



Research Article

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Literacy and the Girl-Child Empowerment for Sustainable Development: A Study of Amma Darko's *Faceless*

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Abstract

*This paper examines literacy as a veritable tool towards the empowerment of the girl-child that leads to sustainable development in the family in particular and the larger society. Literacy is the ability to read and write; formal education is the avenue through which this can be achieved. Education is an investment that when properly utilized can empower, liberate and embolden; on the other hand, the lack of education exposes one to exploitation, oppression, ignorance and poverty. Using Amma Darko's *Faceless*, this paper discovers that the girl-child who lacks education is exposed to the danger of poverty and prostitution, but through the intervention of a group of educated women in MUTE; hope and a bright future is given to the vulnerable girl-child. Applying the feminist theory that advocates for the freedom and self-assertion of the female gender from ignorance, oppression and exploitation; this paper concludes that the rehabilitation of the street girl-child by the literate women empowers her to be a source of livelihood for her family, thereby sustaining economic development and reducing petty crime rate in the society which is prevalent among the youths due to illiteracy.*

Keywords: *Literacy, Girl-Child, Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Feminism*

1. Introduction

Education is the bedrock for human development which eventually leads to the development of the society. Education is an investment in human beings, and the result of the investment is the contribution of the individual to the socio-economic development of the society. It creates awareness among the citizenry and this allows them to participate actively in the political, social, economic and democratic processes of their country. Ozidi & Canham (1975) note that "the common purpose of education is the transmission of accumulated wisdom, knowledge, and skills from one generation to another, and the preparation of the youth for future membership and participation in the life of the society, in its maintenance, growth and development"(191). In the same vein, Dauda (2001) argues that "education as a productive investment in human capital contributes to the socio-economic development of a nation"(30). Literacy is founded on the ability of one being able to read and write, this is achieved through the acquisition of some form of education. Etim & Jarigbe (2016) argue that "Fundamentally, literacy connotes an individual's ability to read and write"(86). Education which gives birth to literacy is geared towards sustainable development. Ogbeide (2016) argues that "Development can hardly take place without education

because the skills, competence and knowledge needed for such are through education”(136).

In Amma Darko's *Faceless*, the girl-child Fofu is empowered by a group of educated women who rehabilitate her from streetism to a meaningful lifestyle through a profession (catering) which will enable her contribute to the wellbeing of her family in particular and the development of the society in general. This is discussed using the feminist theory that advocates for the freedom of the female gender from oppression; and self assertion of the woman in all spheres of the society by fostering social positive change. Chukwuma (1994) defines feminism as “a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them a positive identity” (ix).

2. The Concept of Sustainable Development

Empowerment in all its ramifications is geared towards sustainable development; this is true because the empowered individual sustains the economic independence of the family and the society. “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (www.sd-commission.org.uk). In 2015, more than 190 world leaders who are committed to seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) met to help end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and fix climate change (<https://www.globalgiving.org/sdg>). The seventeen(17) Sustainable Development Goals are:

- No Poverty
- No Hunger
- Good Health
- Quality Education
- Gender Equality
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Renewable Energy
- Good Jobs and Economic Growth
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Reduced Inequalities
- Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Responsible Consumption
- Climate Action
- Life below Water
- Life on Land
- Peace and Justice
- Partnerships for the Goals

The goals which apply to the ideology of this paper are Goals No.1, 2, 3 and 4. These would be applied in the course of the analysis.

3. Literacy for Girl-Child Empowerment in *Faceless*

The ability to acquire education opens ample opportunities for the development of the individual socially, economically and politically. Education is an investment in human development, and lack of it exposes one to depravity, subservience, dependence and inferiority. The education and empowerment of the girl-child is paramount to the overall development of the society. Kabir (2016) notes that “educating girls will have a multiplier effect on the economy and society at large leading to sustainable development”(287). The education of the parents or guardian goes a long way to determine the level of literacy of the children. Anyachonkeya & Anyachonkeya (2012) argue that:

“A literate family will be an asset in raising literate children. The literate family will not hesitate to give its members the much desired literacy empowerment with which to kill the blight of disease, ignorance, poverty and hopelessness and superstition” (184).

