

The Phenomenon of Street Children in Amma Darko's *Faceless*

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Abstract

One of the main issues of African countries after the period of democratization in 90s is the development of big cities which leads to street-involved children. Through this paper, I propose to conduct an analysis of (1) the strategies implemented so far by Amma Darko in her fiction to emphasize and draw attention on that serious (2) and growing phenomenon through her characters Fofo, Odarley, Baby T. She then gives way to her imagination by (3) suggesting means such as the alternative library to strengthen monitoring and caring centers of children in the intervention of Accra and its suburb areas.

Keywords: street-child, youth, monitoring, caring centers.

Introduction

After the period of independence, African countries are involved in a series of cross-cutting social issues, exacerbated by their status of underdevelopment. Thus, poverty and its consequences marked a very significant footprint in people's lives. They are therefore faced with a situation that inexorably leads to the degradation of family and social structure. All African communities like that of the developing countries are in difficult socio-economic conditions that accentuates the degradation of morals, family values and social and traditional structures. All this has implications in the education of children, and consequently in their future.

It is concerned in particular with evidence of what are perceived as escalating diminutions and disruptions in parental care in postcolonial big cities, processes which have profound implications for infants, children and human development and its sustainability. Indeed they are critical for African future development among youth.

Through this paper, I propose to conduct an analysis of the strategies implemented so far by Amma Darko in her fiction to emphasize and draw attention on that serious and growing phenomenon, and to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the care of children.

Lot of materials and papers are now being written on Amma Darko. Then I will not recall Amma Darko's origin, writing and schooling history. I will directly tackle the issue which leads me to this writing.

Anyidoho considers that,

The phenomenon of street children has become one of the most widely discussed social tragedies of our time. We are witness to a deluge of talk about the plight of these children, from

newspaper articles, to radio talk shows, television documentaries and elegant academic discussions. There are countless NGO's supposedly working for the interests of street children. Many well-funded, well attended workshops and conferences have been convened on the subjects. Even Government claims to be doing its very best to tackle the problem. And yet, in spite of all these well-publicized efforts, the problem not only persists but also seems to be getting even more intractable."⁵³

I then consider as "street child" any minor, urban resident, aged under 18, who spends all his time on the streets, working or not, and does not maintain relations with his parents, guardian or person responsible for his care or protection. Amma Darko's presentation of a street-child is by this way:

She chose to spend the night on the old cardboard laid out in front of the provision store at the Agbogloshie market place because it was a Sunday. It had nothing to do with Sunday being a church going day. The reason was simply that if she hadn't, she would have stood the risk of losing her newly acquired job of washing carrots at the vegetables wholesale market. Fofu would have spent the Sunday night into Monday dawn with her friends across the road at the squatters enclave of Sodom and Gomorrah watching adult films her fourteen years required her to stay away from, and drinking directly from bottles of *akpeteshie*⁵⁴, or at best, some slightly milder locally produced gin.⁵⁵

In *Faceless*, Darko gives us the precision that these street-children are "not necessarily orphans and have one or both parents living right here in Accra. Why should somebody living right here in Accra and under a secure roof, let go of her or his child on the streets?"⁵⁶.

This question of Amma Darko is meant for the society. What can happen to people who are still living so that they decide to let go of their children to streets? This highlights the degree of delinquency of the African society after the colonial period. Parents do not know any more their natural role of child protection.

By the turn of the millennium, the phenomenon takes growing proportions. As a matter of fact, older children as well as infants in some neighbourhoods all over the continent clearly become totally "street-addict" because of their unsatisfactory and tragic situation where even survival is doubtful.

Agbogloshie⁵⁷ is called Sodom and Gomorrah⁵⁸ and Darko makes one of her characters wonder if "*Agbo-gbloshie should one day be swept clean and the gutters desilted, and the rubbish mounds cleared, whether the regulars there wouldn't all catch catarrh.*"⁵⁹

With these lines, I take the position that the ills in African society are being purged and perhaps healed through the knowing of the following causes. Also, in the other lines, I explore the interplay between consequences and the ways out proposed by the author.

⁵³ Anyidoho, K. An introductory essay, p 19

⁵⁴ Local produced gin from palm tree.

⁵⁵ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p1

⁵⁶ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 50

⁵⁷ Agbogloshie is a suburb that really exists in the very center of Accra. I happened to visit it in April 2012.

⁵⁸ Referring to the biblical city which the Lord was obliged to destroy in Genesis 19 because of its growing and unforgivable sins.

⁵⁹ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 59

I. Causes of street-children phenomenon

Many causes lead parents all over the world to decide insidiously or overtly to send their children to the streets. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the following points are the roots causes of the phenomenon:

- Poverty
- Family disintegration and lack in children's care
- Illiteracy and unemployment of parents
- Rapid urbanization and Population explosion
- Insufficiency of institutions to take care of children when they drop out of schools.

