

Reflection of Social Ills in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*

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This paper examines the various social ills in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. It argues against the frame that some African youths migrate to European countries as a result of poor leadership and lack of conducive environment to realize their potentials. The work contends that whether in Africa or Europe, the female child is dominated, exploited, and abused by man. It also asserts that Africa migrants encounter a lot of problems in Europe. It identifies some of the challenges that militate against the aspirations of women and African youths in Europe to include: domestic violence, sex exploitation, prostitution, drug abuse, pornography, and racism. It adopts the sociological literary theory to examine the social, cultural, economic, and political problems in Africa that occasion the migration of youths to Europe and the consequences of their movement. The conclusion reached is that the migration of African youths to Europe as a result of the social, economic, and political challenges in Africa has not yielded any palliative to their socio-economic status quo. Rather, it further aggravates their dehumanization and subjugation.

Keywords: reflection, social ills, migration, sociological

Introduction

The literary artist as the moral conscience of the society uses his work to expose the social, economic, and political ills in the society. Some of these evils are poor leadership, corruption, class conflict, cultural subjugation of the girl-child by man, human trafficking, and environmental pollution. It is the duty of the novelist to expose these vices and proffers solutions to them. He makes the people to be conscious of what is happening in the society. Many African novelists have expressed their displeasure over the various problems in post-colonial and contemporary African societies. Jude Agho (2013) noted that: "The African novel has been mostly deployed by writers in trying to expose the abnormalities inherent in the neo-colonial establishment, which as it has become, merely replicates the apparatus of colonialism" (p. 17).

The novelists lampoon the mundane life of the ruling class in Africa and the resultant pauperization of the plebeians in the society. So, in an attempt to surmount their socio-economic challenges, some African youths take to prostitution, drug abuse, migration to European countries, and human trafficking.

In recent times, many African youths have found their way to European countries where most of them engage in nefarious activities. These criminal acts, such as prostitution, human trafficking, armed robbery, and drug abuse have attracted international condemnation. It is because of this negative image that many local and international organizations are in synergy to repatriate many of them back to Africa. Despite the fact that there is great condemnation of the evil acts of some of our youths in Europe and the dehumanising condition they are

subjected to, they are still eager to go there because most of our political leaders are unable to adequately cater for their needs. Faced by poor standard of living, poverty, and unemployment, many well-domesticated African youths have taken to unholy ways as means of sustaining their existence.

In this paper, migration is examined as a social problem and survival is also examined as a strategy from the point of view of the author. The essence is to examine how the author views the social problem of migration in her work.

This paper, therefore, focuses on the migration of some African youths, prostitution and female trafficking, its effects, and how to nip in the bud the evil problem of migration of some African youths.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on sociological theory. Sociological theory examines literature in the social cultural, political, and economic context in which the work is conceived. It X-rays the relationship between the writer and the society. Sociological criticism explicates how the society functions in literature and how literature works in the society. The social function of literature is to mirror the true picture of the society both past, present, and future. It becomes an indispensable weapon in shaping and reshaping the society. Hence, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O (1981) said:

The novel mimics, contemplates, clarifies many elements of reality in terms of quality. It helps organize and make sense of the chaos of history, social experience and personal lives. As a creative process, it mimics the creation of the universe as order from chaos. (pp. 16-17)

The writer through his literary work objectively presents the real situation of the society he belongs because literary artists do not write in vacuum they present the situation prevailing in their society at a particular time. Hence, literature, the society, and the literary artists cannot be separated.

The novelists are members of the society. So, the problems and the wellbeing of the society are the main materials for their novels. They use their novels to mirror the ills that are prevalent in the society and proffer solutions to them. A literary work can only be useful and successful when it mirrors the various ills in the society. This sociological importance of literature is universally enriching in bringing order in the society in which it emanates. Literature becomes a weapon for social order and sanity to a disordered society. It becomes an agent of conflict management and social control. Hence, Richard Ohmann (1976) said: "There is just no sense in pondering the function of literature without relating it to the actual society that uses it, to the centres of power within that society, and to the institution that mediates between literature and people" (p. 303).

