

**CORRUPTION AND EXPLOITATIVE TENDENCIES IN AMMA
DARKO'S *THE HOUSEMAID***

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Abstract

Corruption has varied meanings as individuals perceive it. Corruption and exploitation have interrelated relationship which relates to deliberate cheating of innocent and less privileged citizens of a society. This paper therefore, takes a prosaic view at the way some people engage in the act of corruption and equally exploit the less privileged ones in the society as reflected in Amma Darko's text –*The Housemaid*. The girls drafted from the villages such as Kataso, Oriadon and others that serve as housemaids by engaging in various house chores could be seen as total exploitation. The promises given at the initial stage of contractual agreement were not followed. Such girls/housemaids were left to the vulnerable hawks hovering the streets of the big cities of Ghana.

Keywords- Corruption, Vulnerable, Exploit, Slavitude hovering.

Introduction

According to Igbinedon (2011), “corruption forms part of a larger category of economic and financial crimes. It pervades every stratum of public office as a means to the ends of individual enrichment at the expense of the general good” Bishop Hugh Latimer as quoted by Kayode Eso (2011) in his book *Thoughts as Human Rights and Education* sees corruption as:

‘A princely kind of thieving. They will be waged by the rich, either to give sentences against the poor or to put off the poor man’s cause. This is the noble theft of prince and magistrates. Let them leave their colouring and call them by their Christian name-Bribes.’ This definition according to the legal jurist- Kayode Eso was given over four hundred years ago, but as it was then, so it is now in Nigeria (African Societies) but we should prevent it from being continuously so, by facing it most squarely and fighting it to a standstill. It has progressed from arithmetical progression to geometrical progression. Corruption has been a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation. Once it is enshrined in our day to day activities. It is being worshipped as a demi-god. There has been no reduction in the rate of corruption in the land. In fact, it is on the increase, with high profile public officials using their entrusted office to either receive hefty bribes or to plunder national treasury (Igbinedion, 2011).

The Concept of Corruption and Exploitation

Mu’azu Yusuf (2000) in his seminar paper titled “Causes and Effects of Corruption on Society Development” says that corruption has varied meanings depending on the political culture and civilization of the people. He posits that it is generally accepted that it involves inducement intended to pressurise an official from carrying out his function in accordance with the set rules and the procedures. He further opines that, the common man’s conception of corruption covers all instances of bribery, kickbacks, favouritism, nepotism and the use of value influence in running public affairs.

Stephen D. Norris, a professor of politics, as quoted by Muazu (2011) writes that (political) corruption is the legitimate use of public power to benefit a private interest. Also, an economist, Ian Senior as quoted by Muazu (2011) avers that corruption is “An action to (a) secretly provide (b) a good or a service to a third party (c) so that he or she can influence certain actions which (d) benefit the corrupt, a third party, or both (e) in which the corrupt agent has authority. Daniel Kaufmann as quoted by Muazu(2011) extends the concept to include “legal corruption” in which power is abused within the confines of the land as those with power often have the ability to make laws for their protection.

To Vito Tanzi, as quoted by Boris Begovic in his article titled “Corruption: Concepts, Types Causes and Consequences”, sees corruption as ‘the intentional non-compliance with the arm-length principle aimed at deriving some advantages for oneself or for related individuals from

this behaviour.” Also U Myint, in his article titled “Corruption: Causes, Consequences and Cures” sees corruption as “the use of public office for private gain or in other words, use of official position, rank or status by an office bearer for his own personal benefit. Going by this definition, examples of corrupt behaviours would include: Bribery, Extortion, Fraud, Embezzlement, Appropriation of public funds among others

Corruption can occur on different scales. There is corruption that occurs as small favours between a small number of people (petty corruption) corruption that affects the government on a large scale (grand corruption) and corruption that is so prevalent and a part of the everyday structure of the society, including corruption as one of the symptoms of organization crime (Systemic corruption). The reality of corruption in Nigeria according to Igbinedion (2011) is such that an investor cannot resist incurring extraneous expenses for sundry purposes. Since this negatively impacts on profit margin, the country cannot ordinarily feature in the proposals of prospective national investors in search of investment friendly crimes. According to Professor Mbaku as quoted by Igbinedion (2011)

“Corruption allows inefficient producers to remain in business, encourages governments to pursue perverse economic policies and provides opportunities to bureaucrats and politicians to enrich themselves through extorting bribes from those seeking government favours-----the firms offering the highest bribes are not necessarily the most economically efficient ones but that are efficient in rent seeking.”