Then the issue of street-involved children has its foundation in the remote colonial system developed by Great Britain in Ghana and in other formerly British colonies. That is:

The British colonies were often subdivided into provinces headed by provincial commissioners or residents, and then into districts headed by district officers or district commissioners. Laws and policies on taxation, public works, forced labor, mining, agricultural production, and other matters were made in London or in the colonial capital and then passed down to the lower administrative levels for enforcement.⁶⁰

At the provincial and district levels the British established the system of local administration popularly known as indirect rule. This system operated in alliance with preexisting political leaderships and institutions.... Instead, it developed the perverse view that the colonized should pay for their colonial domination. Hence, the choice of indirect rule.⁶¹

At the point below, I explore one of the root causes of the phenomenon.

1.1. Poverty

In *Faceless*, poverty is something one can see by one's eyes and touch with one's fingers. It is something concrete, touchable, physical and material.

In *Faceless*, Amma Darko presents through simple words what is the compound yard of poor people where Fofu, if she did not decide to leave for the streets of Accra, should be living. Darko describes then a situation which is common to any Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) where poverty is present and touchable:

Just a few years back, and Fofu could have been one of the numerous screaming children, scrambling with the sheep and goats and chickens for space to play and exist in the common compound. Fofu could have been the girl in the tattered brown underpants with the diseases red hair and a protruding stomach, carried on legs that were as thin as two dried sticks. Or the other in the flour sac underpant with a body ravaged by rashes and whose nose seemed to never stop running. Maa Tsuru's family home was a home of many faces.⁶²

⁶⁰Weriebor, Ehiedu E. G. "The Psychology of Colonialism." In *The End of Colonial Rule: Nationalism and Decolonization*, vol. 4 of *Africa*, ed. Toyin Falola. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002. www.wikipedia.com

⁶¹Oyebade, Adebayo. "Colonial Political Systems." In *Colonial Africa, 1885-1939*, vol. 3 of *Africa*, ed. Toyin Falola. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002. www.wikipedia.com

⁶²Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 17

Darko wants the reader to recognize the active and evident poverty of people like Maa Tsuru that leads them to urge their children out to the streets. She portrays the victim of this sado-masochistic system in pain: “*Maa Tsuru broke down. She began to cry again. Don’t talk to me like that, Fofu, she sniffed, “Just because I made a lot of mistakes in life and I am poor doesn’t make me less your mother. So don’t talk to me that way.”*”⁶³

Darko continues and gives another reason of people urging their children to leave and go to street: “*Hunger is a foe and it is overpowering. When it pushes you, you go. It was the same with Baby T.*”⁶⁴

Poverty drags Maa Tsuru’s arms and legs bound to accept money made from what only Amma Darko knows as “Backpass”. Though feeling great innocence and compassion about her girls’ house leaving and what else they may be enduring in the streets, that means body-merchandizing, Maa Tsuru seems not to know where the notes being given by Kpakpo are coming from, but she accepts.

This means she approves of it. Darko gives us the point of view of common people when their children are ‘fetched’ by “big Madams” from big cities to work for them for fortune. She justifies their innocence about the situation by saying “*While her mother is stuck somewhere in poor village thinking that her daughter who was taken by this ‘kind and considerate’ relation to the city to help her ‘get on in life’ was probably at that moment, learning how to join the seams of a kaba together, the daughter may indeed be busy building a clientele of her own*”.⁶⁵

In this respect, how does Amma Darko want her people to know the existence of this plague in Ghanaian society?

The idea of ‘Good Morning Ghana’ in *Faceless* is Darko’s creation. This show is the voice of the voiceless, the face of the faceless. She wants all the Ghanaians to be informed about what is going wrong in the city. The new Ghana is full of social plights and unsolved problems. Nobody has to be off. Thus, Darko has called for Sylv Po and Ms Kamame, the specialist of street-children whose non-governmental organization had done a study of the phenomenon in Accra a few months before. She has been invited by the GMG producer. On the day of the show, she explains, explains and confirms that poverty is not only the core cause of the condition. She goes on, “*because there are some very poor parents we encountered, who in spite of their situation, were not allowing their children out onto the streets.*”⁶⁶

According to Ms Kamame, street-children issue has other sources which will be discussed in the following lines. Interestingly, one of the cause is family disintegration and lack of care which is to be discussed in the below lines.

