

An Assessment of Prostitution among African Women in the Diaspora: Evidence from Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*

Samuel Ohene Anane¹, Edward Owusu^{2*}, Priscilla Appiah³, Nana Agyemang Opoku⁴,
Bernice Quampah⁵, and Hagar Ampomah Donkor⁶

^{1, 6}Department of Foreign Languages, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

^{2,3,4,5}Department of Communication Studies, Sunyani Technical University, Sunyani, Ghana.

Corresponding Author: *edwardowusu@minister.com

Article Information:

Received: February 28, 2023, Accepted: April 12, 2023, Published: April 14, 2023

Abstract

The development of every nation is highly dependent on the success of the individuals in it. This is but a realization of the adage that the average man if rationally organized, lives by the sweat of his brow. Every individual becomes successful based on the work he/she does. This is to say that the individual's success and the development of a nation are mutually dependent. The African woman's engagement in prostitution as a livelihood has attracted all forms of dialogue, both in Africa and in the diaspora. The purpose of this study was to analyse how Amma Darko presents prostitution among African women in the Diaspora. To achieve this objective, we used *Beyond the Horizon* as their primary source of data. We analysed the factors that push women into prostitution in the Diaspora as well as the presentation of the practice of prostitution, as presented by the primary source. The findings of the study affirmed that women who go into prostitution in the diaspora are mostly blackmailed and coerced into it by their male benefactors who take them abroad. The study also revealed that through prostitution, women sex workers get addicted to drugs, and coming out of this trade becomes almost impossible. Based on the analysis, we conclude that the expectations of the families of the sojourning African women remain a strong influence on the women joining the sex industry.

Keywords: Prostitution, African Woman, Colourism, Sex Business, Patriarchy, Domestic Violence

1. Introduction

Prostitution is the custom of having sexual relations in exchange for economic gains (O'Neill, 2001). This phenomenon has been carried down through various languages to the present day. According to Nickie (1992), in prostitution, the responsibility for the act is carried by the seller, in language, and attitude. Historically, the reputation of prostitution has also focused on the provider of the service. In the opinion of Pheterson (1996), since the birth of 'the

oldest profession', the woman selling sexual services has been either revered or despised, but in more recent times, it has more commonly been despised. Sex work is a term used to describe a wide range of activities relating to the exchange of money (or its equivalent) for the provision of sexual service (Harcourt and Donovan, 2005). People prefer using the term "sex worker" instead of the term "prostitute" because the former sounds less offensive. According to May, Harocopos and Hough (2000), the term 'sex worker' refers to those engaged in prostitution and is the preferred term used throughout the literature on the subject. They posit that the term has been adopted as is it free of complicated, derogatory, and sexist connotations which are more commonly associated with the term 'prostitute'.

It is clear from the definitions reviewed that prostitution is a transaction between two parties: the one offering his/her body, and the person patronising the service. In the market situation, the buyer transacts with the seller, at the hospital, the patient interacts with the doctor, in the school, we have the teacher and the student but in the case of prostitution, while there are two parties engaged in the sex transaction, the buyer is overlooked since the term prostitute refers to only the one offering the service. There is no equivalent term for the one buying the services of the prostitute. Shaver (1988) also asserts that when looking at prostitution historically, it becomes clear that those punished for the crime are the providers of sex. Western society and most sex worker activists prefer the term "sex worker" instead of the term "prostitute".

Harcourt and Donovan (2005) compiled a long list of the different types of sexual services practiced by sex workers around the world. From this list, they grouped types of sexual services into two categories: direct and indirect sex work. Direct sex work refers to services, such as indoor and outdoor prostitution as well as escort services. This type of sex work typically involves the exchange of sex for a fee in which genital contact is common. Indirect sex work refers to services, such as lap dancing, stripping, and virtual sex services (over the Internet or phone). Genital contact is less common in this type of sex work; however, a fee is still exchanged for the service.

As posited by Taylor and Jamieson (1999), people engage in sexual activity for pleasure but others engage in it for economic reasons. Thus, the sex industry works as the principles of demand and supply in the business world. There has been consistent demand for sex over the years, which has culminated in more people, especially women offering sex for economic gains. Therefore, if this increment is consistent, it stands to prove the reason for the increment in the number of sex workers who are engaged in prostitution. According to Cusick et al. (2009), calculating the number of commercial sex workers is very difficult as sex work is mostly hidden and the population is transient, with people moving in and out of sex work constantly. The sex-work industry is made up of both men and women. However, women make up the majority of the workers. Women make up the majority of the sex work population, with some estimates suggesting the proportion is around 85-90 percent (Scambler, 2007). Another study by Wilcox and Christmann (2006) on male sex workers in the Yorkshire area of Kirklees found a small number of male sex workers working in the area. This stands to reason that though men are engaged in prostitution, women prostitutes constitute the larger portion. The patronisers of the sex industry involve both the learned and the unlearned. It is therefore difficult to categorise prostitutes as possessing little education. Thus, Roberts et al. (2010) assert that some students engage in sex work to help fund their studies and that the numbers are thought to have increased with the introduction of top-up tuition fees.