Abiola Irele (1987) justified the theory when he says that:

... attempts to correlate the work to the social background to see the actual author's intention and attitude issue out of the wider social context of his art in the first place and more important still to get to an understanding of the way each writer or each group of writer capture a moment of the historical consciousness of the society. (p. 12)

Sociological criticism explores the relationships between the artist and the society and the role of literature in the African society cannot be properly appreciated outside the sociological theory.

Social Ills in *Beyond the Horizon*

The story is about a young Ghanaian girl Mara, who marries Akobi, a man who works at the ministries. Later, Mara goes to the city to live in Akobi's shabby one bedroom apartment. Mara, a humble, meek, and

gentle woman performs different domestic duties, such as cooking, cleaning the house, and selling various items to support Akobi. She tolerates Akobi's abuses, sadistic sexual demands, and sleeping on a mat on the concrete floor while Akobi sleeps on a dried grass mattress. Mara is almost a slave to Akobi.

With the help of a link man, Akobi travels to Europe. His intention is to secure a job and raise his social status in the city. Akobi's travelling to Europe brings honour to his village and Mara's family. He is seen as a man of great prestige. Later, Akobi arranges for Mara to join him in Europe, Mara is highly elated because she never dreamed of going to Europe in her life. Once Mara arrives in Germany with the help of the connection man, Mara is subjected to various manipulative ordeals.

Mara had no sense of her worth. She consistently endured Akobi's physical and verbal abuse of her person. Akobi makes her to work as a prostitute to satisfy his own selfish and material desires. In the novel, Amma Darko portrays men as brutish. We see a great exhibition of the power of men in the society. They deceive, manipulate, and use aggression in oppressing and suppressing the fundamental human rights of women.

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Amma Darko exposes the exodus of some African youths to Europe in search of greener pastures. However, when they get there, they discover that gold is not picked on the streets of Europe. They become disenchanted. The novelist highlights the various problems they encounter in Europe. African youths, like Akobi and Mara, his wife are forced to migrate because of the harsh and unfavourable social, economic, and political realities in some parts of Africa. Hence, African women are lured to Europe and forced to take up prostitution as a means of survival. According Jude Agho (2013),

Beyond the Horizon, clearly examines the problem of women trafficking as it operates in Nigeria and Ghana, whether as a social problem or as a survival strategy embarked upon by modern-day African youths in trying to come to terms with the strangulating and suffocating realities in Africa. (p. 73)

The effect of this human trafficking is manifested in the person of Mara who bemoans her exploited and depreciated image. She complains about her over abused body, especially her private parts and breasts. Mara discovers that life as a professional prostitute is frustrating and strangulating. The novelist explores the fact that women are always exploited whether in the traditional society or in modern society. Ato Quays (2000) reinforced this claim thus: "In Africa, women existence is stung between traditionalism and modernity in ways that make it extremely difficult for them to attain personal freedom without severe sacrifices or compromises" (p. 585).

Akobi, the husband of Mara, is portrayed as the main cause of her problem. He is brutal, wicked, and exploitative in his treatment of Mara. He treats Gitte, his German woman, the same way he treated Mara. Akobi is materialistic, deceitful, and devoid of the milk of human kindness. He marries Gitte because he wants to be a citizen of Germany. All his actions toward woman are based on parochial interest.

This abusive and exploitative instinct in man makes Akobi to coerce Mara into prostitution in order to generate money for his interest. In the same vain, Osey Akobi's friend and a smuggler is equally involved in exploiting women. He has no respect for women. He exploits Vivian his African women. He nearly rapes Mara in a train to Hamburg.

Alhaji is another male character that exhibits exploitative tendency towards his tenants. He has strong taste for money yet he does not care for the comfort of his tenants. Mr. Akobi happens to be one of his tenants. His tenants live in horrible grimy rooms, exposing the occupants to unhygienic conditions. Little wonder Mara says on seeing Akobi's residence in the city:

... to say I was shocked when Akobi brought me to his home in the city would be an understatement, I was stunned. Akobi had to tell me this was his home before I believed it ... it was a cluster of shabbily, constructed corrugated iron sheet shelters that looked like chicken houses while all about and within them shallow open gutters wound their ways. (p. 8)