Dina, the founder of MUTE, a non-governmental organization that is into documentation and information build up, is able to establish the organization because she is educated. MUTE is made up of women who have in one way or the other experienced betrayal, abandonment and lack of care from men in particular and the society at large. By divine arrangement, one of her members, Kabria, encounters a street girl-child in an unfortunate situation whose lack of education and parental care pushes her to the streets. Kabria is robbed by Fofu who disguises herself as a boy at the market; she saves her from being mobbed by the angry crowd. Kabria feigns knowing "him" because she reckons that Fofu is pushed to the streets because of lack of education and adequate parental care. In her internal monologue, she reasons:

But in the midst of it a ray of reasoning hit Kabria. If anything happened to the boy, it would be on her conscience. Time was flying. He could have been her son. He looked to be about Obea's age. He should have been in the classroom learning. (70)

Through Kabria's encounter with Fofu, MUTE takes her case up and also conducts a research into what pushes children to street life. Kabria who encountered Fofu first hand on the street suggests that "Ultimately, her rehabilitation. While simultaneously getting to know what pushes her onto the streets" (106). Through Kabria's suggestion, MUTE rehabilitates Fofu for a better life. Dina, the founder of MUTE takes her home and gives her a roof over her head, she tells her colleagues

Eventually, we will have to talk with reputable organizations like 'Children-In-Need' or 'Street-Girl-Aid'. But before we release her, we must be certain she will be safe. We can do our bit by adopting and sponsoring her training and all, but we must tie up all the loose ends first. (123-124)

MUTE at this point becomes the foster parent of Fofu, having known the value of education, it is their desire to equip her with literacy empowerment that will reduce poverty and hopelessness in her family. Fofu willingly accepts the offer and decides to go into catering school. She said excitedly "I like catering" (207). MUTE's decision to rehabilitate Fofu and take her out of the street is a form of education which is geared towards sustainable development. Onwuka (2008) notes that:

It has to be emphasized that education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge or cognitive enrichment. It involves the training of the mind in morals and in acts that will make an individual socially efficient. Socially efficient individuals should be able to use their head, heart and hands not only for themselves, but also for the well-being of their society. Such form of education must serve as an instrument for raising society to a higher moral level. (55)

MUTE's basic interest is to rehabilitate and empower Fofu, in addition to investigating what or who killed Baby T, her elder sister. They intend to take her out of the street and unite her with her family which will foster familial love, affinity, growth and development of the family and the society at large. This is imperative because after having seen the benefits of leaving the streets, she will be an ambassador for MUTE as she will be in a better position to convince her friends to also leave the streets. Dina tells her "Probably. But maybe after you have settled into your new life, you can convince her to also leave the streets"(206).

MUTE's plans for Fofu is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal No. 1 which is to end poverty, for it has been observed that "more than one billion people still live on less than \$1.25/day". The aim is to "eradicate extreme poverty". One of the approaches to eradicate poverty is through vocational trade skills training. Catering which Fofu chooses amongst other vocational training skills is an aspect of education and empowerment. MUTE rehabilitates Fofu and takes her out of the streets, thereby giving her a new lease of life.

In her effort to empower Fofu and investigate into what killed Baby T, MUTE collaborates with the media, because the press has a significant role to play in the fight against ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and voicelessness. Rothman (2000) notes that "By virtue of their growing accessibility and increasingly interactive nature, mass media in all its forms assumes an increasing influence on the construction of a person's reality" (354). MUTE collaborates with Harvest FM station through its presenter Sylv Po to unravel the mystery behind Baby T's death. Poison, the street lord who is an accomplice in the saga feels threatened, and as a ploy to stop them, he sends

a feaces parcel to MUTE.

To Poison, MUTE was the cause of most of his headaches about the increasing public interest in Baby T's death. They brought it to the attention of the media through Sylv Po, and the shit parcel was a message to them not to meddle in other people's business. (200)

Apart from rehabilitating Fofu, it is also the wish of MUTE that she lives a healthy life, after having been exposed to unprotected active sex life on the street. They achieve this by ensuring that she goes for a comprehensive check-up. "Fofu, you are expected to go for a comprehensive check-up at the Korle-Bu Hospital" (207). This is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal No. 3 which is to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages" for it has been discovered that:

We live in the most advanced age of science and medicine; yet preventable disease, untreated drug and alcohol abuse, preventable birth defects, and avoidable traffic and industrial accidents still kill millions of people each year. Where a person lives or how much money she has should never keep her from receiving the medical attention she needs. Let's make sure that every person, child or adult, gets the resources they need to live a long and healthy life. (www.globalgiving.org.sdg)

