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Society, African literature and sustainable development: An examination of Darko's the Housemaid

Funmilola Kemi Megbowon *, Chijioke Uwah

Department of English Studies and Comparative Literature East London Campus University of Fort Hare

Abstract

African literary writers have been trying to contribute to the achievement of a desirable and sustainable society through their creative works. Using textual and interpretative analysis of Darko's *the Housemaid* within the theoretical framework of social theory, this paper aims to identify and discuss the portrayal of the sociocultural problems as they relate to selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and recommends the possible corrective measures through the voice of reason presented in the text. Besides demonstrating the contribution of African literature to global sustainable development, this study examines specific societal problems in relation to development goals resonated by Darko which must be redressed for a sustainable society. Following the analysis of the text under consideration, child neglect and trafficking, teenage pregnancy, non-educational enrolment of child(ren), uncontrolled childbirth, and uncontrolled pursuit of wealth over ethics which are in line with SDGs 4 and 5 that seek to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to education as fundamental to achieving sustainable development and aim to eradicate trafficking and all forms of sexual exploitation were the societal problems that were resonated. As deduced in the text, the study provides and echoes the need for responsible parenthood, child education, birth control and ethic and societal consciousness in the pursuit of wealth as imperatives for a sustainable society.

Keywords: African Literature; Society; Development; Sustainability

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* Corresponding author. E-mail address: fmegbowon@ufh.ac.za

1. Introduction

Globally, there has been urgent and interconnected multidimensional problems that range from economic to including health, political, environmental, religious extremism and societal (Rogers et al., 2012). These problems have put governments and development partners in the pursuit of ways through which these several problems can be solved. As a result, there have been international agreements on various development goals by governments of nations. Several of these development concerns and priorities form the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the global leaders as global goals that must be achieved by the year 2030. Sustainable Development in the SDGs implies a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs (UNESCO, 2017). As the notion of sustainable development advances, there becomes an expansion in its focus to the economic and social development, and environmental protection for future generations. The idea of a sustainable development can be viewed from several perspectives, but this study focuses on four main areas which include society, environment, culture and economic.

A sustainable society is one that ensures the vitality of human life and culture, health and of nature's capital, for the present and future generations (Blewitt, 2015; Viederman, 1993; Sachs, 2015). It is a society that can be described as one in which the needs of everyone in the community are met and people feel safe, healthy, and ultimately happy; the environment is protected, enhanced, cherished, and deterioration to the environment is minimised, employment opportunities are better, economy is vibrant and people's work lives are more rewarding (James et.al., 2015; Stafford Borough Council, 2022). The pursuit of a sustainable development is imperative because the behaviour and decisions of human beings and the society at large have significant consequences on people's lives in the present and the future respectively, and where necessary actions of those that destroy the peace of the society should be stopped, conserved what is in existent and restored where it has been damaged (Viederman, 1993). The vanguards of sustainable development have necessitated many actors (government, development partners, academia, researchers, non-governmental organizations) from various fields to be working with different audiences to achieve similar goals of raising awareness and promoting conditions to achieve the goals of sustainable development. The first generation of writers and contemporary African literary writers are part of these actors that have made attempts in contributing to achieving the SDGs.

African literature mirrors the society and African literary writers have often articulated the realities of their societies through creative literary writings in form of documentaries, novels, fictions, and dramatic plays (Megbowon and Uwah, 2020). In finding a nexus between African literature and its society, Kehinde (2004), asserts that African literature reflects the happenings in the society. In other words, the writer lives in a society and draws his ideas, situations, and characters from that society. Besides, he imaginatively writes about the individuals who live in the society and the events which happen in the society. He further opines that no matter how imaginative a writer may be, the society he resides in and knows, invariably forms the background of his writing. To corroborate this view, Ngugi wa Thiong's popular assertion: "literature does not exist in a vacuum" expresses the profound truth about the relationship between literature and its society. It reflects the social, aesthetic, and range of aspects of the life of a society. Also, in support of this fact is Taine (1986), who contends that a literary text is the expression of the psychology of the individual author, which was also a product of the environment and the historical period in which he lived and the race to which he belongs (Barry, 2002). His postulation further buttresses the claim that literature does not exist in a vacuum. Thus, it is obvious that

African literature is functional mainly because the experiences that sharpen the psychology of the African artist are products of his or her society. Megbowon and Uwah (2020), argue that African Literature functions as a voice by speaking about and against societal ills and providing solutions for social change, thereby positioning it as one of the tools that can help bring the desired change in the society.