1.2. Family disintegration and Lack of parental care

In the contemporary African countries, the lack of moral values, supportive norms, pauperization, suffering and violence, material ambitions and sexual drive fuel all this disintegration. In *Faceless*, Darko explores a great number of situations of parents’ carelessness in fiction. She pinpoints the situation that leads Fofu’s mother to let her children go to the streets:

⁶³ *Ibid*, p 25

⁶⁴ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 100

⁶⁵ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 189

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p 108

*A woman like Fofo's mother, whose 'village' happens to be inner-city Accra, is more likely to lose her sense of onus rather speedily when pushed by joblessness and poverty and the non-existent male support. Her physical and emotional detachment from her children is made less difficult in the harsh conditions of the inner city life. She let go Fofo and her sister out onto the streets with virtually no guilt at all because her psyche had accepted the situation with ample ease.*⁶⁷

In that novel, we find another reason why women tend to hallucinate when faced with a crisis. Society does not offer possibilities for women to vent their frustrations. By this way, Darko gives opportunity to the reader to live directly the real situation of street-children in the new Ghana's suburbs, Sodom and Gomorrah. The story carried on is not just imaginative but authentic and prevailing that exposes the abandonment, sorrows and danger met by these children because of the irresponsibility of their parents and community. African society accepts insidiously that women in some extended family become *"the only caretaker of the child's emotional or physical or financial needs". Or all three combined. That means performing the tasks to two.*" *Hers and the absentee father.*"⁶⁸

This is a situation of a real burden to be carried by only one person *"Maa Tsuru"*. It is the image of a traditional African family where women's role is to bear, to care for children, to contribute as mothers particularly in food provisioning and household management.

This is the least they can provide to fuel male-dominance world. This presentation of women is mostly sloppy and biased and women have to cope with till it changes. Though are some serious points of resistance.

The sobriquet 'Dr. Kwei' was given by himself just after he finished beating his pregnant wife. Darko informs Ghanaian society that the only way her male characters prove their dominance is violence and abuse. They have no human compassion. The miserable Kwei *"pounced on her like a cat on an unsuspected mouse and began a vicious pounding spree. He pounded Maa Tsuru with his fists, landing the blows anywhere and everywhere and on every part of her pregnant body...Kwei grinned Maa Tsuru began to bleed. Then he returned to AgbooAyee and told all there that, with immediate effect, they had better start calling him Dr. Kwei..."*⁶⁹

The regular absence of "Dr Kwei" has serious effects on his children's emotional and physical care, Maa Tsuru being the only one to do this and do that. She is his wife but has *"no idea if he is dead or alive."* *When she gave birth to the second child, Kwei's family did not honour the baby with a name.*"⁷⁰

Here Darko gives us the detail of what happens to Kwei and Maa Tsuru's family. On our understanding, she forgets all that and now is accepting another liar's advance: *"Kpakpo had plenty of time on hand for visiting. He visited Maa Tsuru regularly, mostly in the afternoons, when Fofo and*

⁶⁷ Ibid, p 111

⁶⁸ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 108

⁶⁹ Ibid, p 124

⁷⁰ Ibid, p 126

Baby T were out on the streets and the boys were gone to the seaside and the fish market. When Kpakpo visited, MaaTsuru cooked for him to eat.”⁷¹

Through this passage, Darko informs the reader that Maa Tsuru, the already poor and single woman, now with her new lover moving in with her, employed to divide the room into small ones, ‘chamber’ and ‘hall’ with the curtains she had bought. Maa Tsuru, already in the hunger for sex, decided to feed her lover with the means her children suffer to get home though there was a price to be paid.

As a result, Maa Tsuru “*ordered Fofo and Baby T out their old sleeping place, which was now part of the chamber, to join their brothers at the part that was now the hall. The first night with their new father in the room, the boys did not sleep for one second.*”⁷²

The lights off and exasperated by all this, the children decide to “go through the wooden windows but instead their absence causes no worry to Maa Tsuru because she has already found what she was looking for “a new father for her four children and not be mocked at again”.⁷³

Hence Darko gives the final verdict of Maa Tsuru “*Maa Tsuru could have gone to look for her sons. She decided not to. She had noticed them toss and turn on their mats the whole night through. They saw it all. It was time for them to be on their own.*”⁷⁴ But what Maa Tsuru forgets is that “*the boys were gone with their contribution to the daily house hold income. Maa Tsuru began to feel the pinch.*”⁷⁵

This situation will surely bring about the shaky happiness in Maa Tsuru household, then she dropped a hint to Kpakpo, but “sleep began to elude her. She reacted typically, “*by becoming suspicious, which common sense should have done a long time before. Nose around.*”⁷⁶

What is then the third root cause about?

1.3. Illiteracy

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines literacy as “*ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.*”⁷⁷

Therefore, based on the above concept, I can depict illiteracy as the “inability of an individual to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts”.