Blackwell (2016) posits that exploitation occurs when someone or something (e.g. a material resource, an opportunity) is used or taken advantage of. Social scientists are chiefly concerned with the exploitation of people and classes, who are generally considered exploited if they are required by force or by circumstances, to contribute more to some process than they receive in return. Karl Marx held that working people are exploited if some of the labour they perform is surplus labour, labour for which they receive no equivalent.

Benn, S (1988) argues that “Exploitation (in exchange) demands...that there is no reasonably eligible alternate (for the exploitee) and that the consideration or advantages received is incommensurate with the price paid. One is not exploited if one is offered reasonable price”

Brewer J (1987) sees exploitation as the failure to pay labour its marginal product.

Moreover, Bucharam, A. (1985) believes to exploit a person involves the harmful, merely instrument utilization of him or his capacities, for one's own advantage or for the sake of one's

own ends”. According to Moore (1973), exploitation “Forms part of an exchange of goods and services when (1) the goods and services exchanged are quite obviously not of equivalent value, and (2) One party to the exchange uses a substantial degree of coercion” while Hill (1994) admits it is psychological, rather than a social or an economic concept. For an offer to be exploitative, it must serve to create or to take advantage of some recognized psychological vulnerability which, in turn, disturbs the offeree’s ability to reason effectively.

Effects of Corruption

The effects of corruption cannot be over emphasized judging by its negative impacts on all spheres of the economic downturn, misfortunes of our country since independence till date. Despite the huge billions of dollars realized from the sales of crude oil nothing could be shown for it in terms of infrastructural facilities thus creating poverty in the land as a result of plundering of the economy.

Chinua Achebe (1983) in his book titled *An Image of Africa and the Trouble with Nigeria* says that public funds are routinely dated out to political allies and personal friends in the guise of contracts to execute public works of one kind or another, or licenses to import restricted commodities. It should be noted that a political contract according to Achebe will have no expertise whatsoever nor even the intention to perform he will simply sell the contract to a third party and pocket the commission running into hundreds of thousands of naira or even millions for acting as a conduit of executive fiat. The rate of economic growth, employment in the land and distribution of the nations wealth have all suffered and regressed due to corruption. No wonder the UN Global Programme against Corruption (UNGPA) have aptly summed up the negative effects of corruption as stated by Igbinedion (2011) thus:

“Corruption undermines democratic institutions, retards economic development and contributes to government instability. Corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institution by distorting electoral processes, perverting the rule of law, and creating bureaucratic quagmires whose only reason for existence is stunted because outside direct investment is discouraged and small businesses within the country often find it impossible to overcome the start-up costs required because of corruption”

An Analysis of Exploitation in Housemaid

(a) Economic Exploitation :- The writer tacitly reveals economic exploitation in the text using the discussion between a truck pusher and a tomato seller. It should be recalled that the news of an abandoned baby went viral in an unknown eastern village in Ghana. At the station near the main market in Kumasi, people were seen discussing the issue of the abandoned baby, the truck pusher, market women and others were engrossed in the discussion.

The truck pusher, the tomato seller and the taxi driver exchanged hot arguments on the sad incident. The tomato seller had this to say:

‘Why do you men always try to make nonsense of issues, just to escape blame?’

The truck pusher says:

‘Escape blame? Please madam’ the truck pusher with the stained teeth snared.

‘Tell me; to the taxi driver, can you understand why whenever trouble to do with sex crops up, women talk as if it was only men who enjoyed the act?’

The tomato seller turned her frustration on her truck pusher. You either take what I am offering or me and you have no deal; all I am interested in is paying you the lowest possible price to cart my tomatoes. That’s all. (P.7) Tika, the mistress of Efiya was getting ready to do a round of her debtors. Tika according to the writer could easily afford a very good second hand car in fine condition, but the idea never caught on with her. Being away from home a lot would necessarily mean employing a driver. She chattered a taxi and directed the driver to her first debtor. The driver ruminates within himself thus:

‘Look at me, praying for my luck to shine, so that I can make some money off a woman. These market mummies are taking over their country. They dazzle you with their monkey humility, wheedle all your money out of you, and then aim for your power. I bet-----“ P.52 the thought of the driver was to seek undue monetary exploitation of the woman.

(b) Sexual Exploitation:- Exploitation in UNHCR’S “Evaluation of UNHCR’S Efforts on behalf of Children and Adolescents (1997) is defined as “using for one’s own profit or your selfish purposes” exploitation of a child according to the UNHCR’s study refers to the use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others and to the detriment of the child’s

physical or mental health, development, and education. Advantage is being taken of the child's lack of power and status.