For instance, some of these writers have been involved in environmental sensitization and calling for a healthy cultivation of the earth free from pollutants in a world where unsustainable situations ensue. Some of their works educate people on the need to preserve the life support systems of the earth and condemn the unsustainable use of natural resources which often leads to environmental degradation, Letters from Earth by Albert Otto and Tale of Harmattan by Tanure Ojaide are good examples. Reflecting on exploitation of the natural resources as an off-shoot of an awful decision, modern African literature writes extensively about environmental mismanagement. In Sophia Obi's Tears in a Basket, the poem titled Routine (2005) gives a glance of the responsibility of nature to mankind as he decides to nurture nature. The attractive elements of nature make the earth a superficial place to live. Nature revitalizes the minds of human and make available constant source of impartation on his featureless mind. The nature provides vitality that sustains and nourishes human. Hence, human beings in their right minds should shun all activities that can exploit nature, since nature has extremely contributed to the well-being of the people. Appreciating nature very highly is synonymous to showing thankfulness as elucidated by the poet. Albert Otto's Letters from The Earth (2007), addresses all the features of our environment. He addresses environmental dilapidation: gas flaring, oil pollution, animal extinction, desert encroachment, sea pollution and acid rain. It is apparent that African literary writers have created awareness in this regard. It can be observed that several of these Africa writers through their works speak to (educate and create awareness) various problems and offer solutions for social change which are desirable for a sustainable society.

Also, African literary writers depict the issue of indigenous pattern of law, order and justice in their works, and reveal that their pattern are necessary for the promotion of communal peace, prevention of crime, conflict management and resolution, and upholding morals in the community. For example, the justices of Umuofia masquerades in Things Fall Apart are instances of traditional African scheme of justice, Osofisan's Women of Owu is also another example. This indigenous pattern is for the promotion of communal peace, prevention of crime, conflict management and resolution are related to the SDG Goal 16 of Peace Building. Studies (Oguntomisin, 2004; Zartman, 2009) note that various communities in precolonial Africa had diverse conventions that are aimed at mitigating intra and inter human and intercommunal conflicts which are embedded in religion, customs, and tradition before the activities of colonisation. Another instance is in Achebe's Things Fall Apart, for the community of Umuofia (an indigenous Africa setting) the court system was in the form of the egwugu. The egwugu in the community were nine masked men which represent the different villages of Umuofia. The egwugu also symbolized the physical exemplifications of Umuofia's nine sons established and they are called upon by the people to help resolve quarrels. Alagoa (2001), notes that the management of conflicts amongst precolonial Igbo as in other African societies revolves round the principles of impartiality and fairness.

African literary writers have also portrayed issues of violence against women in their works, which have consistently been related to patriarchy as one of the bases of this violence. This is in line with SDG goal 5; to attain gender equality and empower all women and girls. Specifically target 5.2, is to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls. Examples abound in Emenyonu's Tales of our Motherhood, Flora Nwapa's

This is Lagos and Other Stories, Ama Ata's Anowa, Ifeoma Okoye's Behind the Clouds, Mariama Ba's So long A Letter and Sefi Ata's Everything good will come among others, depicting discrimination, injustice, gender inequalities, and subjugation that women experience in male-controlled society. Adichie in her Purple Hibiscus challenges patriarchal society through aunty Ifeoma, Kambili and Beatrice. Aunty Ifeoma is an independent, outspoken, who influences everyone around her positively in contrast with Pa Eugene a dictator, who confines Mama and renders her almost unable to speak for herself. Papa Eugene's orders and expectations are the only thing Kambili understands in the patriarchal society she lives in. Her transformation into a self-reliant and strong young woman begins when she travels to Nsukka to visit her aunty Ifeoma where she engrosses her independent personality. These writers have demonstrated the need for women's economic liberation and knowledge empowerment to overcome female subjugation.

