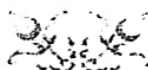


CHAPTER

14



CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND FEMINIST ANTIDOTES TO TRAFFICKING IN AMMA DARKO'S *BEYOND THE HORIZON*

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Abstract

Human trafficking constitutes one of the various migration configurations in Africa. Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* is a literary representation of some of the causes and effects of trafficking in humans, such as we have seen in recent times where African migrants in search of greener pastures outside the continent are trafficked to Libya, for example. This paper focuses on the whys and wherefores of trafficking in females and their consequent resistance of it. In this relation, the study uncovers the practical utility of feminism in Africa, especially at a time when many African women are wondering how the mantra of feminism can translate into their material well-being. Adopting the feminist theories of Obioma Nnaemeka (nego-feminism) and Catherine MacKinnon (consciousness-raising and sexuality) in the analysis of Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* enables us to understand the dynamics of gender inequality in more profound ways. This paper submits that Amma Darko's presentation of the trafficked females is realistic about their enforced passivity, second-class status, and humiliation. The various acts of brutal sexual intercourse are interpreted as the display of male power, since male pleasure, as we find in the text, seems to be inextricably tied to victimising, hurting and exploiting.

Keywords: Human trafficking, Migration, Sexuality, Consciousness-raising, Gender inequality, Enforced passivity

Introduction

Human trafficking constitutes one of the various migration configurations in Africa.

While Africa still battles with the traumatic aftermath of slavery and colonialism to which it was subjected to by foreign powers, the impact of these twin forces continues to manifest themselves in varying forms. With these, it becomes clear that Africa is yet to fully and practically appropriate the utilitarian roles of literature – a medium which is shaped by the socio-political, economic and cultural concerns in a given society (wa Thingo, xv). Despite the growing human trafficking oeuvre (creative and critical works), a pool from which policy makers could prognosticate and prescribe panaceas for this anomaly, the scourge of female trafficking still persists. Some of the prose works which address this issue include Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Bisi Ojedin's *A Daughter for Sale* (2006), Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2009), Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Ifeoma Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh* (2009), Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara* (2013), amongst others. This paper focuses on how and why the female gender falls prey to trafficking and their consequent resistance to it.

In achieving this set goal, it is also important to briefly assess the impact of feminism on the continent. As a movement that sets out to emancipate women from the clutches of patriarchal and all forms of domination, has feminism really influenced and equipped African women to such an extent that they could avoid becoming victims of trafficking? Most African women, especially those outside the academy, wonder how the mantra of feminism affects their well-being. This category of women is often doubtful and sometimes indifferent about feminist movements and their role in them because they do not see how the movement will translate to their material well-being – socio-economic opportunities which they crave for. The ensuing textual analysis foregrounds the need for the African feminist discourse to transcend the often academic gymnastics and expression of high-sounding jargons that characterise most of the literary theories, to respond to the peculiar economic and cultural conditions that confront African women. Becky Jacobs believes that “such intellectual exercises disregard the continent's poverty, political crises, racism, and class issues” (28). In other words, merely theorising cannot address the socio-economic needs and sufferings of African women as seen in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

However, this does not in any way undermine the place of theory in the African feminist discourse. In the light of this, Obioma Nnaemeka notes that “Theory plays a central role in helping to scrutinise, decipher, and name the everyday, even as the practice of everyday informs theory making” (358). The central argument, therefore, is that there must be a nexus between the political, academic and practical aspects of feminism. The goal of African feminists – writers and theorists – should be to evolve a movement that is culturally sustainable.

Our close reading of Amma Darko's text makes a case for the continued vulnerability of African women in a typical postcolonial socio-political and cultural system. This is corroborated by how the arranged marriage between Mara and her manipulative husband, Akobi, moves her slowly but steadily from innocence to forced prostitution in Germany, Europe. Arguing that the failure to protect women from sex trafficking is tantamount to the failure to grant them equal protection under the law, the aim of this study, therefore, is to contribute to the expansion of the African feminist discourse in a way that reflects its utilitarian values, with a view to assisting policymakers across the African continent to identify measures for the adequate protection of female victims of trafficking for

prostitution and pornography and the development of prevention measures to combat trafficking in African women and girls for the male capitalist interest.

A Brief Overview of the Gender Issue

Feminism refers to the various political, cultural and economic movements whose primary aim is the establishment of greater rights for women and the protection of their interests in every sphere of life. In other words, the term describes a movement that undermines every manifestation of patriarchal oppression (Emenyi, 28; Barry, 121; Bertens, 96). These movements achieve this aim by altering conventional perspectives on human relations as reflected in politics, culture, history, economics, literature, law, religion, etc.

