

Sex Slavery and Exploitation of Women in Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*

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Abstract

In a patriarchal society, women are faced with all sorts of dehumanisation ranging from deprivation, negligence, maltreatment, marginalisation, oppression, subjugation, exploitation, humiliation and even isolation, all of which emanate from aspects of the people's culture. As a result, women now cry out for such aspects of the culture that undermine their well being and emancipation to be eradicated. They, therefore, struggle for equality and emancipation in the male dominated society, especially the African society under study here. In fact, in the African society, women are seen as mere tools of necessity-housewives, child bearers, gratifiers of men's sexual passion; and worst of all, not consulted in the decision making processes in their communities. The women as wives are expected to be submissive, obedient, unquestioning and servile while any challenge to these attributes attracts social disfavour. So the clearly defined roles for women are passed on to the girl-child as she grows. Data for this study is from two main source, primary and secondary sources. The novel under study is the primary sources, while library texts, journals, scholarly articles, the internet are the secondary sources. The theoretical framework for the study is feminism. The novelist wants the men to reconsider their negative notions about women and to also appreciate their contributions in the well-being of their societies, their families and the upbringing of the children.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Exploitation, Disillusionment, Sexuality, Dehumanization

Introduction

The greatest achievement of the novel lies in the novelist's ability to move beyond mere exposition of the social crimes against humanity to powerfully demonstrate through the lives of the main characters the ways out of the degradation these humans find themselves. Of course, women all over the world are clamouring to be liberated from all forms of discrimination so as to enable them fit into the society, just as their male counterparts. The notion mostly among the female folks is that the women have contributed immensely in various aspects of human development and sustenance. Unfortunately, in most societies and cultures, women are enslaved, subjugated, humiliated and dehumanised. The origin of this distorted view of the women can even be traced back to the ancient times. Even Aristotle in his *Poetics* as quoted in Maduka argued that “women were not full human beings and that the nature of women were not that of a full

human person (184). His view was that women by nature were deficient, not to be trusted and to be looked down upon. It is a universal phenomenon that women are not given equal rights with men and this led to their being subjected to many inhuman treatments in the society. Women are made to play the second fiddle—inferior role—in the society: in the family, in social gatherings, in politics and in national issues and these gave birth to feminism—women's movement for liberation and equality.

Feminism is a belief in the rights of women to have political, social and economic equality with men. It is a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies, which are concerned with the issue of gender differences, advocate equality for women and campaign for women rights and interests, which will emancipate them.

Nanda says:

The modern feminist movement stems from the

middle of the 1960s, in North America. At the root, this movement seeks equal political and social rights for women as compared with men. The main common theoretical assumption which gets shared by all branches of the movement has been that there has been a historical tradition of male exploitation of women, stemming originally from the sexual differences which led to division of labour, for example, in childrearing practices (212).

Heywood Christopher in his own contribution sees feminism as “an ideology that is inevitably linked to the women’s movement and an alternative to advance the social role of women,” (238), that as such:

it is associated with two basic

beliefs: those women are disadvantaged because of their sex, and that this disadvantage can and should be overturned. In this way, feminists argue that there is a political relationship between the sexes, the supremacy of men and the subjugation of women in most, if not all, societies (238).

From the above, one can deduce that these writers dwell much on the plights of women, both the young and old, and the desire for liberation from their limitations. The female writers in their works do not carry it to the extreme; they only request certain basic rights such as the right to education, the right to choose their husbands, the right to contribute to the social, political and economic development and advancement of their societies; instead of performing the roles of housewives, house helps, mothers,

prostitutes and traders. It is worthy of note that female writers like Ngozi Chuma- Udeh do not revolt against the men but against certain social laws and cultural norms that have denied women their inalienable rights.

Thus, emancipation of women, a theory which undermines patriarchy, is also the struggle for sexual equality which has a long history and is likely to continue for some time; even if it should soon be out in the industrialised nations, it may well rage on in many “underdeveloped countries.” It was on this fact that Goldman asserts that “a woman is confronted with the necessity of emancipating herself from emancipation if she really desires to be free.” That in this world, if a woman is to be free to direct her own destiny and aims, certainly she should be worthy of the great enthusiasm, courage, perseverance and ceaseless efforts of the tremendous hosts of pioneer man and woman, who staked everything against a world of prejudice and ignorance. Goldman

further says that: emancipation should make it possible for women to be human in the truest sense. That everything within her that creates assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression, all artificial barriers should be broken and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission to slavery (20).

This was the original aim of the movement for women’s emancipation. This emancipation of women comes up as a result of women not being allowed to contribute in the society. Then, they do not vote let alone being voted for. In traditional patriarchal societies, women have far-reaching consequences and produce fundamental political changes. But, it is always resisted by the established power. However, it seems certain that this power will ultimately have to relent because the emancipation of women is both necessary and desirable. It will provide for a greater degree of social justice and, thus, benefit everyone.

The intention in this paper, therefore, is to explore how sexual exploitation has negatively affected the emancipation of women as portrayed in Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*.

The theoretical framework for this study is Feminism. The ideas of feminism have catered effectively to the movement of women for social, political and educational emancipation of women and their equality with men. Such and similar movements have been rightly termed as feminist criticism. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines feminism as: "the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes. It is an organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests" (456).

According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, "Feminism is the belief that women should have economic, political and social equality with men" (71). It is an organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. Cynthia Cockburn in her work *In the Way of*

Women says that:

The story of modern feminism began with the American Revolution in 1784 which embodies the aspirations for equality, liberty and fraternity, shaking the old feudal and monarchical order. She further states that the first feminist document was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 in which she opposed men (15).