The main objective of this study is to examine the contribution of African literary writers to the achievement of sustainable development goals. The specific objectives are: i) to identify and discuss the portrayal of the sociocultural problems as they relate to five of SDGs development goals, ii) to identify the possible corrective measures through the voice of reason in the text under study. This paper is structured as follows; succeeding the introductory section is the methodology section which embodies the theoretical framework and analytical technique used in the study. Result and discussion are presented in section four and section five presents the conclusion.

2. Methodology

2.1. Theoretical framework and analytical technique

The theoretical framework supporting this study is social theory. The framework speaks to the changes and developments that take place in societies. These changes are related to issues of social behaviour, gender, class, social structure, and modernisation among others and further articulates the need for social change (Harrington, 2005). Social theory can be conceptualized as ideas, hypotheses, thought-experiments, arguments, and explanatory speculations about social phenomenon like human societies, gender, power relation, social class and structure among others (Harrington, 2011). According to Adebani (2014) social theory is a framework that can be used to unfold a phenomenon; it serves as a meditative, rational mode of abstract thinking which attempts to apprehend and explain social phenomenon and human action. The reflecting of the concept of social theory in the works (fiction, poetry, drama, and essays) of African writers, thus serving an important fabric of social thought and social theorising in and beyond the continent necessitates the adoption of the theory (Adebani, 2014). The works of these African literary writers offer abstractions, frameworks, comparisons, and critical reflections on African lifeworld, and thereby placing Africa in the global context. The theory is suitable for analysing Darko's text as she used literature to reflect on moral decadence in her contemporary society and call for social change in behaviour for sustainable society. A textual and interpretative analytical technique is used in this study.

2.2. Synopsis of Amma Darko's the Housemaid

The novel was written in 1998. Darko chronicles the lives of the contemporary women in Ghana. Seven women characters involved in social issues were depicted by Darko as the story unfolds. Darko opens with the issue of an abandoned dead baby in the bush, everyone comments on this, although men have a different view to

that of women. Some men are of the opinion that the perpetrator should be punished while some women think both the perpetrator and the man who impregnated her should be blamed. Darko depicts greediness, cunning and desperate nature of human beings in pursuing wealth and this is reflected in the women characters in the text. Darko presents Tika, the protagonist as someone who gives all it takes including her dignity, to succeed in business having failed her fifth form exam in school. She requests for a housemaid from her dead father's family to compensate her father for his unpleasant experience from her mother which leads to his death. Tika receives Efua to serve her as a housemaid. Meanwhile, Efia's grandmother and mother devise a means to acquire Tika's wealth. Efia gets pregnant then pushes it to one of Tika's lovers who happens to be an impotent man. Efia delivers the baby who dies immediately after birth, and she throws it into the bush. Darko depicts the plight of Akua, housemaids and other young girls from villages who moved to the city in search for survival and how they use their bodies as instruments of sex in place of cash payment where necessary. Darko addresses a lot of social issues in the novel: socio-economic differences between the rich and the poor, bribery and corruption, life in the village compared to the city, gender roles, superstition, and religious beliefs among others.

3. Result and discussion

Darko through her writing creates awareness regarding social problems that can hinder the achievement of SDGs and compromise a sustainable future if not corrected. Darko points to five of the SDGs; goal 1 which is to end all forms of poverty; goal 3 intends to ensure healthy lives and promotes well-being for everyone; goal 4. is to ensure comprehensive and quality education for everyone; Goal 5 is to attain gender equality and empower all women and girls, and goal 16 aims at promoting peaceful societies for sustainable development. This study identifies social issues in Darko's *The Housemaid* and discuss them as they relate to the SDGs. Furthermore, recognized voices of reason are appraised as suggested solutions to achieving these goals. Voice of reason as portrayed by Darko in the text, are opinions or ideas (or persons that have opinions) that are reasonable, based on experience and what ought to be.