Prostitutes working in an area cannot also be classified as indigenes of that place. This is because prostitutes may migrate from one area and work in another, as reported in the study by Dickson (2004) which looked into London-based female sex workers and found 93 different ethnicities among the London population - only 19 percent of whom said they were from the UK. Different cultures have demonstrated a great difference in perception and practice of prostitution at different times. In ancient Cyprus, it was their culture that every woman had to be a prostitute herself at least once to any stranger as that was the eligibility criteria for marriage (Greenwald, 1967). According to Nickie (1992), the 18th century is called "The Golden Age of Prostitutes". This is because, during this era, many places had been established where prostitutes could get training to get started in a professional life as a prostitute. Examples of such places were Mme Gourdan's in Paris, Mrs Goadsby's, and Miss Fawkland's in London. At that time, prostitutes were very famous. Different factors compel different women to go into prostitution at different places.

According to Wawer et al., (1996), Domestic responsibilities, economic crisis, and lack of household economy forced women to involve themselves in prostitution. The burden of maintaining the home, feeding the family, and making ends meet has driven many women into the practice of prostitution. A study by Chattopadhyay et al., (1994) shows that illiteracy, failure of family support, and lack of ability to fulfil the basic needs of the family or children, were key factors that make people adopt prostitution. Hong and Li, (2008) also assert that a lack of money and economic necessities are the basis for some women joining sex workers in China. The issue of prostitution is prevalent in Africa, as is the case in other parts of the world. Consequently, different authors have written extensively on this subject matter. This study, therefore, seeks to assess prostitution among African women in the diaspora as shown by Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Plot Synopsis

Amma Darko in her novel *Beyond the Horizon* presents to the reader a young naïve girl in the village, Mara, who is married by a young man and taken to the city. In the city, she goes through a lot of hustle and humiliation from her husband in the corrugated iron sheet structure they call home. Her husband moves to Europe to find greener pastures with many promises to Mara, the main character in the work under study. Akobi, Mara's husband later makes arrangements for the wife to join him in Europe which she obliges, only to come to the realization upon relocation to Europe that, her husband has deceived her into prostitution. And more shockingly, Mara finds out that the proceeds of her sex work are used for funding the luxurious stay of her husband's concubine in the European country, Germany. Mara, now a free prostitute, sends a letter to Akobi's newfound European wife, Gitte who had given so much money to Akobi to build a house for them to relocate to Africa. After the receipt of the letter, Akobi is sent to prison while his African woman lover, Comfort is deported.

2.2. Analysis of Prostitution among African Women in the Diaspora

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* presents the reader with a deep insight into the practice of prostitution among African women in the diaspora. Through the texts, we have identified certain issues that push women into the practice of prostitution. We find patriarchy as a prominent factor that pushes women into prostitution. In Ghana, and even after migration to

Europe, women who usually go into prostitution, depend wholly on men who bring them for shelter, food, and other necessities of life. This affords the men the opportunity to initiate them into the sex trade. This practice of patriarchy is further substantiated, when Vivian asserts to validate the reality of the dependence of the African women on their invitees in Europe, thus:

“I came here full of hope and found here too, I have to continue depending wholly on Osey. He makes every arrangement and simply gives me orders. Even the money I make, he controls it. I can't buy anything without his consent, not even for my mother at home” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon* p.116).

Vivian is not alone in this dependence on the men, Mara upon arrival in Europe, depends wholly on Akobi, who is known in Germany as Cobby. Akobi decides what Mara eats, where she goes and even the work she does and this proves very instrumental in his plan to push her into the sex trade.

Kaye also expresses her total dependence on her then-boyfriend after she arrives in Germany. From the presentation of these three characters cited, Amma Darko exposes the reader to the patriarchal situation that the African woman migrant encounters, where everything she does is dependent on the man who brings her abroad. This situation usually puts the man in a better position to push the dependent woman into prostitution.