Based on that, can see clearly that it is ignorance that hangs back MaaTsuru and dictates her inaction against Kwei who has insisted to be called by his friends of Agboo Ayee ‘Dr. Kwei’. Let me have then a look on what she did on the contrary. The author writes “*MaaTsuru weaved her way to*

⁷¹ Ibid, p 130

⁷² Ibid, p 131

⁷³ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 131

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 131

⁷⁵ Ibid, p 131

⁷⁶ Ibid, 131

⁷⁷ UNESCO, <http://www.unesco.org/education/litdecade>

*the mercy of her aunt, while secretly waiting and hoping for Kwei to reconcile with her. But all too soon, the pregnancy and the two young sons began to take their toll on her*⁷⁸ and continues by this “*much to the displeasure and heartache of her aunt, MaaTsuru started cooking for Kwei again and took to sleeping over at his place. Kwei did not ‘glue an iron sheet around his loins’*.”⁷⁹

In *Faceless*, Darko depicts MaaTsuru as the prototype of inaction, cowardice, illiteracy and money greediness. When she heard about her new lover attempting to violate her child Baby T, silence was her lot. The story worth a pornographic scene went on by this:

Kpakpo tiptoed over to Baby T and tapped her on the shoulder. Baby T sprang up, still drowsy. Kpakpo beckoned her to follow him. It all seemed like a scene in a zombie film. Baby T rose. Kpakpo beckoned again, impatiently, forcefully. Baby T walked slowly, like there was no life in her. She followed him to behind the curtain. Fofo’s heart pounded fast and loud inside her chest. It was like it would burst and hurl itself out through her chest. Kpakpo took Baby T’s hand and sat on the bed. He placed Baby T before him and signalled her to remove her dress. Baby T obeyed as though in a trance.⁸⁰

There lies all the indication that the feminist voice in Darko’s work is against women who, by their silence or indecision, lead other women or girls into prostitution or all kind of sexual abuses. But also men who take undue advantage of the vulnerability of women are criticized even more. In this vein, in *Faceless*, Darko exposes that Kpakpo wanted to abuse Baby ‘T’ and controlled her young and fresh body. He knows when to strike. He dreams on that, plans it and lays bare of it that night: “*Kpakpo tiptoed over to Baby T and tapped her on the shoulder*”. Darko did not tell the reader what stopped him from concluding his disgraceful action. He was at an inch to have sex with her “daughter” but something stung him and urged him to stop: “*He didn’t do it! She muttered. Her voice sounded like coming from outside of her*”.⁸¹

Similarly, Onko, the young, generous and understanding man, tried his turn and succeeded and when Maa Tsuru heard about that silence was her expression and the reward of her connivance was the following:

Ma Tsuru stared long at the thick wad of notes in her hand. There was a look of worry and hopelessness in her eyes and another not so easily discernible. Then she rested her gaze upon Onko’s face...MaaTsuru sighed heavily. Never once in her entire life till then had she held so much money in her hand... Tears welled up in MaaTsuru’s eyes. She isn’t even yet twelve. MaaTsuru looked him directly in the face. She said nothing. ...untied her cover cloth around her waist, placed the wad of notes in one corner of it and proceeded to slowly tie it up and disappeared from Onko’s face.⁸²

After reading the last passage of this quotation, the reader can understand that not only has MaaTsuru come to meet Onko but also has accepted the note given as a compensation to ‘*spare all the trouble*’⁸³. Only poverty and ignorance can lead people to that extremity of moral decadence, this is how Darko paints the new Ghanaian society after independence. She proves to what extent there is no hope for parents and that if they want to survive then they have to sell their children or even accept

⁷⁸Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 122

⁷⁹*Ibid*, p 126

⁸⁰Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 133

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p 134

⁸² *Ibid*, p 138

⁸³ *Ibid*, p 139

their children's death in silence and obedience. Women like Maa Tsuru confirms what the character Bandele said in *The Interpreters*: "*I hope you all live to bury their daughter*".⁸⁴

What are then the sufferings children go through once onto streets?

II. Consequences

There are a series of consequences for children while on the streets. In *Faceless*, what has Amma Darko showed?

2.1. Child-Prostitution or child-abuse

In several studies, child sexual abuse has been identified as a characteristic of adolescent prostitution. The implication of these findings, especially for girls, is that the two phenomena (child sexual abuse and adolescent prostitution) are often related. Sexual abuse in childhood leads to prostitution.

On the contrary, but for Seng M.J. in *Child sexual abuse and adolescent prostitution: a comparative analysis* the relationship is not directed, but involves runaway behaviour as an intervening variable. It is not so much that sexual abuse leads to prostitution as it is that running away leads to prostitution.

