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Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*: A Critique

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Abstract

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the theme of trafficking, sexual exploitation and how it affects the characters in Amma Darko's novels *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*. In this essay, the paper argues that Darko's thematic content in her novels borders on the issues affecting women and children in their immediate environment. In this regard, the paper unravels the fact that social, economic and cultural issues such as sexual exploitation, domestic violence, patriarchy, corruption, and rape are still rife in contemporary African societies as presented in both novels – *Faceless* and

Beyond the Horizon. To this end, psychoanalytic criticism and feminist criticism will be adopted as the theoretical frame work for this analysis. In conclusion, the paper espouses that the existence of a literary work is heavily determined by social situations and that there is a reciprocal relationship between a literary phenomenon and social structures. Thus, it is apposite to say that literature proves very useful in understanding the socio-political situation, the world view and creativity of the writer.

Keywords: Literature, African Writer, Contemporary Africa Society, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and Darko

Introduction

In every age, literature has always served as a mirror; and creative writers have invariably shown concern for the social, political and moral issues of their societies. Thus, the African creative writer is an integral member of the society; one who understands and brings to fore the collective social reality as well as an embodiment of the yearnings, aspirations, mores, ethos and culture of the people. Inedu ^[1] posits that: "The writer being an integral member of the society knows and feels the lives and felt experiences of his people and society, bringing to bare the intricacies and peculiarities that define and characterize man in his society". Inedu ^[1] cites Allwell Abalogu to emphasize that; "The literary artist is like a seer, a prophet, conscience of the society". In this vein, Ngugi Wa Thiongo in his seminal book *Writers in Politics* writes that; "The writer as a human being is a product of history, of time and space ^[2]. As a member of society he belongs to a certain class and he is inevitably a participant in the class struggle of his time". Ngugi's submission lends credence to the fact that the social task of a writer is to advocate for social change and adjustment in order to achieve harmony and stability in the society ^[2]. However, the writer's responsibility in the society is to ask questions, challenge conventions, creates awareness and consciousness, awaken emotions and impulses among his people. In this regard, a writer is like a seer, a prophet, a teacher, a chronicler, societal watchdog, the conscience of the society etc. There is a consensus that writers are very important members of the society, they occupy a vintage position in society playing pivotal role in the sanity of man and his society. More importantly, the African writer as we have come to know is one who probes identifies and proffers solution to the historical, political, economic, social and cultural forces that tend to stagnate and submerge his people. In view of the many functions of the African writer in his society, Chinua Achebe in a conference at

Makerere University College in Kampala Uganda had pointedly examined the reason why an African writer should be socially and politically committed thus, he declared that:

An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant – like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.

In a similar vein, Ngugi wa Thiong'o contends that: "No writer of imaginative literature from the very best to the moderate significant can really avoid the big issues of the day, for literature to the extent that it is a mirror unto man's nature, must reflect social reality or certain aspects of the society"^[2]. In the light of the above assertions, the obvious function of literature and the writer cannot be exempted from the society. This is because literature is a medium through which the writer can contribute to the realization of society's goals and aspirations. Through literature the society is evaluated, interpreted and re-interpreted. It is on the basis of this that we shall evaluate Amma Darko's novel *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* through psychoanalytic lens.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, psychoanalytical criticism will be engaged as the theoretical framework. This is because, it best suits and captures the essence of the study. In her insightful book: *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly guide*, Lois Tyson lucidly engages in a deep and thorough discussion of the psychoanalytic criticism, addressing issues that scholars have over the years harped on in regard to the interpretation of literature. In Tyson's analysis, she contends that: "if psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behavior, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts, which are about human behavior".

Similarly, Abrams^[3] writes that "psychological criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in an indirect and fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author". The insight offered by Abrams^[3] reaffirms the fact that psychoanalytical criticism is based on the assumption that the details and form of a work of literature are correlated with its author's distinctive mental and emotional traits. It should be noted that psychological theory is used as a model for understanding human thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Thus, psychoanalytic criticism explores the author's personality in order to explain and interpret a literary work. In addition, it makes reference to literary works in order to establish, biographically, the personality of the author and as well the mode of reading literary works specifically in order to experience the distinctive subjectivity or consciousness, of its authors. Psychoanalytic criticism emerged in the early 1920s through the views expressed by Sigmund Freud whose scholarly works developed the premises and dynamic form of psychology that he termed "psychoanalysis".