Sexual exploitation abounds greatly in the text as vividly revealed by the writer. The issue of the abandoned baby was still being discussed by two drivers which nearly turned into a real tight contribution to the issue was a tiger nut seller who gave an account of how a sixteen years old sister of hers was already pregnant with her second child. The man responsible for the first one disappeared as soon as he was told of it and this second one too, he was a really nice man, till this pregnancy came. The man desired ownership of the pregnancy as soon as he was told about it.

Didn't I do it with you all the way only once all the other times, didn't I remove my thing before milk came?" (p8)

The Tiger nut seller went further saying so tell me sixteen, two children, no husband, no job. I tell you. A fine reason to abandon your baby, or?" p8

Also, it had never been Tika's dream still to be single and childless at the ripe old age of thirty five. Living only with Efia, her maid, in a two room estate house, and traveling frequently all over Africa to scout for goods to sell in Ghana, was not much fun. Neither was hopping into bed with men of all shapes and sizes for the flimsiest of business excuses. But fate, it seemed, had determined it, from the day several years back when she had fallen in love for the very first time. She had invested so much of herself in this love that when it turned sour she swore to herself 'never again!' and switched her emotions into neutral (p17)

The many escapades of Madam Tika with various men in her house were known to Efia-her maid. Efia was always at their bell and call serving them food and drinks with instructions from madam Tika that they don't get disturbed because they have business deals to discuss.

"And Tika would disappear with him into the bedroom. Next thing, the key would turn in the lock. And the many times that Efia placed her ear to the key hole, she heard noises: moans, groans, pains and sighs, and the wild creaking of the bed (p49)

Efia, Tika's "housemaid sexual escapades were uncontrollable. She made use of every available opportunity of her boss absence to invite boys and men into their house. Should we even blame Efia? No, because she had learnt the trade unofficially from her boss. It would be recalled that her boss nearly caught her in the act when she suddenly returned home to pick her purse which

she forgot. Efia locked her out and paved way for the man with her to hide before she opened the door for her. Tika had this to say:

“You were in here with somebody during God knows what, and you made whoever it was leave by the backdoor before you let me in. isn’t that it? (p54)

As soon as her boss left, Efia and her man resumed their sexual exercise having this to say.

“Stop asking questions and let’s get going. Efia rebuked, ‘and when your milk is coming don’t remove your thing (p55).

The young girls in Kumasi shared their ugly sexual abuse in the hands of the boys and men in the society with one another in anguish. Most of them are beaten to a pulp after being sexually abused and they could not even defend themselves. A girl in red told her friends thus:

I have my own problems. The owner of my base has returned from abroad and wants to resume work on his building, so I had to bribe Atinga yesterday with a couple of quick rounds behind the blue kiosk to get him to find me a new place (p95)

“Well, Akua came in, “as for me, fortunately work has been suspended on my building. I heard the owner has traveled to some country to get work and make more money to come back and complete it. So far the next year at least, neither Atinga nor any of them will see my pants” (p95) Like her mates, Akua had no regular homes. They all lived in unfinished buildings; when final completion work started, they moved out. Thanks to bribes of cash and sex, workers at the building sites regularly tipped them on the next place available for occupation. (p32)

Conclusion

Aptly put, corruption and exploitation (in any form) cannot be separated from each other in the novel because both serve as mean of survival for the young and budding boys and girls on the streets of Ghana (as could even be seen in other African countries) as a result of the decadent African societies. No wonder, Yusuf Muazu (2011) concludes in his article titled “Causes and Effects of Corruption on Society Development” that some governors and local government Chairmen are the sole contractors of all projects and purchases by their government. Some go and do it directly while some put their friends and brothers as middlemen to do the purchases. Indeed, it is because of the corrupt practices of Nigeria’s public service functionaries that, neither the landscape of Nigeria nor the standard of living of its citizens has significantly improved since

independence, despite the huge monetary resources which the government has been able to accumulate over the years.

The novelist says that all the women that appeared in the text are caught in web of superstition, ignorance, greed and corruption but there is ray of hope for them in the long run as stated by Tika in the concluding part of the novel through a discussion she was having with her bossom friend-teacher. She has this to say:

“Like the business discussions I used to hold in my bedroom: and she burst out laughing and crying at the same time. Teacher joined in and, together, they laughed and cried: laughing and crying away their pain, their disappointment, their age, their fear. And laughing with hope” (p107)

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