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Dans un environnement marqué par la croissance, sans cesse, des productions scientifiques, la diffusion et la promotion des acquis de la recherche deviennent un impératif pour les acteurs du monde scientifique. Perçues comme un patrimoine, un héritage à léguer aux générations futures, les productions scientifiques doivent briser les barrières et les frontières afin d'être facilement accessibles à tous.

Ainsi, s'inscrivant dans la dynamique du temps et de l'espace, la revue « **AKIRI** » se présente comme un outil de promotion et de diffusion des résultats des recherches des enseignants-chercheurs et chercheurs des universités et de centres de recherches de Côte d'Ivoire et d'ailleurs. Ce faisant, elle permettra aux enseignants-chercheurs et chercheurs de s'ouvrir davantage sur le monde extérieur à travers la diffusion de leurs productions intellectuelles et scientifiques.

AKIRI est une revue à parution trimestrielle de l'Unité de Formation et de Recherches (UFR) : Communication, Milieu et Société (CMS) de l'Université Alassane Ouattara. Elle publie les articles dans le domaine des Sciences humaines et sociales, Lettres, Langues et Civilisations. Sans toutefois être fermée, cette revue privilégie les contributions originales et pertinentes. Les textes doivent tenir compte de l'évolution des disciplines couvertes et respecter la ligne éditoriale de la revue. Ils doivent en outre être originaux et n'avoir pas fait l'objet d'une acceptation pour publication dans une autre revue à comité de lecture.

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La revue **AKIRI** n'accepte que des articles inédits et originaux dans diverses langues notamment en allemand, en anglais, en espagnol et en Français. Le manuscrit est remis à deux instructeurs, choisis en fonction de leurs compétences dans la discipline. Le secrétariat de la rédaction communique aux auteurs les observations formulées par le comité de lecture ainsi qu'une copie du rapport, si cela est nécessaire. Dans le cas où la publication de l'article est acceptée avec révisions, l'auteur dispose alors d'un délai raisonnable pour remettre la version définitive de son texte au secrétariat de la revue

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Social Deprivation: Case of Prostitution in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*

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Abstract

In a society of moral collapse where the traditional foundations are overthrown, there is no more reference mark and each one goes his own way. A lot of drifting emerges from all parts and tend to become the perfect norm to adopt. In this respect, prostitution gradually set up as a means for facing material and financial issues. Ladies hardly hide their liking and even practice of prostitution; more and more it is a pride to be a "traveling brothel" without any care of the popular opinion. That tendency spread over post-colonial Ghana and was one of the thorny topics examined by Amma Darko in *The Housemaid*. Using sociocriticism as a theoretical bearing, the paper thoroughly analyses the novel and depicts prostitution with its ephemeral advantages and dreadful consequences, to lead the new generation to much enthusiasm for work and a strong affection for traditional African values.

Key words: disease, fame, money, pregnancy, prostitution.

La déprivation sociale : Le cas de la prostitution dans *The Housemaid* d'Amma Darko

Résumé

Dans une société en pleine déconfiture moral où les fondements traditionnels sont bouleversés, il n'y a plus de repère et chacun suit son chemin. De nombreuses dérives émergent de toutes parts et tendent à devenir la norme parfaite à adopter. À cet égard, la prostitution s'est progressivement imposée comme un moyen pour subvenir aux problèmes matériels et financiers. Les jeunes dames ne cachent guère leur attrait et même leur pratique de la prostitution ; c'est de plus en plus une fierté d'être reconnue comme tel sans que l'on se soucie de l'opinion populaire. Cette tendance s'est répandue dans le Ghana postindépendance et a été l'un des sujets épineux examinés par Amma Darko dans **The Housemaid**. En utilisant la sociocritique comme fondement théorique, l'article analyse le roman de fond en comble et dépeint la prostitution avec ses avantages éphémères et conséquences néfastes, afin d'encourager la nouvelle génération à un intérêt poussé pour le travail et une forte bienveillance pour les valeurs traditionnelles africaines.

Mots clés : argent, célébrité, grossesse, maladie, prostitution.

