notorious as one of the 'poverty capitals' of the third world societies. In the social setting of the stories in the collection, the monster of *almajiri* urchins, abandoned and out-of-school children, traffic-light children-beggars, motor park children, dustbin children (scavengers), mentally challenged, hunger-humiliated homeless children, among others, are a common sight captured in the writer's lens. The study avers that the 'eye-witnessing' approach deployed in the collection enables the author to penetrate the conscience of the audience and also serves to ventilate his disgust and protest against the seeming conspiracy of silence of the powerful elites towards the dire conditions of the downtrodden in society.

Key Words: Stranded children; African socio-cultural values; witnessing aesthetics; street biography

Introduction

Much of the recent literary works and critical interventions on children-centered creative writings continue to concentrate on issues of child-abuse, the trauma of child-soldier and on other concerns such as childhood education, upbringing and learning experiences, but not much attention has been given to the issue of street children that gnaws stridently at the heart of contemporary society. Onyekachi Onuoha's *Earth Corners* (2017) is one of the more recent entries of such books in African creative ferment. Prior to Onuoha's book, Amma Darko's *Faceless* (2003) and Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* (2013) focused on similar situation. *Earth Corners* contains twenty-four thematically intertwined stories as told by the author's imagined, and familiar scenarios of everyday

characters, whose identities might not leave anyone to be veiled in metaphoric, make-believe and sheer humor venture because such characters and situations narrated in the stories are daily encountered in the streets in most of the sprawling cities and their adjoining ghettos around the capitals and in the marginal spaces of even the so called great nations of the world. The story reverderates echoes of what Udoinwang and Amonyeze describe as the "bleakly" moments unfolding on post-independence, postcolonial African milieu (160).

It is creatively intriguing to note the strategies by which the author plots the stories in the collection, especially by exploring with vivid illumination of the Augean sites of the streets where 'interviewer' witnesses the horrors and nauseating narratives of the imagined victims of social neglect, moral inflictions and manifest exclusion of the children of the poor who have no voice nor anyone to voice out their dire fate to the hearing of those who were supposed to factor their welfares into the policy advocacy, design and inclusive governance, instead of the prevalence perversities of sycophantic and elite-centric socio-political system. It is in this respect that Niyi Akingbe avers thus:

> Given the …conspiracy of silence under which the whole nation labors, such act of witnessing are virtual acts of protest. They defy the elaborate system of repression put in place by the government and assert the inalienable rights of the citizenry to have a say in the way in which they are ruled (14).

It is in the context of the situation implied above the Onuoha's stories rendered through 'witnessing' as its chosen aesthetics assumedly to intensify the momentum and also rouse attention to the streets where pictures of neglects and failed governance principles stare the assumed audience in the face.

Furhtermore, the biographical, reportage style employed by the author gives each of the narrations the enabling verve and immediacy of temperament; whips up empathy, and sustains the tempo of horror that marks the ambience of the entire collection. The scenes or locations of each of the pseudo biographic documentary recounted by every character in the stories replicate the images that serve as characteristic signposts of the vulnerable streets where the victims, mostly young children or teenagers in their miserable existence, find their aloneness habitations. By traversing the length and breadth of the porous city spaces like a street eye-witness reporter, the nauseating scenes of children abandoned by families and society in the streets and traumatized through abuses and hunger, are brought to the frontier of creative discourse and critical interrogations. In any case, Onuoha's stories, using biographical technic in which the biographer embarks on a journey of discovery and traverses the streets across his sphere with his focused characters who are cited at the periphery in the universe of this reportage, is heartrending and indicting to our shared humanity in the overall. The author purposefully and meditatively interfaces social reality, social history and realism with aesthetic as channel for probing into the very essence of our humanity. Mary Kolawole gives a broad definition of the arts and criticism thus: "Literary studies, like other discipline in the humanities is located at the interface between history and epistemology, fiction and realism, tradition and modernity, change and alterity" (7).