4. Lack of Literacy and its Negative Effects

In *Face/less*, Kabria, the working class wife and mother of three children is underpaid because she lacks a higher education like her husband, Adade. The luxuries of life she desires like driving a good car eludes her because she cannot afford it. She is dependent on her husband who torments her due to her lack; even before he agrees to spray the old car which she calls 'creamy', after much embarrassment and humiliation. She vents her anger on her husband thus:

Don't get sarcastic with me. Kabria retorted, if I had had the time to study further like you did, I would also have been reaping the benefits today in terms of a better salary. But I was busy making babies then. Remember? (39).

Lack of education exposes a woman to social ridicule, molestation and abandonment. Maa Tsuru's lack of education exposes her to all kinds of exploitation by different men. They impregnate her without proper marriage, after which they abandon her. She is encumbered with many children that she cannot cater for; she therefore drives them to the streets for menial jobs, begging, stealing and prostitution. Baby T is the unfortunate girl-child who is sold to prostitution by her mother, Maa Tsuru to Maami Broni, the commercial sex merchant. Maami Broni remits peanuts from Baby T's sweat to her mother. Fofu flashed her mind back to when Baby T was forcefully sold to prostitution thus:

In her mind's eye, all she saw was a recollection of the last time she ever laid eyes on her sister. Baby T's reddish and swollen eyes from too much crying, with her belongings tied up in an old headscarf and held loosely in her right hand as she followed Maami Broni out of the compound house. (48)

Maa Tsuru's helplessness, docility, poverty and lack of a means of livelihood to cater for her children compel her to send them to the streets. She could not feed them, and hunger was staring them in the face. The employers of Baby T whom she has sold to prostitution torment her for her mistakes, thereby caging her into voicelessness. Illiteracy and poverty silence her and make her a public ridicule; she is despised in the compound she lives. She narrates her experiences thus:

Do you know what Poison told me to the face? That Baby T ceased to be my daughter the day I sold her to the streets. I sold her to the streets? I sold my own daughter to the streets? Oh God! (50)

She regrets her actions, but it was too late because Baby T is already dead. Hunger is one of the wars Sustainable Development Goal is out to fight. Goal No.2 is to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. It aims to end "hunger by 2030 through advancing sustainable agriculture and achieving food security". Hunger drives children from poor homes to the streets in a bid to find food to eat. Many of them survive through prostitution, and

in the process, they are exposed to HIV/AIDS, because they are too young to know the dangers of unprotected sex. The author illuminates the naivety of the children thus:

During a recent survey we conducted for a programme, all the girls we talked to out there were already very sexually active. And we also established that, for many of them, rape was their first sexual experience. And I am talking about girls as young as seven. Many were child prostitutes. They had no idea at all about the extent of self-damage to themselves. Sex to them was just a convenient means of survival. Many were roaming about, oblivious of whether or not they were HIV positive, or....(56)

Maa Tsuru as a girl-child was equally deceived, manipulated, abused, used and abandoned by men whom she fell in love with, because she lacks education. Illiteracy makes her dependent on the protection of men. This researcher has argued elsewhere that "Illiteracy also contributed to the educational deprivation of the girl-child" (158). This is because illiterate parents are deceived and their daughters are taken away from them by traffickers with the promise of training them in the city, but the reverse is the case as these young girls are pushed into prostitution as soon as they arrive the city. These are all considered as sexual violence against the girl-child. Etuk (2003) argues that:

These forms of violence against women that fall under sexual forms of violence against women include rape, sexual harassment, as well as subtle practices as women trafficking, and forced prostitution. Rape and sexual harassment appear to be very common, although women trafficking and forced prostitution have since the dawn of the twenty-first century been on the increase. (12)

Maami Broni is a woman who connives with Poison the street lord to recruit unsuspecting young girls into prostitution. Egbung (2011) argues that:

Darko, in Faceless, clearly shows the effect of streetism on the society and the extent of corruption and decadence in the society. She tackles a society's neglect of its future leaders, the irresponsibility of fathers, the importance of the media in solving problems and the importance of determination in our lives. (7)

Poison harasses the young girls as he pleases by collecting their money, bullying, raping and sometimes killing them. He collaborates with Maami Broni to exploit Baby T and other girls whom poverty and lack of education have pushed to the streets. As the street lord, they work for him, the street becomes his business empire and whoever works on the street becomes his staff. That explains his reaction when MUTE and Sylv Po confront him over the death of Baby T, he explodes: Poison mellowed. I did beat the girl up, but I did not kill her! He repeated. Why would I kill a girl who was making lots of money for me? Maami Broni would bear me out. You can talk to her if you like. I did beat her up but I left her crying. Not dead. She wouldn't be crying if she was dead, would she? (202).

