

BRUTALITY AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN IN AMMA DARKO'S *FACELESS*

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Abstract

This paper attempts a critical analysis of brutality and sexual exploitation in Amma Darko's *faceless*. Historically, Africans before the advent of colonialism had a well ordered and preserved traditional ways of life, a policy well guided by the earliest African rulers. The legacy of civilization bequeathed by their colonial masters, to an extent, had negative effects on the Africans. This is not unconnected with the ways the new African rulers (leaders) have neglected executing social infrastructural needs of the Africans, thus, throwing the African children into the wild societies (streets) to be devoured by hawks. This paper reveals Darko's textual revelations of sexual exploitation and brutality of the African children (girls) as a result of our decadent societies. Darko highlights the nature, the causes and solutions to feminist issues in the contemporary Ghanaian society.

Keywords: Brutality, Exploitation, Colonialism, Society, Decadence.

Introduction

According to Kofi Anyidoho's (2013) introductory note relates Darko's considerable skill in portraying the plight of women and young girls in a merciless world dominated by greedy, irresponsible and often cruel men in their life. Darko, sadly, tells a tale of a diseased society that seems to have lost its hold on the lives of its children. A provocative tale of a society that has developed a tragic ability of guiding its young ones, especially the girl child, into a life dedicated to prostituting every conceivable virtue for the sake of flimsy material possessions.

Kwame Awuyah in his article titled "Faceless Amma Darko's face for the masses," says that Darko's narratives capture the horrid reality females, especially young teenage girls, endure and cannot escape. Darko textually explores a recurrent theme of sexual exploitation. Kwame Awuyah asserts further that Darko defines feminine sexuality in

terms of a complex trope of transformations from voiceless to voice and movement beyond facelessness to attain face or personhood.

Julian Daniels Ofori in her article titled “The feminist voice in Contemporary Ghanaian female fiction-----“ sees *faceless* as a story of a mother, Maa Tsuru, who loses grip on her own life and lives of her children, leaving them at the clemency of the predators of the mores. Darko presents feminist trepidations on issues such as stereo typing, abuse of females, marriage, childlessness and motherhood, education, poverty and exploitation, and parental neglect.

Poverty as an Issue

Poverty, generally means scarcity or dearth, is a situation of lack in certain things such as money or material possession. It is a multifaceted concept, which includes social, economic and political elements. Absolute poverty refers to the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter and health care. Hence, poverty is seen as a state of being poor or indigent or deficiency of elements or resources that are needed or desired for human existence. In the text, the author had been able to reveal state of poverty in its nakedness. According to Ajimuda (2004) in his book *Complete Work on WAEC/NECO Literature in English*(2016) reveals that most of the boys and girls who live on the streets of Accra, like Fofo, crave for one major thing- the joy of living in a home and having parental care such that one street boy who was asked by a reporter of a private FM station of his most passionate dream says:

My dream began, the boy, “is to be able to go
home one day to visit my mother and see
a look of joy on her face at the sight of me-----
One day, she said to me. Go. You do not belong here.
If I don’t belong to where she is,
where do I belong?

This shows a pathetic and pitiful situation the boy finds himself due to the poverty state of his mother who threw him out of the house to fend for himself. Also, the discussion

between Fofo and Odarley, her friend at Sodom and Gomorrah, reveals the state of poverty in the country. Odarley engages her friend-Fofo in the discussion thus:

Fofo, she called, wanting to make conversation to get Fofo to talk.

“Hmm”

“Do you remember what you said the other time? That you knew poverty”

“Yes, I saw it”

“You saw Poverty? Odarley asked, suppressing a chuckle.

“Yes”

“Head to toe?”

Head to toe. Its face; its ugly square head; its big fat ones. I know its shape like---(pg 27)

The visit of Odarley and Fofo to Maa Tsuru in the family compound reveals poverty because the room and compound reek of poverty where hapless children scramble with sheep, goats for space to play. There are also diseased and underaged pregnant girls in the compound such that Maa Tsuru muses herself that” Fofo could have been the girl in the fattened brown underpants with the diseased heir and a protruding stomach------(28)

This aptly reveals a dysfunctional family unit.