In the light of their strategies of protecting and securing greater rights for women and the girl child, we can view feminists' mission from four standpoints. Socially, feminists campaign against domestic violence, trafficking, rape, and sexual harassment. Economically, feminists advocate for workplace rights such as maternity leave and equal pay, irrespective of gender. Ideologically, feminists attempt to understand the dynamics of the varying patriarchal systems which legitimatise women oppression. And politically, feminists evolve strategies for stultifying the identified patriarchal structures.

Apart from mainstream Western feminism, other brands of feminism, like African feminism, have evolved over the years. The emergence of many forms/strands of feminism is due to the absence of a generally agreed upon set of principles and methods that underlie feminist criticism (Dobie, 110; Barry, 124). These other strands are critical of Western feminism for being ethnocentric and ignorant of the experiences of women from other races, communities, and classes. As a justification for an African feminism, Obioma Nnaemeka argues that:

Theorizing in a cross-cultural context is fraught with intellectual, political, and ethical questions: the question of provenance (where is the theory coming from?); the question of subjectivity (who authorizes?); the question of positionality (which specific locations and standing [social, political, and intellectual] does it legitimize?). (362)

Moreover, one of the reasons for the evolution of African feminism is captured by Becky Jacobs who argues that "Africans fear, not irrationally, that feminism could interfere in a disruptive and culturally insensitive manner with existing societal relationships, including those associated with maternal roles" (24). Unlike some strands of mainstream Western feminism, Becky Jacobs notes that culturally, African women identify motherhood, for instance, as vital and foundational to their worldview and ideology (24). Her argument is that whereas motherhood means so much to African women, it may be considered non-essential for feminists in other climes. Hence, there needs to be a conscious delineation of cultural interests and ideologies when formulating feminist theories.

Against the background of culture, race, and class, African critics have sought for a feminist model that is fashioned in consonance with the African worldview. In other words, the quest for an African feminism arose in response to the exigency of situating

the Western ideology of feminism in the African soil and to avoid what Nelson Fashina regards as an "undigested application of Western images of sexuality to the African gender relation issue" (72). African feminist writers and theorists recognise the inequalities and ambiguities in African traditional society and how these affect women. They have, therefore, undertaken the role of evolving a valid African poetics of reading and interpreting Africa's social, political and economic realities, rather than depending on Western theories that may not be in consonance with the African worldview and experiences.

African feminists believe that feminist consciousness had existed in the continent long before it was formally birthed as a movement in Western Europe. Hence, they criticise the Western formulation of a homogenous movement that does not take into cognizance the peculiar experiences of people from varying cultural contexts. By undermining the notion of a homogenous feminist identity, African feminists asseverate their right to occupy a unique space in which they could celebrate their identity and commitment to a developmental agenda for the African continent, in addition to writing and theorising based on their peculiar historical and contemporary experiences.

From the foregoing, therefore, Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* bestrides Africa and Europe, in order to depict the peculiarities of each of the environments from which the experiences of women are constructed. We could see that the circumstances that lead to the fettering of Mara to Akobi (both Africans) are different from those that bind Kaye to Pompey (both Europeans). Amma Darko seems to imply the aforementioned need for exploring the encounters of the African woman based on her peculiar milieu. This is a deliberate strategy of localising international phenomena as well as internationalising local ones.

A Brief Synopsis of the Causes of Trafficking in Africa

Many scholars and policymakers agree that human trafficking is a criminal activity that has assumed a global concern. It is a crime which constitutes a great violation of human rights. There are varying opinions about the definitions of trafficking, but this paper sticks to the views of Chinenye Monde-Anumihie and Portland State University. The former states that trafficking is "often characterized as the exploitation of people through force, coercion, threat, and deception and includes human rights abuses such as debt bondage, deprivation of liberty, and lack of control over freedom and labor" (1). This description really captures the lives of the trafficked women in *Beyond the Horizon*. Mara, for instance, is deceived by Akobi to join him in Germany. He and his cohorts use threat, control, and coercion to keep her bound in prostitution.

Portland State University defines human trafficking as the use of "human beings for the purpose of commercial sexual activities as well as forced labor" (2). Mara, as a victim of trafficking, is recruited, transported and transferred to Germany, being made to succumb to Akobi through the use of threat, coercion, deception, amongst other unscrupulous means. The overall aim of trafficking is to exploit vulnerable individuals for the purposes of forced labour, prostitution, pornography and so on. Trafficking in African women, as commercial sex workers, has gained prominence and feminist endeavours must begin to engage policymakers across the continent with a view to urgently addressing the menace. The consciousness of not only women but also the

entire public must be raised if trafficking in women and other vulnerable groups is to be eradicated.