Amma Darko presents the reader with yet another stunning revelation of how African maidens get initiated into this trade that attracts so much displeasure on African soil. The men who initiate the women blackmail, and command them to engage in sex work. Afterward, some of the men threaten the women to blackmail them (the women) by sending images of the women to their (women's) families in Africa if they (the women) decide to quit the prostitution they were initiated into. In the text, Akobi can push Mara into prostitution by playing a recorded video that contains her (Mara) in a sex orgy with many men and threatens her that if she does not engage in prostitution, he (Akobi) will send the video to her family in Ghana.

“The situation was this: the three of us were watching a video film that showed me completely naked, with men's hands moving all over my body. Then some held my two legs wide apart while one after the other, men, many men, white, black, brown, and even one who looked Chinese, took turns upon me. All this was captured clearly in the video film. And this was what Osey and Akobi blackmailed me with so that I agreed to do the job at Peepy” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon* p.151, 152).

Kaye also narrates her experience at the time her then-boyfriend brings her to Europe, coerced her into prostitution and pocketed every mark she made, and kept her in the sex trade by blackmailing her with pictures he had taken of her in action with different men

“You back out today, tomorrow these pictures will be on their way back to your family at home (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon* p. 154).

The analysis of the practice of prostitution in the text discloses the nature of the characterisation presented by Amma Darko. Different characters present the reader with different ways of the practice of prostitution. Mara, the main character in the text, begins her practice of prostitution as a naïve recruit who has been blackmailed and coerced into prostitution. After she was coerced into the sex trade, the man who ushers her into it decides with the pimp to send every mark (amount) she makes into his (the man's) account. The woman does not get any amount of money that comes from the use of her own body in the sex trade. Akobi takes all the money that Mara earns, as she asserts:

“But the money I made laying with men at Peepy, I saw none of it.... Every day, apart from Sundays, I took on at least three men. What they paid me went to Akobi” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon* p. 156).

It is identified that certain traits in Mara are very instrumental in Akobi's ability to initiate her into the sex trade. Mara is very faithful to her husband to the extent that at certain times she takes his orders to be divine. When he outlines his travel plans to her, Mara asserts that even if Akobi had asked her to offer her head she would have done it without questioning.

Mara's naivety also accounts for her easy initiation into the sex business. She is so 'green' to the extent that Vivian even finds it difficult to alert her on certain issues associated with her stay and work in Europe. Mara starts work at Peepy with other prostitutes who by obligation have to paint their lips and their cheeks with a red-like colour each. This paint is supposed to be more of a trademark for the profession – prostitution – than a mere make-up. Thus, Mara asserts:

“I shiver at the sight of my sore cracked lips which still show through the multiple layers of the glossy crimson paint I apply to hide them. This gaudy pink rouge I've plastered on my ebony black face looks horrid too, I know, but I wear it because it's a trademark of my profession” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p.2).

Mara now comes to her senses in the sex trade and stops working for Akobi by leaving Peepy for another brothel, where the money she earns will come to her directly. Amma Darko uses Mara's character to express resilience, in the face of oppression. Vivian is another character the author uses to portray the practice of prostitution in the diaspora and who, being in a similar situation to that of Mara, also works as a prostitute and she has no control over the proceed since it goes to her boyfriend, Osey. Vivian cannot even use any part of the money to buy something for herself. Vivian expresses:

“Even the money I make, he controls it” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon* p.116).

After her initiation, the money Vivian makes goes to her fiancé, Osey. Darko uses Vivian's character to show submission to authority and the possibility of a woman taking her life into her hands, later in the work. Kaye is also a character that Darko uses to disclose some knowledge about the rationale behind the African woman's practice of prostitution in the diaspora. At the onset, Kaye works as a prostitute until she meets and marries Pompey, the owner of Peepy. Kaye, though married, still works as a prostitute when time permits her.

Darko uses Kaye as a character to provide support in diverse ways to the development of the character Mara in advice and other forms of support.

The use of the pimps as characters proves quite instrumental in the development of the plot of the story. The pimps assume supervisory roles in the work. Pompey for instance is an expression of strictness and commitment to duty. He makes sure he stands by his contract with Akobi to remit the latter with the proceeds of Mara's sex trade. Oves, on the other hand, is a character used by Darko to express a clear understanding of purpose and commitment to duty. Unlike Pompey, Oves does not distract himself with the experience of the pleasure he sells in prostitution in his brothel. All he has is his pet cat and cocaine.

