

MARGINALIZED FEMININITY IN A MASCULINIZED WORLD: AMMA DARKO'S *BEYOND THE HORIZON* AND AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S *TRAFFICKED*

OHWOVORIOLE, Felicia. Ph.D

Abstract

*Female subjugation is evident in every stratum of the human society. In politics, religious settings, work place and business organization, women suffer a great deal of unhappiness and subjugation. Female subjugation is also a major theme in literature. Marginalisation refers to a state or condition of deprivation resulting from differential power relations, reflecting a great deal of cultural disadvantage in terms of social opportunities. Patriarchal patterns of culture are also to be found in the three most favoured religions in Africa, Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. Female marginalisation and masculine violence against women include sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and other harmful traditional practices. In the light of this observation, this study interrogates two novels, Amma Darko's (1995) *Beyond the Horizon* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's (2008). *Trafficked*. The central characters in the texts, Mara and Nneoma recall how they are physically, sexually and emotionally tortured by their traffickers. These portrayals of events show how they are introduced to life abuses and exploitation of different forms. Both novels depict how poverty is a major cause of victims' vulnerability to human trafficking. The texts capture in detail the plight of African women taken to Europe for international sex trade. The study is viewed from the perspective of female trafficking as a phenomenon that is not only generating a lot of concern globally but has been represented in literature especially the novel.*

Introduction

Many African novelists have shown their commitment to the society in depicting ideological issues that border on social justice, equity and feminist ideas. Soyinka (1988) affirms the role of the modern African writer. The time has come when the African writer must have the courage to determine what can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity.

Theo Vincent (2004) in a similar vein articulates the nature of literature when he says "literature provides illumination; it is a way of seeing the world, of coming to grips with its complexities." The physical differences between the sexes that children are born with have enormous effects on their lives. In any given cultural context, male and female behaviour patterns are fixed by norms, and anyone who tries to break the rules can expect to meet with serious problems in a community in which the ruling group produces images and conceptions of the others to legitimize the status quo.

Our concern here is the manifestations of female exploitation in the creative productions of two African novelists; Amma Darko and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. In many myths and folktales women are presented to reflect stereotypes observable in broader society as a dangerous force, threatening nature, a witch, a negative power, as the one who swallows or castrates man. Many feminists are of the view that male domination is found in virtually all spheres of life, this male domination is seen as the source of social inequalities and injustice which affect the life of women. Benign projections of sexuality produce images of the woman providing sexual gratification to the man. Feminists therefore seek to remove all the barriers to equal social, political and economic opportunities for women. Feminist literature according to Mobolanle Sotunsa (2008:7).

The general consensus is that feminist literature

is a work written in a prejudiced way to favour the status of women. More often it is a glorification (sometimes unrealistic) of the female and a corresponding castigation of the male. Very often, the feminist writer adopts an unacceptable portrayal of the male in her work in protest against the previously damaging female portrayal in many male writings.

Gender theories are characterized by the following: men and women are unequally situated in society; women get less material resources, social status, power and opportunity for self actualization; This inequality is structural and not biological and every person desires freedom and self actualization and as such women could do with more egalitarian structures and situations.

Many forms of feminism have been identified. They include Marxist/Socialist feminism, Humanist feminism, Liberal feminism, Radical feminism and Analytical feminism amongst others. Feminism which has its origin in the struggle for women's rights, as a movement started in Europe and America but has been domesticated by different cultures and classes. Aduke Adebayo (1996:3) holds:

The term 'feminism' when shorn of its variegated cultural attachments and excesses still possesses a core programme that adequately synthesizes women's experiences worldwide in the same way that Marxism has a core ideology which has been domesticated universally.

Womanism as an alternative theory is distinguished by its focus on the black female experience. It is aimed primarily at achieving self-definition and self actualization for black women. On the subject of womanism Hudson Weems (1998:1815) contends:

The African womanist names and defines herself and her movement... She is family centred. The Africana womanist is more concerned with her entire 'family' than with just herself and her sisters even

Though genuine sisterhood is also very important to her reality Hudson Weems goes further to affirm:

The Africana womanist also welcomes male presence and participation in her struggle as her destiny is often intertwined with his in their broader struggle for humanity and liberation for African people. She has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate enormous strength both in a physical and Psychological Sense. Moreover the Africana womanist desires positive male companionship.