Three main types of trafficking have been identified: "trafficking in children primarily for farm labour and domestic work within and across countries; trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation, mainly outside the region; and trafficking in women from outside the region for the sex industry of South Africa" (Adepoju, 76). Often, as is the case of Mara, African women are trafficked to European nations such as Spain, Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, for prostitution and pornography. Going by Mara's background – a small, impoverished Ghanaian village – trafficking in African women and young girls is a serious human rights issue steeped in the debilitating social, political and economic situation in the continent. The literature on trafficking in African women as sex workers indicates that the problem is fostered by a number of factors including poor cultural practices, poverty, rural-urban migration, unemployment, ignorance, broken marital homes, political instability, peer influence, amongst others (Monde-Anumihé 5). It is not surprising, therefore, that because of these factors, in the guise of providing opportunities for greener pastures, poor families, like Mara's father's, could knowingly or unknowingly give out their girl children to traffickers and their syndicates (Adepoju, 80).

Cultural Practices that Foster Trafficking in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* centres on how Mara and a few other female characters are trafficked to Europe for prostitution and pornography. Their trafficking exemplifies the following: the use of deception and other tricky techniques to capture women and young girls, how cultural practices foster trafficking in women and girls, how the declining economic situation in African states encourage trafficking, how ignorance could also foster trafficking and how women have chosen to fight against male dominance.

Arguably, Akobi may not have dreamt of becoming a human trafficker but he is pushed into the business due to the messy economic state of his society. As a school leaver with brimming hopes for economic prosperity due to his educational qualification, he leaves the village of Naka for the city. But his hopes are dashed as he is confronted by the harsh economic realities of city life. Finding it difficult to afford a decent accommodation, he resorts to living in a shanty. Mara, nay the entire village of Naka, is deceived by her husband, Akobi, who claims to have discovered greener pasture in Germany. On her arrival in Germany, she falls prey to being enslaved in sex business. Mara's naivety paves the way for the success of her traffickers. However, in the end, she is able, through consciousness-raising, to regain authority over her body.

Many cultural practices in some patriarchal societies have negatively affected the psyche of the female gender. One of such depicted in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* is the African marital practices. Mara's story shows how the girl child is understood as her father's chattel. Mara does not possess the right to choose her own husband; rather, she is subjected to the wishes of a male-designed system:

But father, it appeared, had a different formula for choosing or accepting husbands

for his daughters, which took more into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man. (4)

Moreover, in reciprocation to the "honour" which Akobi has brought to the village (travelling to Europe), the chief of the village decides to take one of Akobi's sisters for his seventh wife (39). Mara also raises no objection about polygamy because it is inherent in her upbringing and according to her, "tolerance was the code word here" (41).

This cultural practice is passed on to all females in the fictional society. So, Mara decides to accept her marital conditions as the norm: "[...] since, after all, mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure" (13). This explains why throughout the story, Mara absorbs, in good faith, the domestic trauma inflicted on her by Akobi. For her, "It was just like my menstrual pains. It was a natural thing but it didn't mean that I liked it" (16). Besides, for her and many others, returning to Naka would mean a return to poverty and backwardness.

The Effect of Male Hegemony and Trafficking

Sexual exploitation is the main aim of trafficking in African women as depicted in *Beyond the Horizon*. Sexual exploitation exposes victims of trafficking to HIV/AIDS and many kinds of traumatic situations. Due to their inability to maximise their rights in such a situation, these trafficked African women often "trade" without the use of condoms. However, some are tortured, raped and subjected to other forms of ferocious physical dishonour by their clients and traffickers.

The trauma of such physical abuses engenders loss of the female self and dignity. For instance, when she is initially freed from the tyranny of Akobi, Mara desires to be fettered by his oppression. Her psyche has been altered by the trauma of patriarchal oppression to the extent that she does not believe in her authority or control over her affairs anymore: "Was I capable of being a master even unto my own self? I just was so used to being the servant [...] I so feared this change; and this fear is what (I think) that made me want Akobi back, that made me wish and desired his presence" (44).

This distortion of her self-perception reflects in her passion and motivation for excellence. Akobi becomes the object of her motivation for excellence: "I decided that I would begin taking the steps to do something about myself that will make Akobi proud [...] And upon this decision I swore a solemn oath" (46). The aftermath of human trafficking for sex and pornography is dehumanising. Mara considers her real identity lost: "this bit of garbage that once used to be me" (3). Although there are possibilities for the victims of trafficking to achieve traumatic closure and be integrated into the society, this may not apply to all.