According to Finkelhor and Browne in *The Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse* child sexual abuse leads to feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, stigmatization, and the sense that sex is a commodity. It is said that these feelings often make children vulnerable to re-victimization, including child prostitution. From this edifying definition, one can understand that Finkelhor and Browne are right because, before Baby T and her junior sister Fofo has been involved firstly as street-children and secondly as prostitutes. Darko writes and denounces the attitude of this "new father" who has tried to rape a young girl of nearly fourteen because Baby T's body becomes a site of firing desire for her new father:

Kpakpo took Baby T's hand and sat on the bed. He placed Baby T before him and signalled her to remove her dress. Baby T obeyed as though in a trance. He savoured Baby T's maturing body hungrily with his eyes. Then he brushed the back of one hand over Baby T's breasts and drew down her pants. They fell to the floor. Baby T stepped out of them mechanically. She didn't wait to be told...Kpakpo stripped naked in frenzy, filled with an urgency so wrong by Baby T's nakedness...It shocked her into stillness as Baby T disappeared wholly and completely beneath him, covered entirely even by his relatively small frame.⁸⁵

After this scene of pornography but failed sex-crime, Darko seems to announce to the reader that the young girl has been graded and now ready to go to town to apply what she has just learnt: "*Baby T had been sent away*."⁸⁶ In so writing, she insinuates the following question to any reader: where is she going?

Darko gives the reader the clue of the question immediately in the following passage:

⁸⁴Wole Soyinka. 1978. *The Interpreters*, Heinemann Educational Book Ltd, p 251

⁸⁵Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 133

⁸⁶Ibid, p 140

But Kpakpo assured her that, yes, even though Mama Abidjan used to work as a prostitute in the Ivory Coast, eventually graduating to become a Madame, she was now a repented retiree who was into recruiting young girls for work in chop bars and households. Mama Abidjan was a relative, he told MaaTsuru. And because Mama Abidjan knew his relationship to Baby T, she would guarantee to find a good placement for her.⁸⁷

For Fofu, it is the leader of the street boys who tried to rape her. Darko explains:

She opened her eyes again. Wider. Two viscous eyes glared back at her under the illumination of the storefront bulb. She stared into the face above her. Was her mind playing games with her? She looked again. It was the no-nonsense streetlord, Poison of the streets, alright. A man who used to be the leader of the bullies like Macho now was...Fofu let out a cry and began to kick her hands and legs wildly in the air. One huge muscular hand came down hard upon her mouth and suppressed the sounds from her throat. The other restrained her flailing hands and legs. The angel still looking on shed a tear. Poison successfully captured her legs between his kneeling thighs. You want to live? He hissed.

Fofu moaned and nodded under the gravity of his hands. Then noise! He warned.

Poison grinned like the devil himself. The confidence of a fool. Poison pushed up her dress and scowled at the sight of her underpants. He muttered an obscenity and yanked it off. Poison unbuckled his belt.⁸⁸

This passage provides us with the right danger encoered by street-children not only in Accra but also all over the world. Dangers like Poison (a real poison) and Macho (a real macho) pour poison in the life of street-girls they find wandering, no resistance is accepted. Either they want or not, rape is compulsory in the streets and is “*established as the first sexual experience.*”⁸⁹Through this experience many become prostitutes to give reason to Finkelhor and Browne who report after their research that street-children sexually abused are likely to become prostitutes and twice vulnerable to re-victimization. Sex to them was just a convenient mean of survival and no one cares about that.

When children are in the streets, the other risk for them is that described by Darko in these lines “*Poison landed in bad company on the streets the moment he landed there. Within days, he had mastered in car tape-deck thefts. The more he stole, and got away with, the more confident he became. And more confident he grew, the more he felt in control of the streets.*”⁹⁰

Darko goes further to confirm their relaxed status that “*many were roaming about oblivious to whether or not they were HIV positive.*” They were totally unaware of the possibility after being raped or having unprotected sex with men (Poison, Macho, Onko, Nii Kpakpo) for them to be contaminated.

2.2. HIV/AIDS

According to Kofi Awusabo-Asare in *Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in Ghana: A Synthesis of Research Evidence*⁹¹ the spread of HIV/AIDS has posed a major challenge to nations in ensuring the welfare of the next generation, and the Republic of Ghana is no exception. In 2002 the

⁸⁷ Ibid, p 140

⁸⁸ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 3-4

⁸⁹ Ibid, p 32

⁹⁰ Ibid, p 169

⁹¹ Kofi Awusabo-Asare, Albert M. Abane and Akwasi Kumi-Kyerem, *Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in Ghana: A Synthesis of Research Evidence*, Occasional Report No. 13, June 2004, p1

estimated HIV/AIDS “prevalence rate among 15–24-year-olds in Ghana was 3.4% and the median prevalence rate for the adult population increased from 2.3% in 2000 to 3.4% in 2002”.⁹²

As part of the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the threat it poses for young people, it is imperative to assess the current state of evidence in Ghana on young people’s sexual and reproductive health, including the behaviors that put young people at risk and the factors that protect them. This report provides a comprehensive overview of current knowledge on adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues in Ghana, with a focus on HIV prevention. It draws upon the existing body of social science research and includes both quantitative and qualitative studies. Its goal is to communicate key findings from existing research to a wide audience within the country.