It is important to take note of the social backdrop to the stories in the book in order to situate the thematic context of the tension and confusion in the interplay between the traditional socio-cultural cosmology and the demands of postmodernity depicted in Onuoha's stories. The idea of abandoned or street children contradicts the pre-modernity

socio-cultural African universe, where the communal value system had no room for such situation of individuality, insensitivity and inhumanity manifesting as modern day child neglect. Much f the crisis of postmodernism stem from cultural disorientation that has put families asunder through sheer conflicts of interest that are most often self-serving aptly described by Monica Udoette and Kufre Akpan as "the conflict of power and interest within the family and societal structure" (52). In such cultural society, the child belongs to the collective and is thus closely monitored. Such glowing and adored values or cultural norms seem to have been played down while struggling to contend with the forces of dominant, predatory postmodernity that tends to alienate the humanistic spirit of traditional African societies. Uwem Affiah, David Udoinwang and Offiong Amaku affirm this by stating that "the struggle against the dominance of the imported culture over the indigenous is on-going" (14). The thrust of the stories in the book centers on the socio-cultural contraptions brought about by the dearth of traditional ethos and the incursion of postmodernity, where memories and ethos of the humane past continue to wane while material pursuits seem to have blindfolded the elites, derailed the pursuit of common good and disoriented today's society from its sacred goals social responsibilities. The creative as well as critical import of such creative commitment is as pointed out by Charles Bressler in the following extract:

> History serves as a background to literature. Of primary importance is the text, the art object itself. The historical background of the text is only secondarily important, for it is the aesthetic object, the text that mirrors the history of its time. The historical context serves only to shed light on the object of primary concern, the text (180).

Onuoha's social vision as aptly portrayed in this text, while shedding light on the socio-historical ambience of the world located in his creative binocular, adds fresh perspective and exciting innovativeness to the creative tradition, for, through the gory pictures of poverty and perversity-ravaged streets, he penetrates the heart of the matter, illuminating the dark places of the 'streets' world where the downtrodden, the dreg of the earth inhabit, while at the same time exposing the other side of the camouflaged city ambience and the self-serving and docile humanity that claims religiosity, civilized and sophisticated values, turn the other way from the festering sore of poverty and moral diseases that afflict the larger vitals of the sprawling third world ors postcolonial milieus.

The semiotics of the streets and jungle locations in the setting of the stories arrays the characteristically obscene, contradicting and nauseating pictures of the postcolonial scenarios where socio-economic dilapidation of the peripherals come alive; where morality of leadership comes to question and the muted agony of the social castaways reverberates through the lenses of the imagined universe captured in the text. David Udoinwang and Vero-Ekpris Gladstone point out that "literary semiotics could be utilized to illuminate the inglorious history of the colonial encounter with the attendant destructive legacies manifesting with neo-colonial tendencies as re-created in literary texts" (1). Fresh approaches to understanding the manifest conditions of the postcolonial, postmodern world order, where the credo of 'survival of the fittest' seems apparent and the condition of the voiceless and vulnerable remain very dire at the bottom of existence. The child-victims of the prevalent heart-numbing poverty in the midst of plenty wallow in despair and left at the mercy of the elements, just as those underage victims of disproportionate trajectories of what James Okpiliya and Kufre Akpan refer to as "…the colouration of power hegemony" (50) draw artistic responses to the situations as they evolve. Elleke Boehmer states that

"postcolonial literatures are proliferating and changing, as are critical approaches to them" (223). The artistic situation in Ohuoha's text probes into the heart of society to expose its moral sores that need some remedy.

It is for the above roles that Zulu Sofola aptly describes the artist as the secondary creator, and as vital instrument, "the taming agent of the society" (1). To elaborate further, Sofola opines thus:

> Art is thus the medium through which the soul of man reaches out beyond itself to transform and make intelligible the prodding within the inner recesses for the ultimate Truth, the meaning of existence, man's place in the cosmos, his relationship to the Supreme Creator and to his fellow creatures… For man, through the artist, undergoes the process of creative vision which he actualizes through his creation as a secondary creator (2).