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the most celebrated proponent of the psychoanalytic mode which best known for his theories of the origins of the unconscious, and the defense mechanism of repression^[4]. His arguments as regards to the notion of the "unconscious" and other concepts such as dream interpretation, the sexuality theory – ID, Ego, super Ego, and the Oedipus complex are well explored in his insightful

lectures which are contained in a book entitled *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920). It was this book that set forth the theoretical framework of what is known as "classical psychoanalytic criticism."

Freud's fundamental contributions in this regard have been rich and relevant. Thus, he developed psychoanalysis as a procedure for the analysis and therapy of neuroses, but later expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, mythology, and religion as well as literature and other arts. Freud's critical thinking as he points out is speculative. However, Freud's ideas have over a long period of time evolved and extensively revised by other literary scholars such as Juliet Mitchell, Jacques Lacan, Norman. O. Brown among others. These theorists have in one way or the other improved or used Freud's ideas to respond to literary texts or offer valuable explanation of patriarchy, sexism, etc. Psychoanalytic criticism as a theory can be applied to any other modern literary theory. This is so because psychoanalytic criticism attempts to explain the how, and whys of human actions without developing an aesthetic theory. Bressler's^[5] observation in this regard is apt and pertinent. Thus, he posits that: "Marxists, feminists, and new Historicists, for example can utilize psychoanalytic method in their interpretation without violating their own hermeneutics".

In the light of the above view, it is apposite to say that psychoanalytic criticism is best regarded as an approach to literary interpretation rather than a particular school of criticism. In view of the foregoing, feminists and psychoanalytic critics such as Juliet Mitchell, Jacques Lacan, Norman Holland, Kazin Alfred, among others have explored the ideological bases of psychoanalysis. For the purpose of this study, Freud's concept of sexuality will be used as a yardstick in our analysis of Darko's characters in *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*^[6]. When we examine Freud's notion of repression and sexuality in Darko's *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* through psychoanalytic lens, then, we see that it is comprised of characters with a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behaviour that are as a result of that early experience^[6]. It is, therefore, significant to note that one area of human behaviour explored in Darko's novels that has important implications for psychoanalytic criticism is found in the dysfunctional parenting and sexual abuse of the female characters as portrayed in the novels^[6].

Darko's *Faceless* is an exceptional novel that x-rays the story of children plunged in the streets by parental neglect and the issue of sexual exploitation, domestic violence, among others. Christiana Udogu in her very insightful essay on Amma Darko's *Faceless* states that:

A record of the families in the novel, *faceless*, shows that the parents live together for a while, have children and separate, leaving the children in the care of their mothers. This method of parenting becomes dangerous as it affects the physical and psychological development of the children^[6].

This is however, the lot of many street children in the novel. Fofo, the co-protagonist of the novel, becomes a street child at the age of fourteen. She leaves home like her two brothers in search of food and money on the street. Her biological father has abandoned the family. It is through a dialogue between her and Kabira and Dina (the workers of MUTE) that

the reader is aware of the causes that “dump” Fofo on the streets; “so you started going out to beg because there was no money?” “And no food, that was more pressing “she went on, “When there is no food, you don’t wait to be asked by anyone to go out and beg. Hunger is a foe and it is overpowering. When it pushes you. You go...” The street children (Odarley, Baby T, and Fofo etc) depicted by Amma Darko suffer from absentee father Syndrome and abandonment.