Again, Amma Darko presents the places of practice of prostitution to her readers. There are nightclubs in Germany, where sex is sold and the women whose bodies are used in this trade are treated like properties and assets that are owned by people, rented out to others who supervise their use, as they get monetary returns from the women. Whether rooted in African contexts, focused on transnationalism, or located in the so-called First World, and whether they call themselves, feminists, Womanists, or Sitarists, most "feminist" scholars agree "that a woman's body is her inherent property, not to be owned, used, and dumped by men" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2005). From Darko's presentation, the brothel is made up of single rooms that house beautiful young prostitutes. Each prostitute has a single room from where she operates.

“And from my left and right, all about me, I keep I keep hearing chuckles and paintings, wild bedspring creaks, screaming oohs and yelling aahs. They are coming from rooms that are the same as mine. And in all of them are pretty women like myself” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p.4).

In the text, two different brothels at different places in Germany are used for these acts. The first is the Peepy brothel, under the supervision of Pompey and Oves brothel. The pimp who owns the brothel employs prostitutes and each prostitute in the brothel becomes the property, the pawn of the pimp she works under. He controls them as he controls his assets.

“This man I call Oves. Formally, he is Overseer. 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” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p.4).

There is an agreed time of service for each prostitute. Mara, for instance, is supposed to work six days each week and rest on the seventh day, Sunday, just like the Christian God rested from creation on the seventh day after creation. For each working day, a prostitute sells sex to three men at least. This is how Mara puts it:

“Everyday, apart from Sundays, I took on at least three men”
(Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p.156).

However, when a prostitute wants more money, she could "illegally" arrange for a cut on the number of men who patronise her body but secretly increase the number. An instance of this is when Mara makes an arrangement with Kaye, Pompey's wife, for a reduction in the number of men she sleeps with, to one man a day but secretly, Mara and Kaye increase the

number of men to seven. This is to enable her to make enough money to pay for a marriage that will extend her stay in Germany.

Though the work of sex workers is mostly confined to the brothels where they work (some of the workers) under special arrangements, leaving the brothel to meet some clients at hotels where they engage in the sex trade, just as it is done at the brothel:

“There were others, too, whom she privately contacted, some ... and met for one or two hours at hotels” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p. 158).

Some of the sex workers also agree to carry the sex trade to people who are miles from the brothel. This is through video pornography. From Amma Darko's presentation of the practice of prostitution, each prostitute who pretty has the chance of earning more money by engaging in the making of video pornography. This is presented by Kaye thus:

“Well, I've told you about the other channels, Mara. Those films, pay enormously. And you are so beautiful that I am sure many will clamour for you. Pee can also fix you up for shows, ... the stage shows” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p. 173).

Mara herself confesses that she has been featured in several sex videos and will feature in a couple more, thus: “Worse still, I am now to be seen on a couple more sex videos” (Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, p. 184). Amma Darko presents, as part of her exposition the practice of prostitution, and violence against women. Her presentation of domestic violence appears in line with the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women which states that: ...violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men. (UN General Assembly A/RES/48/104). The men who abuse the women, treat them like their property, permitting their constant abuse and in some cases, the victims have nowhere to run to.

4. Conclusion

Africans are bedevilled with a lot of difficulties. Challenging issues such as poverty, diseases, cultural erosion, illiteracy, conflict, prostitution, insecurity, and hunger are high on the soil of Africa. Pre-and post-colonial periods are major contributory factors to these complications. For example, Owusu et al (2019) reported that the dominance of the coloniser's language, double standard, and abuse of power as some of the problems that pre-and post-colonialism transported to the soils of Africa. However, some of these tragic situations emanate from some cultural values of Africans and the quest for greener pastures. Thus, there is a foundation for cultural dimensions in modern tragedy (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013 a, b; Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2019). Most African cultures would always frown on a lot of issues. Prostitution is one issue that most African cultures disapprove of. However, there are times some entities are torn between making a living and observing the norms of their cultural beliefs, especially if they are outside the context of their culture. This is the situation of the African woman as depicted in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. Although most of the female characters in the text are from rich African backgrounds, we witness how they are

coerced into prostitution for one reason or the other. Mara, Vivian, Comfort, and Kaye are characters Darko uses to depict the woes of some African women in the diaspora who engage in prostitution owing to factors like compulsion, initiation, naivety, and the struggle to make a living outside one's cultural context. On the other hand, Darko uses some of the male characters (i.e., Akobi, Osey, Pompey, and Oves) to portray strictness, domestic violence, sex exploitation, insensitivity, the myth of living abroad, and commitment to business no matter the consequences. Darko's novel, thus, has several themes that are embedded with great lessons.