The author's sense of compassion, zeal and commitment to human value and dignity projected in through the stories in the book places him as the megaphone for the inchoate, the voiceless and hapless millions languishing in the forsaken places of the earth. His metaphoric characters are symbolized as castaways of the world; the abominable and overthrown, who have been defeated by harsh destinies, and now found themselves existing at the mercy of the elements. These millions populate the backsides of the well-paved streets of our cities. The backsides where the abandoned children and youngsters stray into and find 'home' are prowled by heartless rapists and bloodthirsty bullies. This is the dark world that the artist braves in his creative vision of seeking redemption for the socially condemned.

The circumstances and fates of the cohort of lost children buttressed in the text's context are manifold just as captured in the broken narrations that the author plucks from the victims' chagrined lips. Through this auto(bio)graphical discursive technic, the biographer explores the world of the underdogs; and the conditions of the social rejects are stripped and the ugliness of their narrated world exposes the inanities of postmodern 'civilized', sophisticated humanity. The author's dream takes form and materializes through the naivety of his characters' talk backs, talk against or talk outs on the circumstances and oddities of the world that they find themselves. One can perceive the 'dreamed of' world that the author tries to re-create by exposing the situation and by so doing tries to moralize or rationalize what should be the better options for society to pursue in relating to social responsibilities especially towards the weak and vulnerable members of society towards avoiding the unexplainable trauma these unfortunate groups are exposed to in the midst of the commonwealth of mankind.

In analyzing Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, Bressler caps it up by stating that: "Since Freud believes that the literary text is really an artist's dream or fantasy, the text can and must be analyzed like a dream. For Freud, this means that the dream is a disguised wish…It is the memory of these satisfied infantile desires that provides the fertile ground for our present wishes to occur" (132). The mood and motivations of the writer of these traumatizing stories serve to remind and tickle the conscience of society through a perusal of the inner state of the characters that narrate the experiences embodies in the renditions of the book. On this note, Werner Bohleber's assertion below is instructive:

> The catastrophes of the 20th and 21st centuries, wars, the Holocaust, racist and ethnic persecution, as well as the increase in social violence and the newly developed awareness of violence in families,

> maltreatment and sexual abuse of children, have made the development of a theory and technique of traumatization and its consequences an urgent task in psychoanalysis (1).

This is instructive and intellectually reflective, especially as we turn our minds to the ugly sights of bedraggles, hunger-devastated out of school children prowling the streets of our cities day after day, competing with beasts for survival as scavengers on rubbish heaps. It needs not be overstressed that the child-characters found, under one circumstance or the other, left on the streets, are exposed to all forms of dangers, and terminally vulnerable, since it is unarguably clear that the way they are abandoned to ill fate, they constitute the breeding ground for terrorists, future rapists, armed gangs, social nuisance and dehumanized vermin that would in turn haunt society.

A child that is abandoned to the vagaries would naturally grow up morally deformed, physically frail and mentally distorted. No society can fold hands to watch such malady thrive freely. Apart from being exposed to the possibility of being physically diseased, malnourished or psychologically shattered, such child in the early stages of development begins to lose grip of what could be coined as his/her 'moral defenses' because, as Bohleber above puts it, "…for the trauma breaks through the protective shield that is formed by the psychic texture. It is indelibly recorded in the body and has a direct effect on the organic substrate of mental functioning" (1-2). By Ohuoha's creative perspective, the author recreates "images of possible or realizable alternative worlds in the literature" (Asein, 531). These victims of dislocation that characterize postmodern, postcolonial African spaces go through their ill fates and psychic reproaches not necessarily because of lack of resources, but the tragedy of it all is that much of the resources earmarked for social provisions to ease the anguish of the vulnerable are often diverted to private estates of power hegemonies who accumulate for vanities and self-aggrandizements.