3.1. Child(ren) neglect and trafficking

Children neglect is a component of child ill-treatment which results in actual or potential harm to a child's health, dignity, survival, and development (King et al., 2002; Cozza et al., 2019). According to Coohy (2003), child neglect could be physical neglect, supervisory neglect, and emotional neglect. Berliana et al. (2019), notes that child neglect is a reality that is prevalent in the world, and it is increasing at an alarming rate. This reality, however, negates the United Nations Convention on the Right of the child which asserts that every child has the right to get adequate care for their development in terms of his/her physical, moral, social, mental, and spiritual aspects of life.

Darko portrays the issue of child neglect in *The Housemaid* as lack of parental supervision. Child neglect makes some children leave their parents uninformed to wherever they want. This practice negates target 5.3 of SDGs that aims at eliminating all harmful practices against children. Darko portrays this in the text: Akua was waiting to see if she would be sent for from the city as a housemaid but when she sees no prospect, she becomes frustrated and decided to leave Katsaso by all means, "she did what a girl had done. She left home saying nothing to anyone, her mother thought she was going to friends while others assumed she had been

sent on errand to the outskirts of Kataso. Akua left Kataso in the same way” (Darko, 1998:9). Darko portrays another instance of child neglect in the character of Mami Korkor who could not afford a better life for her children thereby subjecting her children to go scavenging on the rubbish dump for clothes. Darko depicts the issue of poverty as it relates to SDG goal 1 which is to end all forms of poverty and target 1.4, is to ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources. Although Mami Korkor warns her children not to hunt things on the rubbish dump but since she could not provide for them, they flout her instructions. Bibio her daughter tells her “And don’t forget, Mami Korkor, that this very blouse I am wearing also came from the rubbish dump” (Darko, 1998:10).

Human (child) trafficking and modern-day slavery in all its dimensions are part of the lingering and contemporary social problem the contemporary society is facing nationally and globally, such that this social menace cuts across regions of the world. Human trafficking is the recruitment, receipt or transfer, transportation, of people through deceit, fraud, and force with the aim of exploiting them for profit, labour, service, or sex (UNODC, 2022). Human trafficking is one of the lucrative and growing sources of income for some secret organizations and individuals who are involved in it (Jespersion, et al., 2019). It is a social problem and criminal activity that needs to be dealt with by every member of the society and this is another SDGs target 5.2; to eradicate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. Darko portrays the prevalent issue of child trafficking and slavery in *The Housemaid* using the character of Teacher who is often given the task of getting young girls from Kataso and positions them as housemaids to families in Accra. The Teacher is very well known among the Kataso people in the Village as well as the city. Tika goes to her when she needs a maid “I came to see you about a maid. I need one, Teacher responded “I’ll help you. I’ll leave for Katoso this weekend...” (Darko, 1998 pp. 36 & 37). Teacher gets monetary rewards for transferring young girls from the village to the city as maids.

“Teacher was no good Samaritan as such. Not only did she enjoy the fringe benefits that came with her efforts, but she also actually looked forward to them” She receives gifts (cassavas, plantains and bush meat) from the grateful families in the village as well as materials, provisions and cash from happy city people (Darko, 1998 p. 56).

The negative impact of human trafficking to the society cannot be understated as some of those girls’ resort to prostitution as in the case of Efua, while only a few are permitted to go to school by their masters.

“These girls were sent for by relations or contacts in the cities to work as housemaids and babysitters, though many eventually ended up as ice-water sellers and prostitutes” (Darko, 1998 p30).

Obviously, Darko through her writing creates an awareness regarding the issue of child neglect and child trafficking which is part of SDG targets 5.2 and 5.3 (eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation). In addition, the SDG target 16.2 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is aimed at ending all forms of violence against children and gives renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, abuse, trafficking, neglect, and exploitation. Furthermore, Darko through the voice of reason (Efua mother’s voice) shows that it is of vital importance for parents to be responsible in taking care of their children:

“Efua’s mother chides her husband who is requesting for money before releasing their daughter to serve as a maid. “She is going to do something that we could never have done for our daughter” (Darko, 1998 p. 48).