References

- Adade-Yeboah, A. and Owusu, E. (2013b). The tragic hero of the modern period – the African concept. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 3(4), 37-45
doi:10.5539/ells.v3n4p37
- Adade-Yeboah, A. and Owusu, E. (2013a). The tragic hero of the modern period – the European concept. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 6(3), 33-38
doi:10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130603.5263.
- Adade-Yeboah, A and Owusu, E. (2019). The Tragic Hero of the Modern Period: A Comparative Study of the African and the European Concepts. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 2(7), 157-162.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3513788>
- Chattopadhyay, M., Bandyopadhyay, S. & Duttagupta, C. (1994). Biosocial factors influencing women to become prostitutes in India. *Soc. Biol.*, 41, 252-259.
- Cusick, L., Kinnell, H., Brooks-Gordon, B., & Campbell, R. (2009). Wild guesses and conflated meanings? Estimating the size of the sex worker population in Britain. *Critical Social Policy*, 29(4), 703–719. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018309341906>.
- Darko, A. (1995). *Beyond the Horizon*. University of Michigan: Heinemann African Writers Series
- Dickson, S. (2004). *Sex in the City: Mapping Commercial Sex across London*. London: The POPPY Project. Statute Law of Zimbabwe Cap. 9:23 (2005) (penalizing the acts of soliciting, maintaining a brothel or otherwise living off the proceeds of prostitution, procuring for the purpose of prostitution). A copy of this newly enacted codification of Zimbabwe's positive criminal law can be found in [Zimbabwe] *Government Gazette*, June 3, 2005.
- Greenwald, H. (1967). Book Reviews: Prostitution and Morality, Harry Benjamin, M.D., and R. E. L. Masters. Pp. x, 495. New York, Julian Press, 1964. *Crime & Delinquency*, 13(3), 468–470. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001112876701300317>
- Harcourt, C. and Donovan, B. (2005). The many faces of sex work. *Sex Transm Infect*, 81(3), 201-206. doi: 10.1136/sti.2004.012468
- Hong, Y. & Li, X. (2008). Behavioral studies of female sex workers in China: A literature review and recommendation for future research. *AIDS Behav.*, 12(4), 623-636.

- May, T., Harocopos, A. and Hough, M. (2000). *For Love or Money: Pimps and the management of sex work*. London: Home Office – Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. Nepal. *Gender and Development*, 8(2), 74-79.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (2005). *Indigenous and Contemporary Gender Concepts and Issues in Africa: Implications for Nigeria's development*. Lagos, Benin, Ibadan, Jos, Oxford, Zaria: Malthouse Limited P.
- O'Neill, M. (2001). Making Sense of Prostitution, Joanna Phoenix, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, xi 200 pp. *Work, Employment and Society*, 15(1), 195-212. doi:10.1017/S0950017001290102
- Owusu, E., Adade-Yeboah, A. and Appiah, P. (2019). Perceptions of Some Africans about Post-Colonialism as Depicted in Jomo Kenyatta's "*The Gentlemen of the Jungle*". *Open Access Library Journal*, 6, 1-8. doi: [10.4236/oalib.1105677](https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1105677).
- Pheterson, G. (1996). *The Prostitution Prism*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Roberts, R., Sanders, T., Myers, E. and Smith, D. (2010). Participation in sex work: students' views. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*. 10(2), 145-156.
- Scambler, G. (2007). Sex Work Stigma: Opportunist Migrants in London. *Sociology*, 41(6), 1079–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038507082316>
- Shaver, F. M. (1988). A critique of the feminist charges against prostitution. *Atlantis*, 14(1), 52-89.
- Taylor, I. & Jamieson, R. (1999). Sex trafficking and the mainstream of market culture. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 32(3), 257-278. UK Network of Sex Work Projects [UK NSWP] (2008b) *Working with Sex Workers: Exiting. Good practice guidance*. London: UK NSWP. UN (1993) General Assembly A/RES/48/104.
- Wawer, M. J., Podhisita, C., Kanungasukkasem, U., Pramualratana, A. & McNamara, R. (1996). Origins and working conditions of female sex workers in urban Thailand: Consequences of social context for HIV transmission. *Soc. Sci. Med.*, 42(3), 453-462
- Wilcox, A. and Christmann, K. (2006). *Sex for Sale – Qualitative Study of Male Sex Workers: Report to Community Safety/SWEET Project Kirklees Safer Communities Service*. Huddersfield: Applied Criminology Centre - University of Huddersfield.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