Introduction

Defined as the act of having sexual relations in exchange for payment (Y. Charpenel, 2016:6), prostitution is a social problem responsible of moral degradation and the spread of several diseases. It causes unrest and disrupts social life because it is similar to an evil which rots our current society. It is without any shame that a growing number of young people devote themselves to that practice for various motivations. Unfortunately, the spread of this phenomenon achieves to denature horribly the aspect of traditional African society. Darko looked into this issue in *The Housemaid* to remind people about some principles and values specific to Africa. To that extent, why does prostitution shape up? How does it affect human dignity? what are the lived effects of prostitution within society?

Using sociocriticism for “it brings out the relations existing between the structures of literary work and the structures of the society in which this work is deeply rooted, (Obou, 2023:128)”, the paper is structured around four parts. Firstly, the potential justification of prostitution, then the dehumanizing aspect of prostitution. Furthermore, the consequences of such practice and finally, some pieces of advices to avoid that decadence.

1. Prostitution: an (in)justifiable act

Through *The Housemaid*, many motivations lead young girls to devote themselves to prostitution. At first, the difficulties of life coupled with food insecurity and a dark future limit the possibilities of ladies to experience an average life standard. Thus, those ladies believe rightly or not they should bargain their bodies for immediate advantages that are existential for them. One of those reasons is the need of money to solve emergencies. Tika did not have any choice that submit herself to the will of circumstantial saviour during a predicament as it is written:

When it came to sex, Nsorhwe had been with Tika only twice. Yes, he had visited the house several times, but it took a couple of such visits before Tika even deemed it useful to allow him into her bed. She needed an overdraft from his bank, and he was the man who could allow it to happen. So she shut her mind to his unsightly looks and imagined him to be someone else. Even so, when it was over, she rushed to the bathroom and threw up (A. Darko, 1998:82).

The prostitute's attitude of Tika is justified by the need of money for a special purpose. After some attempts to earn money for solving an urgent problem, the fruitless efforts can lead people to be fearless of any choice. Consequently, those people can commit immoral acts only to face a punctual situation. They are able to scarify their honour and principles as long as they look pleasant in their living environment. It is the case of Tika who went along with a man she



displeased truly for that person was plenty of money. She strove to have sex in exchange of cash. That amount of money was considered very important to slope Tika's appreciation of her benefactor. For money, prostitutes do the unthinkable by trying to convince their consciousness about the necessity of their action.

Then, the recklessness and thoughtlessness of care of her body is due to her lack of education since Tika did not go forward as school is concerned. She dropped out school earlier and did not learn a particular job either. Therefore, Tika is "The mother of the child works as a housemaid in the urban household of Tika, a woman who came to the city in her youth and who finds out that without education the quickest means of getting ahead in life is to go to bed with wealthy men, (J. Nsiah & C. Marfo,2011:363)" Tika does not have neither degree nor training to care about herself. She does not have any service to offer or an item to sell. In fact, financial independence does not come at random; it is a delicious fruit from a tough and well-prepared work as Bernar Dadié mentioned: "*Vous ne travaillez pas, vous n'avez pas le droit de manger*" (B. Klain,2018:82). In other words, earning money is a process of which work is the basis. Hard work according to a serious plan would lead to need's shelter. But Tika's idleness can explain her appetency for prostitution for her upbringing was imbalanced. It is a non-neglecting aspect in the spread of prostitution phenomenon. When a parent does not have enough authority to conduct his offspring in an honourable way, children can go astray to the detriment of the society. The typical example of that situation is from Mami Korkor 's family as noticed below:

Mamy Korkor was at a loss. Her daughter was growing up on the wrong side of the tracks, she knew. But how could she change things? She had to hawk fish from dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and her four children. They all depended on her. Not a pesewa came from their father (A. Darko, 1998:11).

The single parent upbringing of children is at their disadvantage. In fact, the single parent cannot have a tough authority to channel children's whims and even control thoroughly their behaviour. This parent is mostly busy looking for daily bread for them. He plays between chores and home. Its occupation favours children to stroll everywhere, but try to satisfy the desire of teenage. Those children prove to be vulnerable in so far as they are regularly out in quest of a need to fill in the efforts of the single parent and the absence of their father is a shortcoming in their growth. They cannot benefit from his crucial piece of advices, very necessary in this devaluing world. Unfortunately, Tika (the main character) paid the price for this incomplete upbringing when she succumbed to a strong blackmail in exchange of sexual relationship as the author stipulates in the following extract:



Some customs officers accepted cash bribes in exchange for reduced tariffs, but this did not apply to Samuel, the chief customs officer at the border, when the businesswoman involved happened to be young and pretty. He turned down Tika's cash offer and indicated lewdly that what he wanted from her was sex. She needed his help, so she consented (A. Darko, 1998:23).