They did not take responsibility of taking care of their daughter, rather they embraced the opportunity of sending her to Tika as a slave. This echoes all shades of wrongs in letting a child go to serve as a maid, and the imperativeness of parents to cater for their children’s needs. Also, this clearly shows the undignified place of guardians and parents in protecting the current and future welfare of their children.

3.2. Adolescent pregnancy

Adolescent (teenage) pregnancy is part of the social menace and public health concern prevalent in modern societies including contemporary African societies, hence their inclusion in the SDGs. Mathew and Collinvezina (2016) propose that the enhancement of awareness of the social and public health problems and emphatic responses towards victims are two preconditions for SDG progress in this area. Darko through literature contributed to this awareness creation of child sexual abuse, the challenges of victims and possible solutions. SDGs target 5.3 eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Darko portrays different instances of teenage pregnancy in the text in relation to the issue of abandoned dead baby found in the bush of Braha community which spread to all the villages causing arguments and fights among the people on who was guilty or not. Some suggest that,

“the womb of the culprit be removed, cut in two and given to her to swallow by the count of three” (Darko, 1988 p. 5)

while others advocate that the irresponsible man who impregnated the poor girl should be arrested. One man asked the question in defense of the man:

“who said he was irresponsible? What does he even have to do with the abandonment of the baby?” (Darko, 1998:6).

Another woman who was furious about the conversation:

“you think the mother just sat there, opened her legs, and God above pushed the baby into her or what”.

The man then said:

“Did my brother say it wasn’t a man who impregnated her?” (Darko, 1998 p. 7).

The teenage girl pregnancy is usually unintended and such victims often experience emotional and psychological trauma especially when there is no support from her family or the community. This is what Efua experienced when she got pregnant in the city. Similarly, a young girl of about nineteen, talking about her sister in their conversation with others:

“Go and look at my sister. She is only sixteen and 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 nice man, till this pregnancy came. Then come and see! He too started talking strange talk. "Ah! Didn't I do it with you all the way only once? Then declared that no, no, no, it sure was not him responsible. So, tell me- sixteen, two children, no husband, no job" (Darko, 1998 p. 8).

Also, Darko depicts the issue of girl child sexual abuse in the character of the old man, who impregnated his wife's little sister. This was revealed in an argument between the old man and a young driver; addressing the Old man, he said:

"Don't we know you? In your heyday, when that constable impregnated your wife's little sister" (Darko, 1998 p. 9).

Likewise, another instance of sexual abuse in the text is about Kofi Akorti's who was identified to have impregnated twelve young girls in the village. Ostensibly, Darko, in all these cases portrays the menace to have been caused by "adult men" who needed to be held responsible for their actions.

The issue of teenage pregnancy has a negative impact on the affected teenage girls and the society at large. Cook and Cameron (2015) identify a number of risk factors for early marriage and teenage pregnancy to include poverty, low female education, social pressure and employment opportunities. Considering the social consequences associated with teenage pregnancy which include lower educational achievements, teenage mothers have higher risks of living on lower incomes, they are more likely to be socially isolated and have problems with housing and huge family conflicts compared to their peers (Cook and Cameron, 2015), thereby leading to a vicious cycle of poverty. Without doubt, early pregnancy is one of the many obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Darko's further contribution to the achievement of SDGs in this regard is seen in the voice of reason which is shown in the message made by the palace announcer on the chief's order, when the chief orders the palace announcer to inform the people about Kofi Akorti's gross misdemeanor:

"The chief has asked me to bring this message to you all. "Kofi Akorti has been asked to leave this village immediately. Mama Ama Mbroo reported that he had impregnated her fourteen-year-old daughter. This brings to twelve young girls Kofi Akorti has so far impregnated in Kataso. The chief thinks it is in the interest of the village that Akorti carries his willful and undisciplined penis away from here before he impregnates another twelve girls" (Darko, 1998 p. 30).

This clearly portrays the need for leadership commitment and strengthening of every relevant institution on the need to act against (not concealing) the social problem and stamping it out for the achievement of a sustainable social development.