In his study of trafficking in women and children as vulnerable groups, Usman Mikail Usman discovers that:

The victims' entire experience is about the trauma of being trafficked. If they survive and are rescued, they will not be able to just forget about their experiences, they will re-experience this trauma and the crime over and over the rest of their life. (290)

Mara, for instance, is unable to reclaim her former self and dignity and so she laments: "I have plunged into my profession down to the marrow in my bones. There is no turning back for me now. I am so much a whore now that I can no longer remember or imagine what a non-whore is" (139). Not only has she lost grasp of her real self, she has also lost her dignity to the extent that she cannot afford to relate with her family, although they are not aware of her misfortunes, she complains: "there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them" (140).

The Commodification of Women through Eroticised Dominance

As earlier noted, one of the methods of feminist endeavours is to understand the dynamics of the varying patriarchal systems which legitimatise women oppression. This study, through the critical lenses of Catherine MacKinnon, identifies the oppression and commodification of women through eroticised dominance. Catherine MacKinnon's contribution to feminist theories is couched in what she terms a feminist theory of sexuality which "locates sexuality within a theory of gender inequality, meaning the social hierarchy of men over women" (Mackinnon, 127). In her sexual theory of gender, she analyses sexuality as a social construct of male power, a critical vantage point that captures sex as the core of the subordination of women to men (Mackinnon, 128). Hence, the displaced little finger of Mara is caused by a man, one of her best spenders, whose dictatorial wife treats badly. Through sexual intercourse, this individual vents his rage on Mara. The story opens with Mara existing in the shadow of her real, dehumanised, (ab)used self. She stares at the mirror, exploring the relics of several acts of sadomasochism meted out to her: sore cracked lips, hideous traces of bits and scratches, several bruises and scars. These are the handiworks of men whom she calls her "best spenders" (2). This kind of sexual intercourse is interpreted as the display of male power, since male pleasure, as we find in the text, seems to be inextricably tied to victimising, hurting and exploiting. All sexual violent acts, according to MacKinnon, reflect the fact that "what men want is women bound, women battered, women tortured, women humiliated, women degraded and defiled" (Mackinnon, 138).

Mackinnon avers that sexual objectification of women is the means through which the qualities we know as male and female are socially created and enforced. In other words, to be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on women, a meaning that defines them as things to be sexually used (Mackinnon, 140). This notion is reflected in Akobi's treatment of Mara in the entire story. In one of their sexual sessions in their Nigerian home, Mara is clearly depicted as a sex object: "He stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and lay out my mat because he wanted to sleep alone" (22). The first sexual encounter between Mara and Akobi when the former arrives in Germany is described thus: "He was brutal and overfast with me, fast like he was reluctantly performing a duty, something he wouldn't have done if he had his way, but which he must because he must" (84). Mara considers this a clear case of domestic rape.

Amma Darko's presentation of the trafficked females is realistic about their enforced passivity, second-class status, and humiliation. MacKinnon's postulation about sexualised male dominance is aptly captured by Amma Darko. In the text, Akobi, Osey, and the

other unscrupulous traffickers sexualise hierarchy. From the above-mentioned instances of brutal sexual intercourse, we see that while the imperatives of masculinity are enunciated through the eroticisation of control, the definition of femininity is captured by eroticising submission. Thus, the sexual relationship between Mara and Akobi indicate sexualised inequality and gender hierarchy. It is, therefore, argued that the reduction of the woman to a thing is a function of sexual dominance. By this argument, we can also affirm that trafficking is occasioned by sexual dominance. Therefore, the eradication of trafficking is tied to the eradication of sexual superiority.

Trafficking women and girls for the sex industry – a direct physical appropriation – permits the reduction of women to the state of material objects. Collete Guillaumin calls this appropriation “sexage” (Tyson, 99). Thus, in many literary representations of a patriarchal system/economy, women are seen to be perceived as mere commodities. In the text, we see that Mara also considers herself a commodity of her pimp: “he is my lord, my master and my pimp. And like the other women on my left and right, I am his pawn, his slave and his property” (3). In fact, as Vivian lives at the mercy of Osey, so does Mara live at the mercy of Akobi. It is even disheartening that the money accruing from the exploitation of Mara’s sexuality at Peepy does not belong to her but to her pimps. It is germane to equate trafficking with slavery and serfdom. Because of the illegality of the trade, traffickers employ a number of unscrupulous tactics to retain their victims.