Nowadays, the means age of sexual activity of the youth is comprised between 12 to 18 years old and it is unfortunately the age of street-children according to reports made on the issue. Sexuality is a private matter (personal intimacy and the couple), but concerns also the family (in the sense of membership in an extended domestic group or in a system of relationship) in its aspects related to procreation and to the social field (power, alliances). Such individual behaviour can be lived as a questioning of the social order, which is impossible to control when children are on the streets.

In *Faceless*, we understand the particular indignation of Darko through her presentation of Sodom and Gomorrah when reminding us the history of the area:

This was an area that used to be known as Fadama. So named by the early settlers there who were mostly from the north. Fadama means swampy in Hausa, which the area was. ... Across at Agbogloshie, the government of the day, acquired the land for industrial purposes and paid due compensation to its indigenous settlers, some of whom procrastinated over their relocation. (...) Filth and sin, suffering and ignorance, helplessness and woes ruled the days. And caught in the middle of it all, were girls like Fofu who grew up never ever really experiencing what it meant to simply be a child.

In the sense of her way of creative writing, Darko’s concept of Sodom and Gomorrah is the new Ghana full of new challenges such as street-children, child-prostitution, murderer, HIV/AIDS, rape etc. Darko shows the reader in a comprehensive way that while out in the streets, children are not only confronted to AIDS but also “*It isn’t just AIDS. There are other sexually transmitted diseases. It isn’t only AIDS. There is gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes...*”⁹³

In the third part of my analysis comes what Darko presents as the ways to strike back the phenomenon.

III. The ways out

Traditional practices of care, just like many other traditional ways of living, have been threatened mostly by modernization or socioeconomic transformations and wrought mainly through the processes of migration and urbanization. The issue of children living on the streets is a very worrying social phenomenon which has undergone various changes and became more complicated by a constellation of recurrent or emerging social factors. The central question for all countries remains effective strategy to reduce the phenomenon.

⁹² Ibid, p1

⁹³ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 177-178

Historically, States have developed policies and implemented strategies; multiple associations have made efforts, but the finding that emerges is the increasing phenomenon, coupled with the early onset of the age of entry into the street, and the tendency to the entrenchment of a large number of children in this social space. Given this situation, it is reasonable to question not only the intervention strategies of the structures involved in this field, but especially the social logic that determine this.

3.1. The role of parents

The street becomes, for many children, a placeto live, and to die. Many of them are engaged in activities such as begging, prostitution, others are porters in markets, collectors of various objects, domestic employees, guards and vehicle washers, sellers of various products, thieves, pick pocket, high way gangsters. These practices are almost the same in all African countries and even in Western countries. This is actually a constant quest to find their daily sustenance.

However, increasing attention is then accorded to the idea of “Alternative Library” and children’s sexual education through materials such “PPAG pamphlets”. Darko is sure this can work and help improve children’s view of sex, AIDS, life, etc. Then, parents have to be extremely careful to the very needs of their children because generations are different (*This is not your generation*⁹⁴). But here again Darko shows us that it is women who take the command of good initiative towards children’s education. She states it through Kabria:

Later, I snooped and found an exercise book with PPAG pamphlets. Would want us to talk about it? (...) Her own mother never talked about boyfriends with her, let alone sex. She lived, it seemed, under the assumption that Kabria would never talk to a man till the day she was destined to marry; when the Holy Ghost would somehow conjure the most befitting groom by her side to exchange her ‘I do’ with. And although Kabria would be doing and saying and learning everything for the first time, she would get it all right and crispy perfect.⁹⁵

The author continues and divulges “*Well, those were the days. Now, her children were living with a threat called AIDS* to show us that we have to depart from the traditional ways of educating children in order to induce change according to generation. This means as it is commonly said “new time, new wave, new feeling.”

In *Faceless*, Darko portrays that mothers have to play two or even three roles to educate their children and through that keep their household strong and restore the dignity and pride of black women: go to work, come back home, care for children and do their household chores. So she rejected male-dominance era and reminded us that: “*a report once alleged that the African woman worked for an average of sixty-seven hours a week as opposed to fifty-five for the African man. So who really was the weaker sex?*”⁹⁶

From the chapter seven to the end of the book, Darko insisted on her method of “PPAG pamphlets” for children sexual education as the right way to inform this new generation about the danger of sex and other things awaiting them in the streets.