Mara description above shows that Africa migrants in Europe live in slums and ghettos. The novelist also highlights the activities of some Africans who survive on smuggling immigrants into Europe illegally and bribes immigration officers to obtain visas for their clients. The anchor man called overseer is nicknamed Oves. Oves uses Mara as his source of income. He is Mara's lord, mast, and pimp. Oves exploits female characters and force them into prostitution in other to achieve his financial aim. Also, the writer exposes the use of supernatural power in Africa. Amma Darko introduces two characters the medicine man and his assistant who prepare charms for Akobi to ward away evil spirit and prevents him from arrest and deportation while in Europe. The medicine man warns Akobi sternly: "Shake hands with no one at the airport tomorrow. Someone is intending to plant bad medicine at the last minute inside your palm so that all will go wrong for you in Europe that was it" (p. 42).

Amma Darko (1995) further described the agony Mara goes through when she encounters a German man. The giant tortures Mara sexually. The torture was so terrible that Mara complains thus:

... then filled with the loathing of revenge for his wife, he'd love to kill but lacking the guts even to pull her hair he imagines me to be her, orders me to shout I am her, and does horrible things to me like I never saw a man ever do to a woman before in the bushes I hail from. But I bear it because it is part of my job. I listen attentively to his talk and comfort where I can, and even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me nigger fool, I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he just called me a princess. For I've got a job to do and I have put my all in it. (pp. 2-3)

It is this uncivilized treatment of woman that makes Aduke Adebayo (1995) to say that African "female writers write to tell the truth about their own experiences as well as the experience of woman in general" (p. 34).

One of the major means of survival as illegal migrant in Europe is forced prostitution. The author shows the sexual assault and brutality melted on the female victims. Many African females, like Mara face the brutality of prostitution because they feel that is the price they have to pay in other to remain in Europe. This prostitution is seen as modern slavery. According to Maria Fraiss (2008): "Darko depicts the complexities of the lives of the African women who migrate to Europe as portraying varying forms of prostitution that usually end miserably" (p. 2).

It is this miserable end that makes Chris Abani (2006) to say that:

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* investigates the physical and psychological impacts of violence and forced prostitution of African women in the diaspora and gives details in describing the searing pain of broken bones and wounded skin as well as the violation, humiliation and shame of their protagonists. (p. 5)

It is conventionally believed in a patriarchy society that men have the right to batter women when they think they are not behaving well.

In the novel, the write shows that most young people migrate to foreign countries because they feel life will better there. This is the sole reason why Akobi and Mara leave for Germany. Hence, Mara states:

Parts of the corrugated iron-sheet had rusted away and left little holes here and there which though too small for the heads of humans to pass through were large enough for inquisitive mice and other creatures to slip through. Lift a pan here and out would jump a toad. Pull a chair there to sweep behind it and what should dash feverishly past but a bright orange

headed lizard, spiders wastes and cockroaches were all about, so here and there I sealed with brokes pieces of bricks and clay and anything that could seal, even wet bread and corn dough. But those were just the holes that I saw. (p. 9)

In this novel, most of the youths who are very enthusiastic to migrate to Europe have no academic qualification to sustain them there. They are ready to do any undignified job for survival. Hence, the only means of sustenance is to throw people's rubbish away for them to earn her food in return. This is the true picture of most African youths who live in Europe. This is why Meza Silvia (2014) stated: "Africans migration to Europe is commonly seen as a tidal wave of desperate people fleeing poverty... at home trying to enter the elusive European Eldorado" (p. 8).

This extreme poverty is seen in Akobi's helplessness and his inability to shoulder his responsibility as a husband and father due to the dearth of financial means. Hence, he frowns seriously at Mara getting pregnant again and says that "such pregnancy is undesirable as it might hamper his dream to go to Europe to live there and to work" (p. 34).