To the writer whose writing reflects the womanist perspective, racial and classist oppression are inseparable from sexist oppression. To this, Sotunsa (2008:20) insists:

Womanists believe in partnership with their men folk. This characteristic distinguishes womanism from feminism which is mainly a separatist ideology.

Womanists celebrate motherhood while insisting that women be treated with more respect and that motherhood be valued rather than derogated. Female marginalization and masculine violence

against women include sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and other harmful traditional practices. Trafficking in young women, which has become a global scourge, involves the movement of young women from one country to another for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Those trafficked are mainly from the developing countries to the developed countries of Europe and America. Oyekanmi (2004) posits that ...women are an underdeveloped resource, constrained by factors in and outside their shores. Their fate is determined by culture and societal values. The society perceives women as reproducers of society and providers of care and comfort. Their vulnerability to trafficking is as a result of their inferior position within the social structure. The novel discusses the problem of women being mere commodity or articles to be used at will by their husbands. Trafficking in young women holds relatively few risks but generates enormous fortune for its perpetrators. Its clandestine nature and huge profit makes it lucrative to well-established criminal syndicates. Female marginalisation is dynamic and depends on social context, sex stereotypes and ideals of femininity and masculinity vary across social, cultural groups and historical periods. According to Lipps (2001:11) The negative evaluation of persons or their activities because they belong to a particular group is known as prejudice, and the brand of prejudice that is based on a person's sexual category is called sexism. Sexism can be used against either females or males but in the novels under study the women are judged harshly, not taken seriously and are deprived of opportunities because they are women.

Crippling of Women in *Beyond the Horizon*

The marginalization of women as reflected in literary works does not exist in a social vacuum. In the case of many women in

Africa, there persists in cultures with a history of hierarchical relationships. Darko Amma's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) is a gripping and provocative story of the plight of African women in Europe and the false hopes of those they leave behind. It captures in details the plight of women in the society especially in marriage. Mara is left uncared for by the husband as soon as she comes to live with him. This does not go unnoticed by some of her neighbours. We have a tale of abuse by men of pretty ladies.

“Waiting to be used and abused by strange men” p.1. scars are left on the female body “several bruises and scars left generously there by the sadistic hands of my best payers, my best spenders”. P.2. Mara's finger is deformed by one of her clients. She suffers so much subjugation, “and even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me a nigger fool I still offer him my crimson smile” p.3. The pimp carries on like a lord. “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. What he orders I do.” P.3.

Mara was given away in marriage to a man who paid “two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry gin” to her family and took her to the city as his wife. She was simply informed by the mother that her father has found a husband for her. She remembered a similar episode in the case of her elder sister who later turns out a “wreck”. The father's formula for choosing or accepting husbands for his daughters, is to take into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man. The ugly minister had slept with many pretty girls in exchange for empty promises of a bungalow and a car. The father gives her out in marriage because 'a man he owed money had come and forcefully claimed his debt...so my dowry came in handy' p.6. While drunk he even revealed he

would gladly have given her away even for one goat, and Akobi after the traditional rites were done on his behalf, came and took her away as 'his property'. P.7. When she is taken to the city, the environment in which she finds herself was so unwholesome, but the thought of her going back home vanished as her father would never be able to refund her dowry, much of which he'd already squandered' p.9. She soon discover that these were least of her problems. The Alhaji landlord refuses his tenants carrying out any form of repair work on his 'houses'. Anyone who disobeys him risked eviction. He did the renovation by himself and very badly done to create another opportunity for repairs and charges. The renovation is only done when he has inclination to do them. Akobi promptly denied his wife any form of house-keeping for emptying a neighbour's rubbish. Though Akobi did not like the idea of his wife working for Mama Kiosk, yet he cherished the benefits. Mara became a source of savings for any 'chop money'. A lot happened in her marriage that she thought was normal as she did not see much difference from her parents' marriage either. It has always been a major problem with women trained in patriarchy and its obnoxious laws. She sees it as normal and natural that she wakes before him, makes fire to warm water for Akobi, carries a bucketful of water with his sponge bag to the bath house while he sleeps only to be woken up to bath. It is also normal and natural for her to stand outside the bathroom while he takes his bath in case soap suds gets into his eyes and may be in need of help. She also has the duty to take away the bucket when he is done, and to keep the towel dry for the next use since he hates wet towels touching his skin. Failure to keep the towel dry no matter the weather condition necessitates beating. Mama Kiosk made friends with her and then points her attention to the problem.