The traditional heritage and identities of the past now lies moribund and postmodern African society seems to have lost cultural values of communality and regards to human-dignity. David Udoinwang and Ikpe Akpan put it succinctly that "The cultural heritage of African societies, as it is with every other race, is what gives the people peculiarly marked out identities, self-memories, and a sense of who they are" (8). Asein reflects on the present situation by stating thus: "On the African continent, the perceived dislocations are largely symptomatic of institutions that failed…. The issue here is the perennial human experience of betrayal of a dream- a subject that has provoked literary responses in every state and across cultures" (531). The stories imaginatively harvested on the back streets and ghettos of the sprawling cities and hamlets mark the symptomatic semiotic of contemporary sophistication in the political economies of society, and in our immediate socio-cultural environment, a signpost at the crossroads of a nation that neglects the gaping wounds on the vital veins of its organic existence.

The Biographer and the Entries of His Street Diary

The experiences documented in *Earth Corners* emanate from the writer's creative initiative performed through the agency of what might be described as creative non-fiction in which familiar experience in society are projected with vivid images of our social reality. It is aptly captured in the back cover of the text that, "Earth Corners is a collection of real life stories of street children who are victims of poor parenting circumstances, including negligence and sheer poverty, societal decadence; and sometimes, peer pressure". From the

start point of the street tour, the writer bears witness and also listens to the piercing tales of the street dwellers, just as the landscapes in the stories are bluntly visible to real life locations. Through pointing description, the first story entitled 'My Pregnancy is Like a Drink in a Cup. Those Who are Me Powerful than Me Keep Topping it with Their Sperm', gives a picture of the street urchins who find refuge at the edges of the heart of the sprawling city, competing for space. This teenage pregnant and despondent character, in response to the street diarist, makes some revealing account of her obviously very bleak life experience. She tells the story of the genesis of her street nativity and pregnancy in her response to questions put to her by her interviewer thus:

> "It is a long story".
> "…It's okay, so why did you leave your cousin's house?"
> "I don't know", she opened her juice and wanted to drink but it seemed she had lost her appetite.
> "You look like you are pregnant".
> "You are right".
> "Who is responsible?"
> "They are many! First it was my cousin and later, a lot of persons who sympathized with me also joined in getting me pregnant".
> "…My pregnancy is like a drink in a cup. Those who are more powerful than me keep topping their sperm with it" (*Earth Corners* 13-14).

Going by the tapestry of the whole account, the crisis that saw this victim to the street started right from home where she was supposed to be protected and properly catered for. She was raped, harassed and finally thrown out to the wild street where dreary and morally debased humans prowl.

The second story is titled 'They Said I am a Witch', which is told by another victim who now finds safe heaven in the street in chapter eight under the subtitle: 'They Said I am the One that Killed My Father'. This is even gorier, piercingly heart-rending and emotionally disturbing. Here is the story of young boy who has been profiled at home and branded in the streets into where he is violently driven by members of family. These are familiar stories where vulnerable children are stigmatized and branded as witches and causers of mishaps to parents and families. At the scene of the interview, the roving biographer describes the victim's weary composure as being terribly emaciated by persistent hunger and agony of homelessness:

> Seeing one of these children I had heard about so closely is mind disturbing. He was a child, ravaged by hunger and his rib bones were visible as if he had worked himself into emasculated six packs. Years on the street were written all over him. His body had marks; marks that rhymed with the rhythm of his life… His clothes had not touched water voluntarily for washing except the one that was forced down by nature…. He smelt of the failure of our humanity; our failure from being human and even the perfume in disguise to ward off his odor could not suppress his presence, the presence of what the society had done to him (*Earth Corners* 19).

In the interaction between this street child and the biographer, it is revealed that his travail started from home where he had been profiled and labeled as a witch, a bringer of misfortune, and agent of evil and thus must be exiled from where godly humans live. When the narrator of 'They Said I am the One that Killed My Father' (pp.47-51) is asked about how she left home, she reveals that her paternal uncle accused her of being responsible for the death of her father, and to find safety from her accusers, she fled home to the waiting but

dangerous street.