Blackmail is one of the potent tactics used by both syndicates and the actual traffickers to keep their victims in the trade. Mara is coerced and kept in the business of prostitution through blackmail. Osey and Akobi videoed Mara, completely naked, with many men taking their turns upon her. She fears that in the event of her refusal to stay in the business, the unscrupulous men would send the video to Africa. Usman Mikail Usman also notes that “fear and trauma are two primary tools that are used in control of the victim in human trafficking” (290).

Reclaiming the Female Self: Consciousness-raising and Nego-feminism

MacKinnon’s feminist method of consciousness-raising proves viable in eradicating trafficking in women and other kinds of female denigration. As espoused by MacKinnon, this technique refers to the process of kindling the awareness of women concerning their social condition. Consciousness-raising groups began in the 1960s and 1970s and they provided a free space or context for women to articulate the inarticulate and admit the inadmissible, all of which are geared towards critically questioning gender social relations (MacKinnon, 87).

Although we have identified African traditional marital practices, from the foregoing textual analysis, as inimical to women; yet, we also discover that it is not uncommon for African men to latch upon those practices and expand them to the detriment of women. For instance, Mama Kiosk does not find the marital denigration of Mara normal. She notes that while tradition demands that wives “obey, respect and worship [their] husband[s]” husbands should in return care for their wives (13). While she stands as the instrument of consciousness-raising in the text, her views tally with Obioma Nnaemeka’s nego-feminism.

Nnaemeka postulates a form of African feminism which “challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines” (378). As we find in the text, Mara does not embody the radical brand of feminism whose language and engagement is disruption, deconstruction and a blowing-away of male partners. According to the critic, African feminism challenges through negotiation, accommodation, and compromise. Her idea of a “third space” refers to an arena “which allows for the coexistence, interconnection, and [sic] interaction of thought, dialogue, planning, and action” (360). In other words, the brand of African feminism that will translate into the material, economic well-being of the African woman must advocate the interconnection and coexistence of males and females. This explains why Mara, against all odds, strives to coexist with Akobi. Mama Kiosk’s consciousness-raising, her attempt to make Mara recognise that her subjugated relationship with Akobi is not normal, proves abortive. Mara, instead, chooses to live with her husband hoping that a compromise could be achieved through dialogue.

Kaye also raises the consciousness of Mara. Although partly in the trade of prostitution, when time and interest allow, she assists her husband to manage Peepy. She too went through a similar ordeal as Mara did. She becomes a confidant to Mara and enlightens about her status as a sex slave. Based on the education gained from Kaye, she goes through an epiphany of herself: “I began to wonder. Why couldn’t I take control of my own life [...]?” (118). Through consciousness-raising, Mara is able to, first, discover that she is not a natural victim of social inequality; second, that although she is socially constructed to be that way, change is possible. In the end, she decides to, get unfettered from male oppression.

Conclusion

By closing reading Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon* through the lenses of the feminist thoughts of Obioma Nnaemeka (nego-feminism) and Catherine MacKinnon (consciousness-raising and sexuality), we understand the dynamics of gender inequality in more profound ways. Thus, the text is a literary strategy of reclaiming the African woman’s self and dignity. Amma Darko’s presentation of the trafficked females, especially Mara, in the text is realistic about their enforced passivity, second-class status, and humiliation. The various acts of brutal sexual intercourse are interpreted as the display of male power, since male pleasure, seems to be inextricably tied to victimising, hurting and exploiting.

Furthermore, the sexual relationship between Mara and Akobi indicates sexualised inequality and gender hierarchy, for while the imperatives of masculinity are enunciated through the eroticization of dominance, the definition of femininity is captured by eroticising submission. By this argument, we affirm that the eradication of trafficking is tied to the eradication of sexual superiority. Moreover, through consciousness-raising, Mara discovers that her unnatural socially constructed identity can be changed. In this connection, therefore, narrating stories of female subjugation constitutes one of the potent ways of resistance against male dominance. In other words, by portraying the peculiar insidious trauma that attends African women, especially those trafficked for prostitution and pornography, the society is conscientised and policymakers are well-informed about

what should inform the trajectory of their responsibilities.

The weak enforcement of anti-trafficking legislation in Africa calls for urgent attention among government agencies and non-governmental organisations responsible for the implementation of such laws. This paper submits that more anti-trafficking laws and policies need to be made and enforced to enable effective actions against trafficking in human beings for labour or sexual exploitation. It is believed that African feminism as a political movement can foster this. By adopting the ideas embedded in Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism and Catherine MacKinnon's method of consciousness-raising, African feminist can take a leap towards unraveling the utilitarian face of the feminist ideology, particularly in the fight against trafficking in women and young girls.

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