She says:

Your husband is one of those men who has no respect for village people...But I saw none of it or I lacked the ability to understand it enough to see.

Mother has 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, (pp.12-13).

She regarded her suffering as part of being a wife. The counsel she was given is 'obey and worship your husband'. Mara sees nothing wrong with the husband shopping for himself alone. She has been so marginalized that she accepts any treatment meted out to her by rationalizing it under a preconceived pattern: 'because he is the man' and 'for me, not obeying and worshipping Akobi would make me less of a wife, just as having no menstrual periods would make me less of a woman. On being told that she was pregnant, Akobi was upset with Mara. 'he studied me like he was studying filth'. P.17. She got a beating for announcing the pregnancy and continued sleeping on the floor in spite of her condition. 'For the next two days he spoke no word to me, (p.17). He further reacted to the situation by telling Mara to fend for the two of them. 'I have decided that you must start work to earn proper money, now that we are going to increase'. Akobi calls the expected baby 'your child'.

In addition to doing domestic chores, Mara had to bear financial responsibilities of the family. The petty business Mara was to start by hawking eggs was fraught with intimidation. The initial capital for the business was given as a loan by Akobi who blackmailed her to swear to the river god to drown her if she did not pay the loan. While saddled with business and domestic chores, Akobi's physical violence against her continues. 'When Akobi closed the door on the two of us in the room, one of two things happened. He either beat me or slept with me'.

Mara sleeps on a thin mat on the concrete floor while he

sleeps alone on the grass mattress. The only time her back touches the mattress is when there is a need to satisfy his sexual desires, and once he is done with her, he pushes her back to the floor. He refuses to buy cloth for her, and he forbids her from sewing the clothes he presented to her as part of her dowry. She always remembers her mother's advice which makes sure through the training given in the village that all of these unjust treatment is normal. When Mama Kiosk asks her why she feels it is normal to be treated in that manner, she says: 'Because he is the man'.

In her pretty trading activity, Mara is provoked and she fights with the fellow trader. This leads to her being banned from selling in that vicinity. Akobi's reaction was very unjust: 'He howled, growled and bowled...I was willing to wake up dead the next day. P. 27 This reaction was in spite of her pregnancy. The marriage for Akobi was for an ulterior motive and all these have been unfolded in the novel. Any attempt to socialize with the neighbours was frowned upon. He instructed Mara not to associate with Mama Kiosk and the reason given is 'Because I say so'. Akobi is not proud of his wife. He hardly associated openly with her. He creates a comfortable distance between them when they are on the street together because he is ashamed of people knowing that she is a wife 'I don't think that all this while that we had been living together...this extended belly of mine' p.25 When Mara is brought into the home of Cobby (as he is called in Germany) and Gitte asked him to cook for her (Mara), she states 'my mouth fell open... and wanted to eat with me' p.97. Mara sees a new person in her husband. She did not know that an African man could obey the wife's instructions, especially in domestic matters. She later finds out many other things he did without hesitation for Gitte that he would 'never' do for her in Africa. Lack of consideration for women's feelings and emotions are deeply entrenched in Akobi and many other men who hold on to patriarchy. He gives no thought to Mara's feelings

when he is alone with Gitte in their room. She believes that what she is going through in her marriage is what all other women go through in theirs as well. One of such conversation between Mara and Mama Kiosk where she points to her the unjust treatment she gets (page 13). At the time Mama Kiosk had this conversation, she thought she was going to spoil her marriage if she heeds her advice. When Mara could no longer bear the mental torture, she goes back home, but was met with very little sympathy. The first time he asked her opinion on anything was after he sold her belongings and pretended it was for the sake of both of them. She worked harder to make Akobi realise his dreams. 'soon not only was I the sole provider of our daily meals but the sole payer of our rent too. When he departs for Europe without a proper farewell to his wife, she was sad:

'didn't he make more a maid out of me than a wife?. Despite the fact that she would no longer receive his slaps, scolds, humiliations, kicks and beatings she cried. Unknowingly and unconsciously to my own self, I had grown wholly attached to Akobi, to his unfairness, to his bullying, to the strength he possessed over me, p.44.