It is a similar scenario in the story above which describes the young boy's countenance after a long romance with lonely streets. In summary, the family rejects him, the church where he could find godly people and spiritual succor chases him away, and the street receives him with beatings and all forms of nasty treatments; yet, the on-looking world considers his ill fate as poetic justice. But the young victim keeps dreaming for a better life one day in the future. The extract from the last beat of the dialogue with the street biographer goes thus:

> "So, how do you feel when you see mates returning from school?".
> "It makes me hope. It makes me strong that one day I will also get what they have" (*Earth* Corners 22).

One can only imagine the enormity of emotional trauma and physical torture that the numerous street characters created in the stories go through, in the midst of a society that trumps itself up with its religiosity, good conscience and god-fearing. But its moral yardstick remains fledgy for the picture reveals a rather drifting society that exhibits inhumanity and disoriented conscience. The next story is titled 'I am Hungary', and this could aptly serve as a cover title of the book, for the content of each narrative exposes the travesty of a world that is perpetually hungry for moral repair and collective humanity. This is the type of a lost African universe that the writer seems to passionately long for a repair or retrieval going by the ways he tunes his creative antenna across the dark and absurd places where modern civilization has erected in the place of its lost heritage of communality or common brotherhood. Reflecting on the repercussions of postmodern socio-cultural phenomena, Richard Priebe captures the situation thus:

> Shifting to a more inclusive 'our', I make an obvious point: our agricultural grandparents had a cradle to the grave charter that allowed for stable transference of cultural identity from one generation to another- mobility, literacy, and education have fractured that charter. The particulars of how that happened in Africa account for the particulars of the African narratives of childhood… (45).

The explication above reverberates the rising tempo of critical current in the humanities with the child-concern discourse that writers, critics and scholars must persistently re-energize towards firing the consciousness that promotes our common humanity and concentrates on the welfare of the child in the face of overwhelming influence of alienating postmodernity.

The story 'I am Hungry' indeed, demonstrates the gravity of household violence and brutality that sharply negates the traditional ethos of the African world under which the child was carefully treated by parents and community as a matter of sacred and sacrosanct obligation and sanctity. In the streets, the author bears witness to cases of cruelty and parental terror visited on the vulnerable ones, sometimes as a consequence of transferred aggression or out of sheer wickedness, while the law, being so weak and incapable of serving justice to the weak, watches with careless abandon. The author thus reports:

> He was between the ages of six and eight, for we could not really ascertain his real age. He bled from the cut that was inflicted on him by his father with the use of machete. His father lived on the street and made a living from the sales of recyclable materials. We saw the boy bleeding in a makeshift disused container and the father cursing

him and brandishing a cutlass at him (24).

The psychic dynamics of the characters shifted from the outlook of their countenance, behaviors or in their utterances during the narration or in the scenes of interviews. The interlocutions speak volumes about what the world in which they exist means to them and their estranged place in it as outsiders from the comity of better privileged humans. Several factors including socio-historical, cultural, including socio-political and socio-economic factors converge negatively to intensify the travails of the characters whose stories are presented in *Earth Corners*. But in all, the penetrating statement, 'I am hungry' provokes lasting echoes that blare stridently through the chapters in the stories told in this book.

In story fifteen told in chapter fifteen, entitled 'I Don't Know My Father's Name', the narrator is orphaned of her mother, and does not even know who his father is or was as it were. He finds a company of like minds or shared fate, who loiters homelessly in Bogobiri ghetto area located in obscure place right within the busy commercial heart-beat of the famous city. The biographer explains the atmosphere around this urban ghetto location as follows:

> They sought protection from the street and traders in Bogobiri. Bogobiri was known as a center for suya meet sellers in Calabar. These street kids were playing close to their house which was a disused vehicle, as they climbed and jumped from it… Nobody cautioned them like most persons did in the plays of minors, for it seemed they had been excommunicated from the rest of humanity, and whatever they liked, they did (83).