We realize that authority's abuse upon gentle sex strongly subjugate women. Despite countless efforts to get out independence and get into life under better omen, indecent proposals are offered to them. The administration system does not allow them other possibilities but to go through. If not, these women would be crushed. In such circumstances, gentle sex cannot do otherwise, but do their best to save and preserve their money source. As a result, they trample their own principles for the happiness of their harassers. This is the dark side of business women are regularly confronted with. At last, those women induct this act as normal and a part of a non-writing contract necessary to avoid troubles. It turns out that prostitution is either wanted or imposed for the woes and reification of unskilled ladies.

2. Prostitution: a dehumanizing practice

Life's circumstances led Tika and others to adopt prostitution as a means of survival. Their lack of skill for a particular field and their laziness did not provide them any opportunity that to beg for help and run away in front of difficulties. Thus, their body turns into a seductive weapon to transform challenges in their advantages and be well ahead of any contender. Tika moved that way when she attempted trade business to be sheltered from need. Such opinion is corroborated in this sequence of the corpus as follows:

Tika needed no further insults. She gave up Owuraku and settled on four useful 'steady' lovers. Samuel, the son of an apostolic pastor, was her customs officer on the Ghana-Togo border. Riad, the half-caste, was a shop owner with several outlets. And through Eric, the struggling musician, she remained on the favoured customers list of the commercial bank headed by his older brother. But it was Mr Attui, the factory owner, who helped her get good credit rates on the goods she bought, who proved to be one error (A. Darko, 1998:25).

Unfortunately, prostitution leads to get numerous and different partners. Each of them is a necessity due to his inflows in the life of the prostitute because having many partners allows to get precious helps urgently. Each partner is preciously used for a specific need. Those partners use their purchasing power and positions to maintain their 'prey' under permanent domination. Thus, the young prostitute cannot put any contradictory words, even in case of disagreement. Prostitution tarnishes prostitute's dignity who is at the disposal of proxies with the risk of sexually transmitted diseases. It is a risky work and "A relatively high rate of partner change suggests that sex workers will be more vulnerable to infection and, if infected, they may be more likely to transmit disease than individuals with fewer partners", (S. Day & H. Ward,



1997:161). It means prostitution is a double-edged with potential consequences for the actress and her “customers”. The prostitute is under the desideratum of each person able to pay the bill. So, the prostitute cannot oppose his viewpoint and make any proper decision facing money of customers. Money achieves to reify a person and submits her to all sexual fantasies. Such a dehumanization of the prostitute stigmatizes her where she lives and this really affects her personality as it is evidenced in this passage from the novel: “Fortunately teacher knew other people in the housing estate where Tika lived; she had arranged maids for two families nearby. And from these maids she learnt that the guys in the area had nicknamed Efia ‘Cheap Chop’” (A. Darko, 1998:56/57).

Being prostitute does not provide a good picture to the lady. As an ‘open door’ for everybody, she is disrespected in her whereabouts no matter her apparent comfortable living standards. Her life is known and scanned by the majority of city dwellers who have only contempt for her for some and laughingstock for others. Thus, the prostitute is not a pride for his generation and is mentioned typically to be identified easily. By calling Efia ‘Cheap Chop’, she symbolises a fountain where every single person can come to satisfy his libido cheaply. Such practice gets a very bad reputation to her. In this respect, “the stigmatization of prostitutes is due to two major factors: intrinsic immorality (prostitution is inherently immoral) and gender hierarchical factors” (B. Alabo, 2023:49). It implies that African society vehemently rejects prostitution for it does not match with African values and no reason can justify its acceptance. Beyond the prostitute herself, it is a popular revolt and social stigma which affect the prostitute family from top to bottom. The prostitute ‘s actions negatively reflect on her family and acquaintances as it is stated below:

Effia’s father hastily downed the rest of the drink in his glass...he had known Efia was pregnant, of course, but he couldn’t understand how the news had leaked out (...)