In *Faceless*, Darko suggests parents especially mothers to do this for their children:

⁹⁴Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, 53

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 52-53

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 56

Kabria returned to the pamphlets. Something caught her attention. ‘Youth to Youth Approach.’ ‘Peer to Peer counselling.’ It made a lot of sense to her. Kids who did not have the benefit of parental guidance could benefit from those who did. In her time, PPAG was identified only mainly with the pill and condoms. The new PPAG and the diversity of their programmes overwhelmed her. Counseling and information on sexual and reproductive health.⁹⁷

Darko pinpoints the role of parents in the management of this affair. She advises them to be on ‘alert’, on their guard. Their roles in these times, more than being mothers, bearers, must consist of counseling and information. These are necessary and central and children need that. On the other side, parents have to establish educational talks. During these talks, parents select topics (health, morals, rights of children ...) to tackle with their children. ‘PPAG pamphlets’ are the answers of what they need, Darko seems to suggest.

3.2. The role of monitoring and caring center (Alternative Library)

The first and foremost role of NGO is to assist, care, inform and counsel. In this issue of street-children, Darko says MUTE like other NGO have “a role to play”.⁹⁸ Just after Fofu’s recuperation by Kabria, Darko constitutes MUTE as a foster family. Darko disclosed the situation of Fofu’s recuperation by MUTE’s workers:

Oh! My God! Who did this to her?
Attempts to get Fofu to also tell them something yielded zero.
She kept her lips sealed. Then Aggie asked: “Aren’t we obliged to report to the police?”
No police! No police! Fofu wailed. No police! And struggled unsuccessfully to get past Vikie.
Then Dina regained her composure and took control. Sit down! She ordered Fofu firmly.
Have you eaten? Dina asked.
Fofu shook her head.
We’ll get you some food. And then we will send you to the clinic. Is that alright with you?
Fofu nodded⁹⁹.

They are an essential link in the care of homeless people (young and old). These places, usually small and well integrated into the local environment, offer friendly spaces where homeless people can have many services: domiciliation, shower, laundry, coffee and sometimes food. This description of monitoring and caring center is exactly the one in the dream of Fofu:

It was around 2 a.m and Fofu, though not being hugged, was smiling in her sleep. Not that she was aware of it herself. But God above and the angel watching over her saw the smile and knew it was the smile of a contented fourteen-year-old girl who, but, for the life that fate had plunged her into, should have been smiling that way each night in her sleep. Fofu was smiling because she was having a dream that was far remote from the realities of the life she lived. It was a dream as in the group of thoughts and images experienced during sleep. And in her dream, she was living in a home with a roof. She was there when it suddenly began to rain...¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, 72

⁹⁸Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 57

⁹⁹*Ibid*, p 68

¹⁰⁰*Ibid*, p 3

Amma Darko shows that they are places where “every social, gender and child issue was of interest of MUTE. Their sources were newspapers, magazine, radio, television, hearsay, gossip, telephone calls, and observations.”¹⁰¹ They are alternative libraries where the youth undergo “peer to peer counseling and information on sexual and reproductive health, and testing for HIV/AIDS, diagnosis and management of sexually transmitted diseases.”¹⁰²

Darko presents the future resident of her rescued street-girl through this image “She was smiling still in her dream and doing it comfortably in the toilet with a roof”¹⁰³

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Darko describes MUTE as:

MUTE, where Kabria worked, was a non-governmental organization founded by its boss. Dina, and MUTE was just that: Mute, as silence. Not an acronym. Dina was a graduate of the University of Ghana. Her marriage to her campus boyfriend shortly after her graduation, ended in divorce after four turbulent years of childlessness. Finding herself with no child and husband and plenty of time, she recollected her frustration during her final year research work for her major essay she found out that regular libraries did not stock the kind of information she was looking for. And with that recollection, came the birth of the idea for MUTE.¹⁰⁴

Dina and her volunteers friends help Fofo in her access to rights approaches and offer her the most appropriate structures to her situation. The management of these kind of centers can be defined as an ongoing process that helps a person cope with a difficult situation and to create the opportunity for the care, attention, affection, attachment, compassion or empathy (depending on context). It is also “active solidarity” so the support of his entourage. Darko proves similarly that these centers of social assistance and monitoring are highly and basically directed “intodocumentation and information built-up”¹⁰⁵ and where meetings are held by very “eloquent mothers, wives, women and workers”¹⁰⁶.

In this context, the support covers all psychosocial services, food, educational, medical and health, legal and judicial offered to street children. That is what Darko tries to give Fofo after her encounter with Kabria in the market “The few days under Dina’s secure roof and in MUTE’s absolute care put Fofo through a tremendous transformation. She became relaxed. Her face was rested. She emitted an aura of softness. In the absence of the need to play the grown-up and the tough one to survive, as was needed on the streets, she looked and acted her fourteen years.”¹⁰⁷

Street-child care is defined as all the material, educational, psychosocial conducted with children and whose ultimate goal is to recover and to facilitate their return to the family. Child care is a set of fun, educational, psychosocial conducted with street children to retrieve. MUTE’s objective is the same that is to attend to street-children and Amma Darko gives the reader the opportunity to understand that parental care should normally be taken on when they are responsible and because in such relaxing atmosphere like that of Dina’s “Fofo was recuperating well in Dina’s home, but was still not talking...though attending to Fofo requires extra energy”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p 38