3.3. Non-educational enrolment of child(ren)

Education as a fundamental human right lies at the heart of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO, 2017), mission and it is enshrined in the Rights (1948), and many other international human rights instruments. The right to education is one of the key principles underpinning the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) adopted by the international community. The SDG 4 is right-based and seeks to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to education as fundamental to achieving sustainable development. Education is an empowering right and one of the most powerful tools by

which economically and socially marginalized children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in the society. Yet more than two hundred and sixty-two million children and youth are out of school, six out of ten are not acquiring basic literacy and numeracy after several years in school (UNESCO, 2017). This deprivation in educational opportunities, may be because of social, cultural, and economic factors. Through her literary work, Darko reveals the importance of getting enrolled in education. The importance goes beyond learning numeracy and literacy to include acquiring necessary social skills. The conversation between Mami Korkor and her daughter indicates that she lacks necessary social skill which she also confirmed. Bibio, her daughter always blames her for bringing her into a miserable life, she insults her at every opportunity, responding to her mother who cautions her about her bad-mannered:

“Too bad. You should have sent me to school to learn some manners then. But since you rather let me stay home to mother to you and your friend’s son – boys I’m only three years older than – where else can I learn my manners but in the streets?” (Darko, 1998 p. 10).

Indeed, poor social manners can only be learnt in the street. Social skills are life skills that are essential for children to develop (UNICEF, 2012; Sørli et al., 2021). These social skills are considered as life skills because they are used every day in communication and interaction and are necessary for an individual’s behaviour in the society, according to the prevailing and desirable culture (Sharma et al., 2016). According to Pachauri and Yadav (2014), social skills can be described as personality traits, fluency in language, social gracefulness, friendliness, personal habits, and optimism to varying degrees. In addition, social skills are generally defined as intra and interpersonal skills such as communication, collaboration skills, and teamwork (Ritter et al., 2018). These skills also include relationship skills, conversation skills (verbal and non-verbal), mannerisms and self-control (Sharma et al., 2016). While Sørli et al. (2021) note that these social skills are observable indicators of the larger social competence construct, Hamre and Pianta (2001) and Zsolnai (2002) maintain that children who are helpful and empathic, who cooperate and share with others, and who can regulate emotions in adaptive ways, are generally better off in most social areas in life, including formal and informal schooling system. Gibb (2014) rightly states that social skills have gradually become significant to academic skills and are strongly associated with the success in life and employment. Equally, Jones et al. (2015), found statistically substantial associations between measured social-emotional skills in kindergarten and key young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education, criminal activity, employment, mental health, and substance use.

School as a main element in the life of an individual also plays an important role in the development of a sound personality. Its scope is not limited to the learning of academic materials, but also improves the level of self-confidence among students, where they are exposed to a variety of skills such as team spirit, cooperative learning, and collaboration that would have positive effects on their personalities (Bukatko and Daehler, 2001). Considering the time spent in the school environment, educational facilities or institutions without doubt are a primary environment for social skill development (Rashid et al., 2020; Kian et al., 2020).

3.4. Uncontrolled childbirth

At the macroeconomic level, unchecked population growth can cause economic and environmental disaster for a country (Chowdhury and Hossain, 2018). Increase in population often leads to increased demand for food, housing and energy which could translate to environmental degradation. At the microeconomic or household

level, household size has been argued to have an influence on household wellbeing, such that there is a link between fertility and poverty. The effect of household size on welfare is further identified to be informed by the prevailing economic status and status of household head. Campbell et al. (2013), argue that high rate of childbirth contributed to increased poverty by catalysing the decline of economic growth, as large families often depend on a limited household income. Browne and LaLumia (2014) also maintain that poverty rates are predominantly high among households headed by single women, and childbirth is often the event preceding these households' poverty. Hence, there has been a continued call for women to embrace the use of contraception. The use of contraception is no doubt one of the ways to achieve a sustainable future at individual level and aggregate level. This relates to SDGs target 3.7 by 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning.