Effia’s little brother was hunting birds to roast for lunch with his friends, when one of them suddenly remarked, if your sister wanted to get pregnant, why did she go to the city? Who goes to the city to get pregnant? (...)

Effia’s mother was returning home from the farm when a friend called to her. (...) I can understand your pain. I feel it for you. (A. Darko, 1998:71)

The attitude of Efia did not have effects on her only, but to her complete family. Her reputation was broken, but also that of her family. In their immediate surroundings, Effia’s family members were identified through her action. People from every class started belittle the members of her family. So, her action does not only discredit her, but her whole family. Wherever they are, they are identified through Efia’s deeds. So, her reputation reverberates upon her relatives and unfortunately, they are a laughing stock of their neighbours. Her mother,



father and siblings hardly accept the indecent and pitiful gossip about their daughter. She appears far to be an example to follow. She becomes repugnant in her close environment and vulnerable to the vindictive judgement and actions. In short, this dishonourable practice and praise is the privilege of Effia and her family.

3. Prostitution and its ineffable impacts

Prostitution is spread in the society and became part of inhabitants 'habits. It less and less shocks them for they tend to legitimate it or at least are passive before such an immoral act. And yet, out of ephemeral pleasures and very limited advantages, prostitution causes very dangerous after effects upon the prostitute and the society. It silently gnaws the victims till to disrupt totally his life. Tika paid the price for prostitution through an unexpected pregnancy as it is quoted.

Then Tika got pregnant.
Whose was it?
She made some calculations and decided it must be Attui's.
I need money for an abortion, she told him.
(...)
But Tika did not reconsider. She ended the pregnancy (A. Darko, 1998:26/27).

By dint of committing her body to people, she became pregnant and prostitution indirectly led her to an undesirable pregnancy. In fact, the demands of some customers can be very tough like having sex without condoms and the prostitute can withstand to such a desire, but the reality is that most customers enjoy it without condoms to better feel pleasures. Therefore, there is a major risk of pregnancy with a non-identified partner. Prostitute cannot do otherwise, but riddle to accredit fatherhood to someone. It is clear that the majority of illegitimate children with poor bringing up are from prostitute acts. Those children are a threat for a peaceful society for they are stigmatised in every area they are. So, their coming out is not well prepared with people and their mother. Most of time, their mother is not ready to be baby sister for the baby can bring a halt to their subsidence activity. At that time, the single option is abortion, which is not a non-risky decision for prostitutes. Darko therefore writes:

And what is wrong with my daughter?
Com...complications?
What complications?
The nurse indicated his abdomen.
The abortion?
It hit the nurse like a bolt from the blue. You know about it ?
Sekyiwa smiled wryly.
Her womb also had to be removed because it was very badly infected (A. Darko, 1998:39);



Prostitution favours multiplication of abortion to help prostitute so they can continue their whore. Abortion would prevent them to care about a baby whereas they are moneyless and wish to preserve their body for cash flowing. Abortion is so the last resort in case of failure of contraceptives. Many prostitutes practise it to be at whorehouse and maintain their living standards. But Abortion can have unpredictable and inestimable drawbacks despite appropriate precautions. This is checking through the below assertion:

Abortion also has economic consequences in terms of direct cost for health systems and indirect cost for women, their families, and societies. Abortion impacts women's and families' budgets, since they must pay for the unsafe abortion, for some or all of the costs of treatment for complications, and for costs incurred by inability to perform normal economic and domestic activities for a period of time (G. Lerner, 2007).

It turns out that abortion harms the prostitute at many levels. It can damage her health and even in case of a succeeded abortion, she has to spend a lot of money to buy medicines to guarantee herself a good recovery. This implies that prostitutes are not far from cohabitation with certain diseases and an abrupt death. The following figures are to confirm this trend. "Sex workers are at considerable risk in this situation. More than 75% of female prostitutes in Kenya had STDs; and in Kinshasa, Zaire, 75% of 1233 female prostitutes presented with at least one sexually transmitted disease." (S. Day & H. Ward, 1997:162)