Lack of education exposes the girl-child to so many dangers. Fofu drops out of school because of lack of money, as the mother who has been abandoned by her husband could not afford to buy school books and school uniforms for her and her sister. In a bid to fight hunger, she resorts to begging which eventually translates to street life, stealing, prostitution and drug abuse. She narrates her experiences to MUTE thus:

There was no money. Mother couldn't afford the uniforms and the exercise books....And no food. That was more pressing, she went on. When there is no food, you don't wait to be asked by anyone to go out and beg. Hunger is a foe and it is overpowering. When it pushes you, you go. It was the same with Baby T. (129)

Illiteracy exposes them to poverty and exploitation by different men who are agents of patriarchal domination. Kwei abandons Maa Tsuru after four children to suffer in penury. Kpakpo manipulates Maa Tsuru because he leverages on the purported curse she is associated with to deceive her. Onko rapes Baby T because he is privy to the fact that Kpakpo had fingered her before. Onko shuts Maa Tsuru up by bribing her not to make a case against him. The attainment of education for all by 2030 is one of the goals of Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 which states

that:

Full access to quality education is the first step to achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, gender equality and women's empowerment. Let's make the sound investment in quality education by ensuring that primary and secondary schools are free for every child by 2030. (www.globalgiving.org/sdg)

5. Aspects of Style

The title of the text is symbolic as Baby T, the victim of sexual and physical oppression, exploitation and subsequent death is disfigured by the accomplices. Her facelessness makes her not to have an identity and personality because, after all, she belongs to the streets. A street girl is owned by the street and whatever happens to her is not any one's business. "The facial mutilations were to confuse identification. That way, she could pass for a *kayayoo* from the north. The shaven hairs were to lend weight to the theory of her death being punishment for adultery" (230). The street child is a faceless child, without an identity or personality, no family, no relation. That is why MUTE rehabilitates Fofo and takes her out of the streets and unites her with her family.

Another aspect of style is irony. It is an ironical twist that MUTE, a non-governmental organization whose name represents silence, is the same group that champions the rehabilitation and empowerment of the girl-child and takes her away from the street. Their impact is felt and appreciated by well-meaning individuals who commend them as attested to by Odarley, Fofo's friend. "Everybody is talking about you and this organization"(209). Egbung (2011) notes that:

It is ironical that the non-governmental organization which has MUTE as its name, and not an acronym, but silence, turns out to be the organization that speaks loudest in the search for the killers of Baby T....MUTE, therefore, becomes the voice for the voiceless (Maa Tsuru, Baby T and Fofo) and exposes the circumstances that led to the death of Baby T(15-16).

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the positive impact of literacy and the negative effects of lack of it; it has done so using Amma Darko's *Faceless*. In the text, MUTE the organization that represents literacy makes positive impact in the life of Fofo in particular, and in the society in general. If MUTE is able to empower all the street children, the society will be the better for it, as there would be no more street children who indulge in petty stealing.

Fofo's rehabilitation and empowerment gives her a sense of belonging as she bounces back to normal life again. She is no more the street child who lived in fear of the street lord who brutalizes her at will.

Fofo by then had reported to the organization to begin her rehabilitation. Her test results for Korle-Bu were still not in, but she knew that MUTE would be there for her. That was consoling. She could also mourn her sister openly. That felt good. (229)

Fofo now becomes an individual who can contribute meaningfully to the development of her society because she has been educated and empowered. Egbung & Okereke (2009) argue that:

"Education is the bedrock for human development of the society. It creates awareness among the citizenry and this allows them to participate actively in the political and democratic process of their country". (48)

Fofo's empowerment in the catering business will eventually make her an active contributor to the economic development of her family in particular and the society at large thereby being an agent for sustainable development.

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