¹⁰² Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 72-79

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p 3

¹⁰⁴ Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 38

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p10

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p 77

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p 98

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p 95

In this very situation of street-children assistance, MUTE workers, after being informed about the tragedy against Baby T, has decided to investigate and solve the mystery. The NGO has then carried on a “detective task”, the Ghanaian police which is supposed to lead the enquiry into the murder of the little girl being inoperative. The office in which the police symbolizes inactiveness, laziness, lack of resources, corruption and neglect (broken windows, leaking sewerages, cracked walls and peeled painting... the confidential filing with “*handle missing... and a gaping hole where a lock should have been*”... “*the simple chair with the leather covering all torn-up*”... “*but above all, the telephone and of course the empty yard with NOTHING in it, no vehicle...*”¹⁰⁹

The reality of NGO like MUTE, “*Children-In-Need or Street-Girls-Aid*”¹¹⁰ on the ground is that very few of them work because of their lack of means. Therefore, to have a clear idea of the magnitude of the situation of street children, a proper investigation turns imperative.

Darko’s second strategy is to strengthen the NGO’s activities by adding to its contact for a team work the GMG of Harvest FM of Sylv Po. The case of the young girl (Baby T) discovered days ago behind the “*Rastakiosk*” is put on discussions and interventions. On that day, the producer Sylv Po invites MsKamame whose “*non-governmental organization had done a study of the phenomenon in Accra a few months before, confirmed that Fofo’s story was similar to many cases her research team had come across*”.¹¹¹

It is very important for MUTE workers to establish control over the street-child and let her be confident and trust them. After that assurance, Dina’s house becomes a foster family house for Fofo, the young street-girl. It also becomes a center for protection and orientation.

A foster family has the role of being to the child a second family while waiting for his family reintegration. But these homes need tools to get in touch with the street-children, hence the creation of centers count. Establishing dialogue between NGOs and the authorities allows a better understanding of objectives on both sides.

3.3. The role of government

Writing at a time when people suspect their government of inaction, silence and act of weakness to face and tackle serious social problems, Darko is motivated by the desire to pinpoint this lack of institutional presence. Through Fofo, Darko harshly shouts: “*Government,... I want government*”¹¹². This little street-girl knows that there are actions to be taken on by the government of her country. She insisted and urged for actions.

The other side where government should empower is police stations to implement its decisions against street-children exploitation. Darko shows us that till now the police have nothing. She portrays when MUTE workers decided to investigate:

The police station stood in a busy area and was, simply put, a sorry sight. Broken windows, leaking drains, cracked walls and peeling paint... Sir, Vickie cut in, do you have any idea about the average number of lives that are affected when you are compelled to file a case to lack of

¹⁰⁹Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 81-83

¹¹⁰*Ibid*, p 95

¹¹¹*Ibid*, p 107

¹¹²Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 47

resources?...(...) The inspector's expression was one of cynical bemusement. Look hard! He taunted. Did you see it? But there is nothing there! Exactly! He grinned cynically, "You saw nothing, no? But what should you have seen? A vehicle! The inspector's cynical grin turned to a wry smile."¹¹³

If those who are supposed to implement the government's actions on the ground have no resource, not even a vehicle to move and figure out cases and because of that they are obliged to file cases, nothing will move toward for a change.

There are countless for the interest of the endangered street children. "*Many well-funded, but how many of them work really for the sake of the street-children? Even government claims to be doing its very best to tackle the problem and yet, in spite of all these well publicized efforts, the problem not only persists but also seems to be getting even more intractable.*"¹¹⁴

Conclusion

In this paper, I show that Darko suggests to the Ghanaians that no matter what their social and economic status they have to be more responsible for the lives of their children by preventing unwanted pregnancies, bearing many children and by giving them more caring and assistance. She also reminds us that government's actions are needed to help reduce the phenomenon. That's why little Fofu says "Government, I said government. I want government"¹¹⁵ because she knows that "*it is the government who had the power to make people do or stop ding certain thing*"¹¹⁶. One of these actions Darko is looking for is to strengthen what is already being done by NGO, monitoring and caring centers. The typical example is MUTE and Harvest FM's GMG show. This is what Anyidoho portrays through this passage "*Somehow, Amma Darko's vision of social reality would not allow our world to be completely swallowed up in such total gloom.*"¹¹⁷ If perpetrators like Poison, Macho, Onko and Kpakpo are tracked, arrested, sentenced and jailed, people will know that something has changed or is changing.

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¹¹³Ibid, p 83

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¹¹⁵Darko, A., 2003. *Faceless*. Accra, Sub Saharan Publisher, p 47

¹¹⁶Ibid, p 79

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