Onko, a neighbour of Maa Tsuru repeatedly had carnal knowledge of Baby T on his bed having forced a handkerchief inside her month and torn off her pants and left her bleeding on his bed. He warned her “Better tell no one.” Maa Tsuru accosted Onko about what he did to Baby T. Onko begged her to drop the matter and allow him to show her his generosity. Onko gave her wads of notes. She untied her cover cloth around her waist; placed the wad of note in one corner of it and proceeded to slowly tie it up (139)

The discussion on phone by a woman on telephone with Sylv Po of Harvest FM reveals the poverty state of the woman.

“Take it that I am the oldest of the five children” she began. ”Our father is jobless--I want to know if I can apply any existence law to legally present our

parents from having any more children after the one presently carried is born”
(182)

Sylv Po found out that it was a real situation. The woman on the line was asking it on behalf of the “Oldest child” who was her house help. He promised to delve into the situation and talk it on one of his coming show.

Textual Analysis of Brutality and Sexual Exploitation of Women

According to Femi-Olaleye (2013) in her book titled *Understanding Literature* asserts.

That the fate of children in the society is a
major theme of the novel which plays itself
out through a street children narrative
which allows Darko the scope for
powerful social commentary that the personal
tragedy of each and every child that ends
up in the streets. Darko succeeds in
hammering from a powerful message that
it is children and the way they are treated
that are the true measure of how societies are judged (55)

Brutality and sexual exploitation of women (girls) abound greatly in the text through Darko’s fictional ingenuity. Two major characters in the text Macho and Poison of the streets who used to be the leader of the bullies have recklessly molested the girls on the street. Fofu and Odarley are not exceptional. Fofu recounts her ordeal in the hand of Poison who forcefully molested her in one of the ramshackle makeshift houses at Sodom and Gomorrah. Fofu could not match the physical built of Poison than to submit to his sexual covetousness. Macho, on the other hand, stole the bag containing the hard earned proceeds of Fofu. The sight of macho sends jitters down the spines of the girls always. His sight or sudden appearance made Fofu to run for cover and could not pick her bag before macho got hold of it and emptied its content. An act he and other bullies have been indulged in.

He’s got all of my money from last week”
Fofu whined

“All of it”

“All of it and brokedown in fears

“so what are you going to do now?”

-----I am going to see my mother (8)

It is pathetic to note that Baby T was subjected to prostitution (sexual enslavement) by Maami Broni with the connivance of Maa Tsuru because of the proceeds there from. Her inability to be herself, protect and fend for her children further exposed them to the hawks of the society. No wonder, Baby T was murdered and her remains were deposited at Agbogloboshie at the back of blue Rasta hairdressing Kiosk. She discussed with Fofu with a bitter mind but could not put herself together because she was overwhelmed with shame. Fofu told her mother that she forced herself to work at the vegetable market in order to run away from stealing but the little she had on her was forcefully stolen from her by Macho. Her mother lamented and said that her hands are tied and that the only crime of the children is that they came into the world through her (25)

Anyidoho also notes the following:

in the confrontation between mother and daughter, we witness a terrifying reversal of the natural order of things. Not only has daughter’s voice taken over with words of unassailable moral authority, her mother is forced, obviously by her own sense of guilt, to forfeit even the right to self-defense.

The coming of Nii Kpakpo, the second lover (Man) of Maa Tsuru, further compounding the case of Maa Tsuru’s children. The only room they live in was partitioned into a “chamber” and hall with curtains according to Anyidoho. She later ordered Fofu and Baby T out of the chamber to join their brothers at the part now known as the hall. No wonder Fofu had this to say:

Nii Kpakpo “entered mother’s life and pushed us all out of it”

Kabria, Adade’s wife, a worker in one of the Non-Governmental organization (NGOS) tried to draw her husband attention to a programme anchored by Sylv Po on Harvest FM on AIDS prevention campaign and street-children phenomenon. She had this to say:

“You see,” she went on, “there is a lot of pain and hopelessness out there on the streets which many seek to deal with through drugs, sex, alcohol. During a recent survey we conducted for a programme, all the girls we talked to out there were already very sexually active -----sex, to them, was just a convenient means of survival------(32).