The novel also X-rays the dehumanizing and inordinate quest for mundane things which are against the African culture. This inordinate ambition explains the conduct of Akobi and Osey in Germany. These men trade their wives for material gains. Their wives accept to play along in their multiple roles as sister, commodities, and prostitutes. The fact that their relations back home expect them to amass wealth for them without caring how it is made, makes them to engage in unholy activities to satisfy their people at home in Africa. This makes Mara to be immersed in prostitution, which reduces her to sub-human being. Mara is used as a paradigm in this novel to represent the vulnerable, exploited, harassed, battered, and abused women of Africa. This is why Kofi Anyidoho (2003) is right in saying that: "Mara's own lie on making her people back home in Ghana believe that she is good in an African restaurant cannot redeem her from the life of shame and abuse she is condemned to at Ove's brothel" (p. 10).

The novel informs the readers that zealous unskilled youths migrate to western countries with the hope to better their condition of living and those of their relations at homes. However, this purpose is not achieved. The character of Osey, an African who struggles for survival in Germany debunks this assertion that Europe is on earthly Eldorado. He tells Mara that coming to Europe does not give the desired glamour or satisfaction. Rather, it turns out to become mere communist utopia.

In this novel, the author brings women together in solidarity to share their experiences of pain, vulnerability, sexual abuse, and other forms of exploitations and to galvanize themselves against males domination. Women are able through conferring in each other to say things which otherwise seem unmentionable. For instance, Mara who has no experience of city life is able to express her suffering, pains, and frustrations through her association with Mama Kiosk who becomes a mother figure to her. Mara confesses that: "Between Mama Kiosk and me now existed a mother/daughter relationship. I had grown to trust her and talk openly with her about everything. She was a true friend and a perfect substitute mother. I valued her enormously" (p. 23).

The novel also shows how various forms of oppressions can be surmounted by women. This is portrayed in the person of Mara. She demonstrates her first act of resistance when she hoodwinks her pimp pompey into believing that her capital in completely destroyed by one of her customers while she was having intercourse with him (p. 119). So, instead of sleeping with three men daily as in her quota, she appeals to her quota pimp to let her take on one man only for the next month, until she is whole and restored again.

The novelist also portrays the fact that the girl child in Africa is regarded as a commodity to be sold by her parents anytime they want. Akobi gains possession of Mara by giving her father two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloths, beads, gold, jewelry, and two bottles of London dry gin. This clearly shows that some girls in Africa have no control over her body and she cannot choose the man she loves as her husband.

The monetary and material exchange make it obvious that Mara's father put her in the state of abuse and exploitation, since Mara's father prefers the economic status he gets rather than the welfare of his daughter. While Mara's father enjoys great prominence and recognition in Naka and settles his debts Akobi on the other hand acquires a good source of labour in his new wife. This is why the novelist says "she is bought off very handsomely, and made the wife and property of Akobi" (p. 7).

The novel also portrays the way Africans embrace European culture and gradually erodes African culture. Characters like Akobi and Mara adopt European way of life. Mara, for instance, changes her style of dressing as soon as her husband leaves for Europe. Mara social transformation stems from her desire to show herself as the wife of a man who leaves in Europe. She does not want to be seen as uncivilized girl. Many times Akobi lampoons her because of her manner of dressing. Akobi is ashamed of being seen with her especially when his colleagues are with him.

Mara wants to look like a civilized woman who is presentable and sophisticated. This makes her to inform the readers about the rejection of African ways of life as regards clothing. "I no longer were African clothes neither new nor old. No! I wear European dresses" (p. 48).

Akobi on his part changes systematically his African identity because he is ashamed of his Africa name. This is how the agent who smuggles Mara into Europe describes Akobi after he has changed his name. "Cobby is your husband Akobi. He changed his name to Cobby because he thinks that sounds more civilized" (p. 66).

Some African youths in Europe, like Akobi adopt European culture because they want to be accepted by their host.

Conclusion

We can see from this article that many African youths migrate to European countries because of the extreme poverty at home. They believe Europe is their earthly Eldorado, a place where all their human needs can be satisfied. However, they later discover that their dream is mere communist utopia. Europe is instead a place where they are sexually abused, exploited, and dehumanized. In order to be accepted in this place, they must cast away their African identity and culture and be assimilated into European way of life. Amma Darko in *Beyond the Horizon* educates many African youths that leaving the continent to Europe is not the solution to the problems at home in Africa. Instead, everyone should be engaged in meaningful job to avoid poverty. They should embrace the potential in their countries. This will lead to economic, social, and political revolution in the continent.

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