The story in *Faceless* is divided into four parts. The various divisions of the novel contributes to the development of the plot. The part one of the book introduces the reader to Fofo and how, through pilfering, she bumps into Kabira, the lady working with MUTE (a non-governmental organization interested in information gathering and documentation), whose acts of generosity set Fofo on a new road towards rehabilitation. Also in book one, we meet sylvapo, the media man who publicizes the issue of Fofo’s murder sister (Baby T), and who, together with MUTE, assume the diligent role to find the murderers. Book Two is mainly a flash back made up of only three chapters (chapters 14 to 16). It is the background story of Maa Tsuru; the mysticism surrounding her birth and her exploitation by the very man she expects to care for her.

It also tells the story of how Maa Tsuru’s children came into the world only to be thrown into the streets to eke out a living. It is important to note that part two of the novel is “sandwiched between part one, which is made up of thirteen chapters and part three, which has nine chapters (chapters 17-25). Part two of the novel provides us with a classic template of form agreeing with content, in that part two, taken up by only three chapters, speaks about the constricted life of Maa Tsuru. Maa Tsuru is one of the major characters in the novel. She is the mother of Baby T and Fofo. Right from conception, Maa Tsuru’s life seems accursed and riddled with foreboding fear as though she is doomed to end badly. She was impregnated by Kewi, her first husband at age sixteen to his mother’s displeasure. However Kewi takes a bottle of ‘schnapps to Tsuru’s family and announces that he had come to show his face” (119). She had four children with Kewi – two boys and two girls but kewi abandoned her after the birth of their two sons.

A more useful and I think more accurate way of understanding Maa Tsuru’s relationship with the men in her life is to see it from Freudian’s psychological lens of fear of abandonment. This concept of Freud’s theory explores the unshakable belief that our friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) Kewi disappeared before the birth of Baby T, their third child. He later lured Maa Tsuru into accepting him once again as a husband and got her pregnant again which resulted to the birth of Fofo. Maa Tsuru, as the novel shows, has no skill; she is not educated either and hardly could provide the needs of her children. In addition, she is portrayed in the novel as a woman with a penchant for making excuses for her irresponsible lifestyle and the curse is one of the often invoked excuses. This penchant contributes to her daughter-Fofo’s resentment because she considered her as an irresponsible mother. Her irresponsible lifestyle is also portrayed in her affair with Nill Kpakpo – a jobless and irresponsible man whose motive is to exploit her unfortunate plight. Maa Tsuru’s conduct in the relationship depicts her as a stupid, shameless and irresponsible mother. She foolishly accepts a relationship from a lazy and uncaring man, Kpakpo, who gradually placed her at a disadvantaged position. She

feeds him from the proceed of her children’s sweat in the street especially from the money from Baby T’s prostitution. In the novel, Maa Tsuru comes across as a cheap woman. Right under the nose of her adolescent sons, she is making love with a co-habiting man. When eventually the boys take the initiative of leaving the house to avoid the shame and outrage of it all, she is not even bothered. Her comment in that regard illustrate her attitude towards her family; “She had noticed them toss and turn on the mats the whole night through. They saw it all for how long could they go on? Better let them go. They were no longer kids. The streets had accelerated their growth. It was time to be on their own” (131).

It is significant to note that the author downplays the role of superstition in the life of Maa Tsuru. Rather she juxtaposes issues in her life in such a way as to demonstrate Tsuru’s own irresponsible choices that are made to culminate in her failure as a mother rather than the power of superstition or fate. In the novel, Kabira one of the major character is a totally different character from Maa Tsuru. Philomena Yeboah’s comment on the character of Maa Tsuru is illustrative:

For Maa Tsuru, herself-actualization lies in sex and monetary rewards. Motivated by money, Maa Tsuru pushes her children into labour: Her two sons were already running errands at the sea side before they attained the age of ten.

Furthermore, she observed the difference in character between the two women-Maa Tsuru and Kabira; “whereas in Maa Tsuru we find an example of a mother unable to take care of her children, especially her daughters, in Kabira we find a mother who makes sensible choices, and is able not only to mother her own children but to mother Fofo as well. Philomena Yeboah in an interview with Amma Darko explains that “the character of Kabira is created as a role model for modern working mothers”. To this end, Darko admits in the same interview that “a character like Kabira deserves to be studied carefully and imitated by any woman who does not want to limit her roles to the kitchen and the bedroom”^[6].