In view of the above, it can be deduced that Darko by portraying the issue of women constantly giving birth to many children beyond their ability, especially when the husband or man impregnating such a woman is irresponsible as an indirect call to embrace caution and control. This is the case of Mami Korkor whom her child, Bibio criticizes for her pathetic and miserable life. She could not afford to send her four children to school because the money she gets from hawking fish only takes care of their feeding. They all depend on her,

"Not a pesewa from their father" (Darko, 1998 p. 11)

The voice of reason is heard through Bibio her daughter who had a different view to her mother's complaint about her irresponsible father:

"Why, after making Nereley with him, when you realized how irresponsible he was, did you go ahead to make Akai, me and Nii Boi as well?" (Darko, 1998 p. 11).

This voice of reason expresses the need for women to make decisions that have a positive and sustainable tomorrow for them and their children. While procreation is good, it should however, be within the economic ability of parents. Bailey et al. (2014) provide evidence that those born after federal family planning programs were introduced were less likely to live in poverty in their childhood and that these same cohorts were less likely to live in poverty as adults. Without doubt Darko motivates for increase sexual and reproductive healthcare service as well as family planning information and education which are target 3.7 of 2030 SDGs agenda. In general family planning has health, economic and social benefits which include raising of parent income, empowerment of women, improvement in infant and child health, increase in household saving, increase in investment in individual child, increase in female work participation, reduction in poverty and achievement of a sustainable human population.

3.5. Pursuit of wealth without ethics

Another observable decay in the modern Africa society which negates features of a sustainable society is the desperate and insatiable quest for wealth, especially among younger people at the expense of knowledge, ethics, values and morals. According to Rogers et al. (2012), material aspirations that are spread by the globalized economy and visual images of western lifestyle and prevailing unemployment and poverty have stimulated younger people to engage in unjustifiable ways of getting wealth. Some of these ways include corruption, internet fraud and scams, romance scams, robbery, prostitution, ritual killing among others. These ways will indeed not guarantee a sustainable future, as a sustainable future goes beyond acquiring money.

Darko, as a social critic brought this menace to the limelight in the conversation between, Tika and Madam Sekyiwa, her mother, and as well between Tika and Owuraku. Tika blames her mother for the breakup between herself and Owuraku, speaking to her mother she says:

“I blame you for the loss of Owuraku too. You brought me up to value money above all else”.

Also, while communicating with Owuraku (her boyfriend), she tries to prove her success in business in spite of her academic failure, saying she invested her all in business: her brains, her energies, her dignity and she succeeded (Darko, 1998 p. 22). But Owuraku is displeased by Tika’s promiscuity and decides on way out of the relationship. Apparently, this reality of wealth-is-all-attitude negates the goal and feature of sustainable society.

Tika, like several other young people prioritise the issue of money above every other thing. This kind of money ideology is nothing but a display of materialistic tendency. According to Srikant (2013), materialism can be seen from a socio-cultural and individual perspective. Materialism is a socio-cultural phenomenon when most of the people in the society appreciate material acquisitions. It is seen from an individual perspective when a person is identified as one, who values material acquisitions very highly. Some of the material acquisitions that people are desperately longing to acquire in the contemporary African societies are latest cars, fashion, mansions, money among others. People are desperate to acquire material things because of greed, financial security and worth and recognition among others. SDG target 1.4 aims to ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions. Also, it seeks to create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional, and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions. The society will become violent, if the only values that are important are the material things, there are no more motivations, self-constraint, tolerance, the values of sacrifice, and individuals then use any means to have whatever they want (Ndubueze, 2021). Similarly, in today’s Africa, sex as a component of materialism has become an instant means for access to jobs, at times ascendancy to power and promotions among others (Jagger, 2015). It is an unfortunate state whereby high officials and directors use their women subordinates as sex objects, who are employed to minister to their sexual cravings. This manace will hinder the achievement of SDG target 16.5 which is to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms and 16.6 to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels. Darko depicts this through the character of Tika when she remarks on the business unpleasantness:

“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” (Darko, 1998 p. 23).

The voice of reasons that are imperative for a sustainable future can be deduced from the words of Tika herself where she blames her mother for bringing her up to value money above other things, and that for Owuraku, money is good, but not at any price. And that is a point Tika has missed. According to Tika “money is the power word. Not books” (Darko, 1998 p24). This is in line with Salonen and Ahlberg (2013) that there is a level of materialism that poses a threat to environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Isham et al.