It is important to note how the author describes the abandoned broken down vehicle as house, and the castaway children have to find accommodation and to play around, loitering aimlessly day or night, without monitoring or feeling of home. A fair knowledge of Bogobiri suya spot in the city is very important. Here is where the government officials, the mercantilists and bankers; the rich and superrich and the privileged of society come to enjoy their fortune, squander their wealth and relax. They seem to enjoy the rather ugly sight of 'parentless' bedraggled, disheveled street children loitering everywhere around this area, but never pay a jot about their miserable condition. It is appalling how they go about unconscious of the uncertain fate that lurks around them day after day, season after season. Yet the eyes of big men, religious leaders, parents with children and big time society women, social workers and government officials are spotting their ever-increasing number in their vagrant fate. Indeed, no one seems to care about the cohort of hunger-deranged lost children who predate the city space without a place to call their home.

Considering the situations of each of the stories narrated in the compilation, it is clear that most of the young ones and adolescents are drawn or compelled to the streets by misfortune of broken homes, unguided peer group pull, abject poverty and hunger at home arising from joblessness, and frustrations of parents who can hardly cater for the family, and even failure of the educational system to handle difficult children or provide leverage in situations where the parents' income are not able to sustain school fees or where the bread winner have lost job or just have no means of seeing to the welfare of families. David Udoinwang and Kufre Akpan pointed out somewhere else that "The present era of popular culture, social media, digital modernity, strange dialects with incoherent idioms, and broken family values, manifests a medley of socio-cultural activities that tend to dismantle earlier notions of social relations and traditional, ethical, cultural and socio-economic value systems" (186).

Religious institutions are also ironically a serious factor responsible for the prevalence of homeless, wandering children that litter the city streets, traffic lights junctions and roadsides. Some of the modern day preachers and prophets are quick at accusing children of being possessed by nefarious spirits or witches and wizard powers, and of such accused of being responsible for parents' misfortune thus recommend that such a child should be kept far off from families until they are delivered from their possessed conditions. The narrator of the twentieth story in the collection whom the biographer meets is a child scavenging whose home and means of livelihood is the cabbage. The street titled in the story 'The Church My Father Took Me to Says I Am a Witch' (pp.118-120), caps up the situation. The church that was supposed to be a fountain of succor seems to have equally failed like the secular institutions of government and society. The shortcomings or shortfalls need serious attention if the cruel phenomenon of street children narrated in the book must be arrested for the overall good of society.

In recent times in Nigeria, for instance, there has been a proliferation of cult gang groups springing up at universities, secondary and even primary schools, where the gang lords would find the vulnerable young people as ready recruits into their groups with juicy promises of protecting them and making them to enjoy the 'good life'. The stock in trade of such group is always violence, vengeance, gun running, stealing and robbery where the proceeds are shared. Crooked politicians find such gangsters as ready instrument to create fear towards forcing their way through elections and for terrorizing opponents. The following interaction in the interview between one such school dropout young gangster now prowling the streets underscores the reality of the above situation:

> ”I went to Henshaw Town and I had a gang that we normally escape from school and we formed a gang which the principal noticed.”
> ”What kind of gang did you form?”…
> “It was Blue Skin”.
> “What did your gang do?”…
>
> “Do you people drink blood?”
> “No, Quadraon”….
>
> “So what expelled you from the school?”
> “The principal caught us when we were holding a meeting at the close of school to beat a senior”. ….
> “It was the time they removed me from Henshaw Town to Science School and I went and met cult boys in school and joined them” (*Earth Corners*, 99-100).

It is important to note that in the society of this story, the phenomenon of impunity and corruption is rife; there are weak institutions, justice is easily bought and the law appears slack, especially when it is connected with the big and powerful members of the society, who patronize some of these criminal gang groups. This is to say that if any of such members of such group is caught, his/her release comes quickly without prosecution and this encourages such groups to thrive side by side with law abiding members of society. This is why cult groups continue to proliferate in schools and colleges, and in the society at large unabated, despite stiff laws that prohibit such. This is why more and more young ones and adolescents, and even adults enlist in such groups, just because of little tokens or to assure a sense of protection and security against attacks in their vulnerable state.