In Darko’s *Faceless*, Maa Tsuru epitomizes the failed mother crushed under the trails of motherhood. However, Kabira is portrayed as a successful mother who refuses to be defeated by the trials of motherhood^[6]. In this regard, Maa Tsuru’s is a symbol of the defeated, pitiable African woman while Kabira is a confident and assertive character. The basic differences in the lifestyles of these two characters lies in the fact that one (Kabira) is elevated and positioned as a model for the reader while the other (Maa Tsuru) is demonized because of the irresponsible choices she makes in the novel. It is instructive to note that both characters are bedeviled with the trials of motherhood; Kabira is able to strategize in such a way that she is not burdened by these trials. For instance, Kabira is married with three children; she works with the NGO called MUTE who documents “serious events that gain little attention from the government. Although she is not satisfied with her meager salary Kabira continues with her work because she derives great job satisfaction from it. Her husband Alade is an architect whose belief and practice of patriarchy creates tensions and sometimes deprives Kabira of her joy as a married woman. Kabira is introduced in the novel as, “the mother, wife, worker and battered car owner...” No

day passed that Kabira didn't wonder how come the good lord created a day to be made up of only twenty-four hours, because from dawn to dusk, domestic schedules gobbled her up; office duties ate her up alive, her three children devoured her with their sometime realistic and many times very unrealistic demands' while the icing on the cake, their father, needed do no more than simply be your regular husband, and she was in perpetual quandary. In spite of all these, she surmounts all challenges and is able to raise her children properly. On other hand, Maa Tsuru is described in the following passage by Darko as a woman who is overwhelmed by trials of motherhood:

In the midst of angry mothers and screaming children and bleating goats and sheep, Ma Tsuru looked like a soul drowned in torpidity. The baby in her arm didn't seem to even impact into her oblivion. And but for the sounds from the child's throat, her world was dead. A life dissolved in absolute lethargy.

Maa Tsuru has literally allowed the trials of motherhood to sap both her energy and her breast milk: "And but the sounds from her child's throat, her world was dead" the picture illustrated here points to a mother's irreversible self-destruction impacting on a tiny baby. In this same vein, Maa Tsuru's soul is described as "drowned in torpidity" that means she is "oblivious" to the reality around her. The author described her life as one "dissolved in absolute lethargy". This shows that her mental faculties are dulled resulting in physical shabbiness and slowness. All this literary description of Maa Tsuru's state of mind and wellbeing clearly shows that she has accepted her situation.

Another significant character in the novel is Fofo the younger sister to Baby T. she is introduced in the novel as a street child. She is the friend of Odarley, a co-street child. The Reader's first encounter with fofo in the novel shows that she is a carelessly strong willed character. Her strong willed behaviour makes perfect sense within the context of her present circumstance. Fofo's confrontational reaction to her mother's reason behind the plea that Fofo run far away from poison underscores her strong willed character:

"Why should I go away, mother?
Who are they?"
Maa Tsuru wiped away her tears
With the back of her hand and blew her nose into her
cover cloth. "It is baby T she said eventually... "I don't
know. But you should never have fed him and his sons
at Baby T's expense. You don't see her. We don't know
how she has grown to look like... (46-47).

Fofo's assertive and smart character makes her an interesting character in the novel. It is also noteworthy to point out that the author employs satire as a literary device to ridicule the state of moral decadence, human rot, suffering, sexual exploitation, streetism etc that permeate the African society with a focus on Ghana as a case in point. These social ills explored in the novel include: – parental neglect and abandonment: Baby T, Fofo, Poison, Odarley and many other children like Biblio are all victims of parental irresponsibility. For this reason, they engage in vices like stealing, prostitution, killing, rape etc. Their dreams of going to school and securing a better future is aborted as a result of lack of

parental guidance and commitment as most parents shy away from their responsibilities.