(2022), found out that individuals who are materialistic have lower levels of personal well-being, spanning across components such as lower life satisfaction, higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower sense of purpose in life. It makes one not to be empathic with others (Isham et al., 2022), and engage in anti-social activities and behaviour. These do not support needed high-quality interpersonal relationships for a sustainable society. To achieve a desirable and sustainable future, guardians and individuals should train their wards and selves not to value money or wealth above all else, but rather embrace the pursuit of morals, ethics, and knowledge in the midst of wealth seeking pursuit.

3.6. Transformation of cultural identity

Traditional African societies believe in family which is known to be formed when two persons come together to get married. Marriage between these two people is recognized only when the bride price (dowry) has been paid by the groom's family. Dowry remains a key pillar of unifying a man and woman in matrimony before the intrusion of western oriented marriages. Although the nature of dowry payment has evolved over the years, yet, it is known to be one of the markers of African identity (Rudwick and Posel, 2014). It is a means of creating a bond between the groom and bride's family (Posel et al., 2011), it is also a reflection that the groom and his family are able to take adequate care of his bride. This marriage rite is the cumulative action that certifies a lady as a wife.

The contemporary Africa is however, witnessing a situation where a bride offers to pay her bride price by giving the said amount to her man in a contrary move to what is obtainable in traditional African society. Such a move has continued to be frowned upon as it shows lack of dignity, value and desperation on the part of the lady. This cultural shift negates SDG target 4.7 by 2030, to ensure global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. Darko portrays this in the text through Tika's conversation with Owuraku: Her judgement day came when he graduated, she asked:

"When will you let your people come to see my people to perform the marriages rites? When I find a job and save enough to finance the dowry Owuaku replied." (Darko, 1998 p. 24).

Tika offers to pay the cash, but Owuraku finds it outrageous:

"Only a shameless, desperate woman who wanted a husband for the sake of earning the title of a married woman would do that." Have you incinerated all your pride and dignity?" (Darko, 1998 p. 24).

Owuraku makes her understand that "my people always say a woman like that is never worth her salt. You don't buy wifhood- you earn it" (Darko, 1998 p. 24), Darko, through the voice of reason speaks to the long-age culture of bride price, and it is on this premise that bride price is paid before a bride is released to the groom. Wifhood in Africa is beyond bearing the title of "married woman"; payment of bride price by the groom's family or the groom, is no doubt a thing of pride and dignity for the lady in the indigenous African setting and should be embraced irrespective of what the contemporary society does. Darko through the voice of reason by Owuraku can be said to be promoting cultural sustainability, being that culture is a source of identity. Cultural sustainability relates to sustainable development that has to do with maintaining cultural practices, cultural beliefs heritage preservation, culture as its own entity and attempts to answer the question of whether any given culture will exist in the context of the future, despite external influence (Gartler et al., 2020).

4. Conclusion

Sustainable development is a development and change that is expected to meet the needs of the contemporary generations deprived of compromising future generations to meet their own needs, and this pursuit has been championed by various groups and individuals. Following the fact that African literary writers are society's conscience, and their creative work mirrors the society and provides solutions, this study examined the contribution of African writers to the pursuit of SDGs with focus on the work of Amma Darko the Housemaid. The study further discussed the portrayal of sociocultural problems as they relate to development and sustainable development goals. Similarly, through the voice of reason, Darko in her text provides, demonstrates, and reverberates solutions needed for a sustainable society. The social problems identified are child neglect and trafficking, teenage pregnancy, non-educational enrolment of child(ren), uncontrolled childbirth, and pursuit of wealth over ethics. Considering the observed contemporary pattern of parenting and child training which include non-educational enrollment, child trafficking, poor socialization, neglect of children due to economic demand and the little or no parental teaching on ethics, it can be said that the identified contemporary social problems will compromise a sustainable future if they are not addressed. Without doubt, Darko, like other African writers has contributed to the pursuit of a desirable society by advocating against social problems and providing and echoing existing solutions for the development in Africa and beyond.

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