The story in chapter twenty-one is titled '… Without Condom' and it is a particularly

piercing account of a young girl who has been thrown into the streets by her parental home, where she is repeatedly violated. The narrator of the young girl's life gives insight into the situation that reveals the decay in society and how this negatively affects the security and welfare of the child as following:

> She was a street girl. Men fed from her vagina to provide food for her. She was 'safe' with condom but one day, a man provided food without the aid of a condom and she took in. … After she took in, the man turned his back on a stretched relationship by the virtue of having a child, for she was a child denied the human core of ancestral root and association. … He attempted to erase the evidence of his pleasure, using *agbo*: a combination of body cleansing concoction with smooth sweet talk, that it was a cleanser that would set the child 'free'. It actually did set her free. Her tribe, other street children, were full of tears as she was laid to rest… Her corpse, wrapped in nylon, was a memorial to knowledge that she had lived a 'shelterless' life (121).

With the above narration, the author magnifies the danger and vulnerability children are exposed to which endangers the child and plays back on such child's development. The sorry tales rendered in each of the stories draw attention to the lost rhythm of compassionate, humane, and conscious humanity. Each situation in the narration projects broken values and the socio-economic complication that aggravate conflicts in families and society, coupled with the widespread moral decay that characterizes modern day socio-cultural order. By the dominant thematic context of the narratives the reader is reminded of the myriad of disgusting and nasty experiences that bedevil contemporary society, and of which the young and vulnerable generation are at peril. Writers who are conscious of this situation could not shy away from this gnawing malady and of course have been trying to deploy their creative ingenuity to push such social concerns to the front burner of creative engagements and critical discourse, towards addressing the situation.

Uwem Affiah, Offiong Amaku and David Udoinwang thus aver that "The quest for a positive self-image and a national culture has led to a mass retrieval and representation of indigenous forms and techniques in literary dramaturgy" (52). The concourse of traumatized, broken-hearted and dejected children that populate the streets and shanty jungles in urban centers of the world negates the traditional cosmology of a humane cultural past and should be addressed in order to save the present and the future society from the dangers and threats to sustainable and equitable existence. The streets of modern cities are assailed by homeless children, old and emaciates hags, mentally deranged, socially ostracized fellow citizens and other terminally vulnerable that society seems to care very little about, even in the midst of stupendous affluence, technology and prosperity. The disequilibrium in the developmental indexes, widespread greed and self-serving desires add to aggravates human suffering that plays out in Onuoha's reflective and indicting stories. The stories documented in Onuoha's book are a wake-up call to mankind.

Conclusion

This work set out to interrogate the moral and socio-cultural underpinnings of Onuoha;s recent short stories collection- *Earth Corners*, in which the author employs biographical technic as stylistic means for probing into the heart of postmodern society while exposing the decadence of a world that turns its attention away from the malady of street children in societies and leaves the vulnerable to wallow in perpetual trauma of rejection, abuse, violations and hopelessness. The analysis has revealed that the

phenomenon of social exclusion and moral decadence has emanated from the abandonment of the traditional ethos of the pre-colonial socio-cultural cosmology that privileged collective humanity as opposed to the chaos that characterize the present anarchical postmodern world order, where individualism and the harsh tenets of 'survival of the fittest' seems to have become the norm. The awkward development seems to account for the abandonment of the youthful and succeeding generation whose potentials, as projected in the stories, have been damaged, but od which society was supposed to nurture with care and love. The paper concludes that through the agency of auto/biographical story-telling and socially committed artistic vision, the author has successfully deployed technics that are direct, vivid and empathetic to magnify the socio-cultural contradictions responsible to the malaise of child abuses, child-neglect and child exclusion in the scheme of societal affairs. This thus projects Onuoha as a young writer who has been able to utilize literary work as veritable tool for the rescue of the hapless millions who have been inadvertently left behind unattended to as part of a socio-cultural regeneration and social repair in a world that has remained ill at ease with itsself.

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