Her first shock on getting to Germany was when Osey takes her to watch a full movie, she is horrified especially when Osey sexually harasses her in the train neither did he make any attempt to help Mara carry her heavy luggage upon arrival. Akobi had married a German without reference to the first wife which is the tradition. Their first love-making is akin to rape, 'what he did to me was clear case of domestic rape'. (p. 84.) When Akobi got to Vivian's to pick Mara he spoke no word to her before getting to Gitte. Akobo who now bears Cobby instructed Mara to play along with his plan of deceiving Gitte. He made it possible for Mara to listen to their love-making

moans which depressed Mara and had to use ear phones or music to block off the noise, 'here in this small apartment, every sound from the bed room reached my ears' p.112. Gitte abandoned her family for Cobby 'and it is my love for him that has now left me without a family' p.123. Mara summarises the purpose of Akobi sending her to Germany

'My husband brings me from home to a foreign land and puts me in a brothel to work and what money I make, he uses to pay the rent on his lover's apartment and to renovate a house for her in her village back home.

Mara later remembers all that Mama Kiosk had told her in Africa, the advice was found to be useful to her in far away Europe. She thought after their first conversation: 'But still I wasn't going to let Mama Kiosk spoil my marriage for me...I like my eyes as they are.' P.14. Another woman who helps Mara to get out of the hold of patriarchy and the shackles of Akobi is Kaye, an African woman who is the wife to the owner of Peepy, the brothel where Cobby is paid all the money she realizes from sleeping with various men. Her conversation with Kaye eventually leads to her breakthrough. She opens her heart to Kaye as noted: 'She was the first person I told my whole true story...before the subject of prostitution was raised with me (p.116). She helps Mara in several ways to get off the quagmire in which she finds herself. To start with, she plans how she will leave Peppy so that she will get a pimp who will pay her directly. She helps her get a detective who gives her all information about Cobby. She arranges how Mara will leave the area she was for another place so as not to get caught. She also assists her to find someone to marry by proxy in order to be able to get a visa for free movement and to get away from Cobby. It is imperative to note how things come to place

between them: 'Initially I kept these thoughts to myself...better to wake up by yourself' p.119. She also learns so much from Gitte, who tells her of how Cobby brought Comfort from Africa to live with them; how she began suspecting Comfort and Cobby with the way they behave at home, how he will take only Comfort out with him to the bar only to say that it was an 'African affair', how she told Cobby to send Comfort out and how Cobby insisted on them getting a flat for her (Comfort) and she (Gitte) will have to keep paying up the rent herself. Mara gets more information, to get her pound of flesh, Mara mailed the information to Gitte. Darko here takes a radical turn in intervening in the long-held societal norms on patriarchy. She makes Mara get all these information as a way of punishing Cobby and to make men see that women, though docile to them, are reasonable and rational beings.

No sweetness for the woman in *Trafficked*

Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* is a compelling narrative which revolves around a charming young lady, Nneoma who flees from home as a result of unfavourable circumstances. The issue of abuse in Ezeigbo's novel revolves mainly around the main character. The portrayal of events show how Nneoma and the other trafficked girls are abused and exploited in different ways. Nneoma recalls while in Oasis centre,:

I am completely devastated by the life I'm forced to live: hit the night street, waiting for customers, winter, spring, summer, autumn; and sleep till it all begins again at nightfall. I am often assaulted by Captain because I sometimes refuse to cooperate with the customers, especially when they demand positions I find despicable or when I am difficult, the men beat me and throw me out of their cars or

kick me out of a car park or field or public garden.
(p.129)

When Nneoma is later sold to Baron (her new boss) she says this of him;

Baron is a sadist. He rapes and beats me. I refuse when customers demand oral or anal sex and insist they must use condoms and I'm sometimes assaulted for this.

Under the pretext of working abroad in the United Kingdom as a teacher, Nneoma and other five girls, aged seventeen to twenty are lured and taken to Europe for international sex trade. Later she discovers in Italy under Madam Dollar, the prostitution ring matron, and captain, that she is a 'common harlot' always walking at night, selling sex to Italian men and foreigners (128-1290. Nneoma is devastated by the life she is compelled to live such as; spending her nights outside, waiting for clients then coming back home at dawn to handle chores, and then sleep till it begins again at nightfall. She recounts how she is usually assaulted by Captain because she does not bring enough money home and because she sometimes refuses to comply with the clients' 'nasty demands'.

While dreaming of freedom, she meets Baron also called Fyनेface who takes her and two other girls to London under the pretext of rescuing them from Madam Dollar.