Amma Darko's novel *Beyond the Horizon* is essentially a feminist novel which unfolds images of female exploitation, lies, deceit, threats, brutality, seduction and prostitution. It tells the story of the battering and maltreating of a naïve illiterate African woman, Mara by her callous, greedy and inconsiderate husband, Akobi Ajaman popularly known as (Cobby) in the novel. It is pertinent to note that the novel explores the Ghanaian experience as emigrants in European countries. However, the study of this novel clearly avoids any feminist cant. Rather, the researcher's objective in this essay is to examine the structure, theme and characterization in the novel. A cursory look at the content and form of the novel shows an interface between literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics. This is creatively woven together in the message and form by the author, thus enabling the reader to make a meaning out of the text. However, this research has employed psychoanalytic criticism in dissecting the structure of the novel- *Beyond the Horizon*.

Structurally, Darko's novel *Beyond the Horizon* starts in media res with the heroine Mara in a room in a brothel at the outskirts of Munich managed by Oves, a shorter version of the name overseer. She is shown sitting before her large oval mirror, staring painfully what is left of her. From what she says about her overused body, especially her private parts and breasts, her "tired graceless bosom" portrays her as pitiable character. Mara weeps and bemoans her life as a professional prostitute. From her account of her despoliation by the "rigid tools" of her different male customers, as well as her permanent hook on dope to energize her, we see the incorrigibility of Mara. However, she is determined more than ever before to remain a prostitute and keep the facts about her life secret from her people in Africa. Therefore, it is this picture of Mara as a prostitute in Munich, which was foreshadowed at the opening of the novel that also ends the story, thus providing a thematic unity for the novel. It is instructive to know that Mara did not start her life as a prostitute. She was lured into prostitution by her Husband Akobi who sent for her to join him in Germany. Mara's experience in Munich is illustrative of what many female immigrants go through in Europe in search of greener pasture. She is portrayed as a reserved, unsophisticated, superstitious and well-mannered young girl whose approach to life is modeled on the time-tested tradition of accepting male control as God ordained by wives. Thus, she is ready to adhere to her mother's advice without hesitation:

Your life is your road, Mara, God puts you at the start of this road and propels you to walk on, and only He knows where your road will end, but it is the road he chose for you and you must walk it with gratefulness because it's the best for you.

Mara's orientation and culture is couched in the biblical submissiveness and quietism of a woman in marriage. This really plays down her fighting spirit at the beginning of the novel. Mara dutifully obeys Akobi and also feeds him with food items received as payment for her refuse-dumping job for other occupants in their slummy neighborhood. Jude Agho in his canonical book on *New perspective on African literature* writes that Amma Darko's novel: "shows Mara's progression from a timid naïve village girl to the status of a

full-grown woman as well as details her intense psychological traumatization though her experience as a prostitute...”.

In the light of this observation, it is important to note that Mara's role in the novel occupies much of the space and thematic preoccupation in the text. It is imperative to note that the story is told from her protagonist point-of-view. The heroine-narrator personalizes her narratorial role. However, no other narrative method could have enhanced this role as much as the first-person Omniscient style does. This is the consistent narrative mode adopted by Amma Darko virtually in all her novels.

Akobi is another major character in the novel. He is the husband of Mara. He is selfish, greedy and callous. His marriage to Mara in the novel depicts a relationship between master and servant. Akobi's maltreatment, control, and dominance is clearly seen in his display of hatred and hostility towards Mara. His contempt for Mara can also be seen in so many ways. For instance, he sleeps alone in the grass mattress while Mara sleeps on the bare floor. This pattern is only changed when Akobi wants to make love to Mara. He also humiliates her in the public by separating from her while in the public. It is evident that Mara suffers deprivation, repression and brutality at the hands of Akobi. Her shoddy appearance in the novel is as a result of Akobi's selfishness and exploitation. Often, he beats Mara for every little human mistake which ought to be overlooked. For instance, Akobi unsatisfied that Mara does not put interest on the loan she borrowed from him to start a petty trading on cooked eggs inside the motor park, gives her a sound beating. It is not surprising to know that Akobi abandon the upkeep of the home squarely on Mara. In order to save up his salaries for his trip to abroad of which he refuses to discuss with her.