According to Kwame Awuyah;

sexual molestation happens to many homeless girls, who experience “a lot of pain and hopelessness out there or the streets which many seek to deal with through drugs, sex and alcohol----for many of them, rape was their first sexual experience”

Also Kabira took Fofo in her smoking car named creamy” to her office for positive interrogation. On their way, Fofo had slept off at the back of the car. As they approached a traffic light, Kabira stole a look at her sleeping face. There were faint traces of fingers obviously from a vicious slap. Something about it gnawed at Kabira, the more she looked at it (68) this shows how the bullies, the street lords brutalize the street girls who are hopeless and defenceless.

The insensitivity of male characters in the text to women particularly useless married men such as Kwei, the first man of Maa Tsuru made him to always see his wife as a pouncing bag especially when they reek like pure vodka on two legs. He pounced on his wife like a cat on an unsuspecting mouse and began a vicious pounding spree.

“He pounded Maa Tsuru with his fists landing the blows anywhere and everywhere and on every part of her pregnant body-----(124)

He later went to Agboo Ayee and told his useless mates of his exploits over his harmless and hopeless pregnant wife with her pregnancy terminated. This shows brutality in its highest realm-a regular assault on the women (girls) on the streets.

Poison, at the tender age of fifteen had mastered the intricacies of pimping enough to have a go at it, on his own. He formed his own evil gang. He had made a mark and a name on the streets and had to exert his control and share of the streets thus, he embarked on an aggressive recruitment of girls to own. It should be recalled that one of his recruited girls provoked him, by refusing to service a client according to his desire.

“He brought her into his room locked
the door, stripped her naked, lashed her
mercilessly with a man’s leather belt;
then he raped her. Thereafter, other girls
never dared to provoke him (171)

This is a senseless act against a defenceless girl who was being forced into sexual labour and enslavement and is equally brutally beaten to submission.

Conclusion

It should be noted that the poverty state and decades in the society culminated in the negative behaviours of most male characters in the text made them to bully and maltreat the young girls on the streets of Ghana and at every available place. Charles Kwame Awuyah posits that Darko’s “emergent voice gives a new feminist perspective on gender and class in contemporary African writing, thus exploring a recurrent theme of sexual exploitation of the most vulnerable members of society and in empowering the voiceless and in giving face to the faceless”.

Patrick Burnett in his article ‘faceless’ asserts that:

“Darko’s landscape is not entirely bleak;
she does offer hope in the form of Fofu,
who by the end of the novel looks
set on the right road, and in the form
of MUTE, whose members are the
positive role models of the novel”.

Also, Darko succeeds in hammering home a powerful message that it is children and the way they are treated that are the true measure of how societies are judged. It is through their eyes that the answers to the myriad moral predicaments that society finds itself in,

are to be found. Finally, Anyidoho in his introductory statement in *Faceless* concludes that:

“There is a wake-up call to us as
grandmothers or grandfathers, as mothers
or fathers, but especially as fathers.
It is not enough to sow the seeds of human
life in quick, repeated sessions of
reckless ecstasy. Beyond the delight

of tears, beyond the passionate intensity
of countless orgasms, the future of our children, of
our own mortality and ancestry awaits our constant
vigilance and careful nurturing.
No seed grows into harvest joys without
the planter’s diligent labour of love.
Until we come to this understanding,
as parents, as family, as community, we
will forever stand condemned by the
anguish in the eyes and the voices of our children,
forever guilty of the “nurturing of----- prospective soul (s)
into the devouring jaws of the streets” (xxi)

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