"I went to Italy with a woman who promised to help me and some other girls to get jobs. She said it was easy to get good jobs there and that we could migrate to Britain after a while if we wanted" p. 15

"I have no idea where I was kept...I don't even know the

name of the street as I was never allowed to go out except on the very few occasions when Baron took me with him or allowed another man to take me out and bring me back afterwards” p. 16.

According to Nneoma:

“In Italy I discover I am trafficked. I have no say in the matter. There's a woman called Madam Dollar-nothing comes between her and money. She owns us and the man, whom we learn to call Captain, her bodyguard. She keeps us prisoner in her flat... Madam raves at me, and Captain beats me up, but he makes sure he does not disfigure me, for this will mean loss of revenue for Madam Dollar... So I walk the streets of Rome for Madam Dollar for three years and still she claims I have not repaid my debt. There is no hope for escape. I do not speak Italian. I know no one in the city. I fear the police like a plague as I don't have valid documents. So I remain with Madam Dollar, biding my time, dreaming of freedom” pp. 128-130.

Efe, (Nneoma's friend in Oasis is one of the abused and exploited victims. She narrates how she was trafficked from Benin to Italy. At age nineteen, Efe leaves home to visit a cousin in Lagos where she is deceived by an advertisement in a newspaper to work abroad. She is taken to Italy and she is subsequently sold to Madam gold (a Nigerian) who forces them to sell their bodies to her customers for six years. Efe recalls:

“We were taken to Italy and ended up in Palermo. It was terrible. I was sold to a woman called Madam Gold, a Nigerian. She was vicious. She used us shamelessly, made us walk the streets every

night...Madam Gold sold me to a pimp-a white man after four years of slaving for her" P.99-100

Luckily, Nneoma escapes from Baron when they both go out for shopping in a Pakistan shop in London and roams the city for two days until she meets a Nigerian woman, Dr. Chindo Okechi, a University lecturer on a fellowship in the United Kingdom. Chindo takes Nneoma home and introduces her to Dimgba, another Nigerian living in London. She lives there doing menial job until the police raid the house and Nneoma is deported to Lagos within days. Nneoma and other girls return to Nigeria, they are helped by Oasis, a centre for rehabilitation of previously trafficked girls.

Within the main plot of the novel are the sub-plots which also unravel exploitation in the academic environment, in politics, abuses in the family and the society. It begins with the experience of a mature student Ofomata who decides to sacrifice his traditional Igbo title of the 'Ozo Nkwu' of Ihite-Agu for a degree in the University and how his challenges in the University increases as he is being exploited by a lecturer, Dr. Komolafe. Also is the politics played by prophet Elias and his group who desecrate the village shrines, steal the sculptures in order to sell them to wealthy art collectors 'from overseas'. Prophet Elias's relationship with the people, and most importantly, with the women reveal the hypocrisy of religion in Ihite-Agu. Hannah Nneoma's sister who returns after eloping with prophet recounts how the latter constantly abuse her and other women physically and sexually.

From the experiences of the trafficked girls, we understand the strategies employed by the exploiters to confine the girls such as seizing their passports, identification documents and denying them access to wherever they choose to go. Furthermore is the abusive affair that transpires between the hypocritical prophet Elias and the

women. Hannah, Nneoma's sister who returns home disconsolate after eloping with him, narrates her ordeal:

Prophet Elias likes whipping people. He says Jesus whipped sinners. Women are not exempted. After whipping us, he invites us to his bed. (p.171)

Hannah, Nneoma's sister was also exploited by a so called prophet who kept her as a concubine in a harem of ten women, she was the only one to remain childless. She had to look after the children of Prophet Elias's wife and eight other concubines and was used as a punch bag when the prophet needed to unburden his pent-up emotions." P. 171

Conclusion

The texts examined are constructed to project social reality shorn of embellishments; exploitation of women in each case. There is use made of traditional perception of the woman. The gender dynamics portrayed in the texts analysed reproduce the gender stereotypes of the broader society. This gives social credence to what happens in the world of Akachi's narrative depicting female trafficking. In *Beyond the Horizon* and *Trafficked*, justice is meted out to some of the culprits of sexual trade and human trafficking, artistically postulating possible panaceas to the evil. This is done in a socially realistic manner. The novels are authored by women. It is not without significance that the main characters in the novels are exploited women.

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