Prostitutes are exposed to many sexually transmitted diseases. Those diseases constitute the main cause of death in their field of activities. Thus, prostitutes are vulnerable and submitted to a dreadful corporal punishment since their bodies depreciates as time goes forward. Prostitutes are progressively rejected from the society for it is regularly shameful for them to go to hospital for consultation which can reveal the origin of their suffering. The luckiest of prostitute get pregnancy which ends which no fatherhood as clearly stated: "Who did Efiya say got her pregnant? The old lady asked. She said she slept with different men: the one she was nearly caught with, the building site labourer, the lotto forecaster at the station, and the dancer at ..." (A. Darko, 1998:74)

It means prostitution favours fatherless children for it is impossible for the mother to clearly identify the author of the pregnancy. She cannot assign her pregnancy fatherhood to a specific man and she is spoilt between different partners among whom she has to give someone responsibility of such a burden. It is almost a trauma for her and her foetus. Although his father is alive, the baby is an orphan in remission because of his mother's shameful attitude. No one would be enthused to recognize and accept him as a legitimate son for his mother was 'an open



door for many lovers'. So, prostitution affects not only prostitute, but also potential babies which are subjected to psychological wounds due to gossip about them.

4. Requalifying human body

Considering life's challenges and the heavy responsibilities to take care of them and even relatives, young people sometimes sink into despair. They believe to be alone to bear the burden of such hardship. When they do not perceive any outcome, they focus on their body to deconsecrate or at last commit suicide. As a man intended to:

Akua watched their backs disappear and thought about the story of the man who felt he could not continue to live such a poor life and decided he would be better off dead. So he went under a tree, strung up a rope, removed his clothes, climbed on a chunk of wood and placed the noose around his neck, ready to die. Just then, an even poorer, more wretched man came by, saw the clothes under the tree, knelt and prayed, thanking God for coming to his aid with such good clothes, and took them. The man in the tree, realising that his situation was not the worst, removed the noose from around his neck, covered his nakedness with leaves and headed back home with renewed hope (Darko, 1998:100).

In other words, there is always a solution in spite of the potential predicament. Prostitution and suicide are not solution to get out suffering. Prostitutes cannot justify their practices by the hardship of life for they are other people with more pitiful situation, but those people rise to attempt to change the trajectory of their life. Thus, the first attitude should be to get a new perception of their body. Young people should be brought up that prostitution is not morally and ethically good as the bellow sequence tends to admit:

Prostitution is a social problem because its presence in society frequently causes unrest and disrupts social life; in addition to being blamed for moral degradation, prostitution is also a major cause of the spread of several diseases (B. Alabo, 2023:46).

Prostitution is viewed on a reproof in the society. Such a practice really depreciates ladies and retrogrades them at the bottom in the society. In general, African people are pride and clung to their culture which reject prostitution no matter the motivations. In short, African society has not accepted and integrated prostitution yet. It is a moral decadence and depravation to be stigmatized as a prostitute. However, young ladies should rise and attempt to get out dependence and servitude through radical decisions because "Prostitution is a form of slavery and must be recognized as such", (C. Mgbako & A. Smithy, 2011: 1189). Prostitutes are not free of their movements and are submitted to the airiness and fantasies of customers which dehumanize them. That is why a mental revolution to change paradigms is necessary for "Prostitution is not part of our culture It is one of the things that came with civilization", (C. Mgbako & A. Smithy, 2011: 1191). It turns out that African people vehemently condemn prostitution and reject



it because it is a practice at the opposite of local values which does not value bodies. We need not lose sight that human body is sacred. It must not be a bargaining counter to solve financial problems. Ladies should be confident to themselves and even start to scratch to take up challenges. They must not neglect any opportunities or even menial works to attempt to achieve independence. Self-confidence and boldness may allow them to sell other competences and services instead of being narrowed to their body.

Conclusion

Prostitution went into different levels and affected almost the main society. It tends to destroy the essence of human dignity by belittling human being like an object. Apart of Ghana, it is a phenomenon which rots the black continent. The recurring life ordeals are more difficult for women who have not almost no choices to accept this indecent practice to survive in the jungle that is our current society. No matter their status (literate or illiterate) women are vulnerable in Africa and regularly victim of men's blackmails. If emancipation of women in all areas is a reality and they do not resort to their bodies to solve material and financial problems, less and less prostitution will be a topical issue.

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