Akobi is portrayed in the novel as a selfish and exploitative husband. He marries a timid unattractive German wife, Gitte for the purpose of getting a five-year residence permit. He fakes his love for Gitte and cheats with Comfort his heart throb who was invited by Akobi through an agent. It is pertinent to know that Gitte, Akobi's German wife is a victim of his deceit, lies and selfishness just as much as Mara. Akobi and his friend Osey later blackmail Mara who was invited to Germany by Akobi into prostitution with the sole aim of making profit from the trade of her body. However, with the help of Vivian, Osey's girlfriend, and Kaye, the prostitute wife of Pompey, proprietor of the brothel named Peepy, Mara arranges to marry a German man by proxy and as well acquires her residence permit for a period of five years. Towards the end of the novel, Akobi is jailed by German immigration authorities, comfort is repatriated to Nigeria.

It is worthy of note that Amma Darko uses many instances to portray the society in her novels. Among such instances in *Beyond the Horizon* is the oppressive nature of the male characters. Through what Kaye, a character in the novel calls “sisterhood solidarity” we see a concerted effort made to create in women the awareness to fight for their rights by bonding together to achieve ultimate freedom from male oppression. This really the basis for the relationship between Mara and Vivian, or even that between herself and Kaye, African women who also experienced male brutality and were forced into prostitution by their Africa male friends. The same spirit of solidarity is displayed when Mara and Gitte, Akobi's German wife, both deceived and exploited by him, became friends towards the end of the novel.

The male characters in both novels are wife beaters, cheats, irresponsible husbands or polygamists. They exploit the women in their lives. For example Nill-Kakpo and Kewi in *Faceless* and Akobi and Osey in *Beyond the Horizon*. In Darko's *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*, human dignity is betrayed and corrupted at the profit of a decadent society. Moreover the novels portray the fact that it is irresponsible parenting that breeds vices in the society. It is also instructive to note that the language employed in both novels is the foremost characteristic of form; it is through language that form actualizes itself. The language employed in both novels is sensuous, emotion laden, loose and conversational. Also, Amma Darko makes use of dramatic dialogue between characters as a way of developing the plot of the novels. In *Faceless*, imagery of decay, destitute children, miscreants are portrayed through characterization and language while in *Beyond the Horizon* Darko's racy style allows for a consummate blend of the novel's dual setting-following the events in Africa and Europe. The narrative thrust of the novel overrides the use of dialogue among the characters since we find more of description of the action and events in the novel by the author.

As noted, Darko's *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* demonstrate ample sensitivity to the social, moral and economic wellbeing of women and children in contemporary African society. In this regard such issues as streetism, patriarchy, government indifference, irresponsible parenting, sexual exploitation, domestic violence among others are well explored in both novels. The novels also points out the failure of post-independence governments to protect its children and its citizens. In the novels Ghana represent the entire African countries whose many citizens are immigrants in European countries. It is significant to note that Darko in her novels portrays a disease and discordant African society, in which the phenomenon of street children in contemporary African society keeps rising because of parental neglect, poverty and illiteracy.

Conclusion

The preoccupation of this paper has been with showing how Amma Darko, has relied on Freud's theory of psycho analysis in the handling of themes and characters in her novels *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*. The paper identifies certain ways in which male characters replay unresolved oedipal complex which involves what is often called the ‘good girl/bad girl’ attitude to woman. Also the paper has revealed that Darko's central message in both novels centers on dysfunctional parenting, exploitation, sexual abuse, prostitution etc. Thus, her protagonists in both novels are subjugated and oppressed which betrayed their human dignity. Furthermore, the peculiar success in both novels reveals how the author successfully renders an emotional story through a veritable point of views. Above all, her use of language reflects the typical contemporary African society. There are, for instance, the uses of proverbs, imageries; and reliance on lexical proxies drawn from her material environment to describe human characters and as well identifies the psychology of the various characters.

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