This phenomenon of girl – child humiliation has become one of the most widely discussed social tragedies of our time. We are witnesses to a deluge of talks about the plight of these children, from newspaper articles, to radio talk shows, television documentaries and elegant academic discussions. Many well funded, well attended workshops and conferences have been convened on the

subject, Even government claims to be doing its very best to tackle the problem, yet in spite of all these well publicized efforts; the problem not only persists but seems to be getting more and more intractable.

Since then there have been various movements differing in creed, in their traditional roles and in their different societies. Some have been quite active and powerful in achieving recognition in their fight towards the emancipation of women while others have remained gagged-and chained. Hence to Ruth Sheila in her work *Issues in Feminism*:

...the term feminism was first used by Alexander Dumas (The younger) in 1876 in pamphlet *FHomme femm* (The woman or a man like woman) That it came into being in the 19th century which indicates that woman had always agitated for their

rights (4)

In African society, women are not given the same rights as the men. This brought about problems arising and caused this movement and revolt against the men. The African female writers now use their works to air their views. Feminism believes in the social, political and economic equality of all sexes. As a dominant theme in the African society, female are often thought of as lower and nearly as important. As a result of this, African female writers revolt against such dehumanizing order. Their aim is to free the African woman from the bondage of patriarchy. This concept of patriarchy shall be explored in the texts under study to highlight how women are being humiliated and undermined in our society.

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The novel explores varied and complex themes such as domestic terrorism/violence

love, fear, hopelessness, freedom, prostitution, materialism, lack of parental care, marriage, dictatorship and brutality. The novel serves as a warning note to young girls whose broken parental background and quest for liberty blind their sense of morality and values. It also comments on the selfish and materialistic nature of parents who pursue wealth to the detriment of their children's well being. The novel revolves around a young girl named *Tamara*, who is also the heroine.

In this novel *Tamara* the author exposed the fate of a female child, who was not given the necessary attention she needs as she was growing up and how it marred her future. Domestic violence is "the inflicting of physical injury by one family or household member on another; also: a repeated/habitual pattern of such behavior". Domestic violence is now more broadly defined to include "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence" that may be committed

by a person that has been an intimate partner or spouse, irrespective of whether they lived together. In *Tamara* there is a lot of domestic violence which is woven around Tamara the protagonist, and her household.

This domestic violence had a psychological effect on them .The mother's sanity was affected. Tamara and his brother cannot associate as siblings should do hence the entire family is placed in isolation where no one communicates with another. This state of things in the family was caused by Tamara's father. The incidence of domestic violence started between Tamara and her father began immediately when she was born. Her father did not pay enough attention to her. On the day he heard that his wife has been delivered of a baby, he hurriedly rushed into the hospital to see her and took her in his hands for few minutes and then hurried away to his business. Tamara says thus: "... She said you took me in your arms showed me the world and hurriedly dropped me on my bed. She

said that was the last time you touched me for years as a child” (18).

Another time was during her primary school days when she took first position she, as a child had been practicing on how to announce the goodness to her father who she expects to carry her, praise her and promise her something for the result but when she entered the father's room and saw the expression look on his face. She could not deliver her goodness to him in the manner she planned.

Tamara says:

I met you on the sofa glancing ceaselessly at the papers... when you saw me, your expression alone terrified me and I lost my bearing. I knew every thing was lost. "What the hell are you doing at the time of the night? You thundered and I shivered. "Dad... Daddy... I... I... wanted... wanted to show... you my report... report" I almost burst into tears. "What about your report card"?

Speak before I skin you alive". "I ... I... I... I..." I was lost. The words refused to come forth, all my rehearsals flew away with the stern look in your eyes and anger in your voice. Thank God mother came to my rescue. "Woman, what is wrong with your daughter"? "It is her report card". "What about it"? "She is only trying to tell you that she took the first position...?" (20).

Coming to the aspect of Tamara's father and his wife, Tamara narrated what took place one evening when her mother thought that her husband was not coming home so she called her and her brother Kizito to tell them stories, and as the story was going on her husband came in and started shouting at her for allowing the children to be awake by that time of the night. According to Tamara, her mother could not answer immediately rather she stammered which means her mother is also afraid of her husband. Tamara reports;

Woman, what's the meaning of this? Speak now or forever speak no more!" You were shivering as your temper was gradually reaching your elastic limit... I was not expecting you, "she had told you. "Why will you or am I no longer welcomed in my own house? Obviously you were not expecting me, that is why such nonsense goes on in my house? That is why you incite the children to go against my wishes and disregard the timetable I made for them? (31).

Tamara says that "That was the last time we stayed together as a family and listened to my mother's endless stories" (31). The family became isolated with each other on his own, even the Sunday their father took them out they did not talk with each other till

the came back:

We sat for over two hours on a table for four but said nothing to one another. We only sat around cracking bones drinking juice and wallowing in our individual thoughts. I knew that wounded my mother the more... we were broken to pieces. Like prisoners without handcuffs, we climbed into the back of the jeep. The same silence that brought out us drove us back" (34).

This isolation in her family affected her mother's sanity and after some weeks she died. The fate affected her children very well, Kizito left the house and did not come back again. It was domestic violence that caused Tamara to lose her virginity at an earlier stage in life, her father's lack of attention and negligence in pursuit of his business made

her leave his only daughter in the hands of her driver Dunga. Dunga used the opportunity before him to exploit Tamara sexually. Tamara being a child that lacks fatherly love, seeks for love in the hands of her driver, Dunga. She confides in him, seeks his advice and comfort without knowing what the result will be. Tamara thinking that she had seen love does not know that she had been introduced to what will mar her future and so when Dunga was arrested and sent away. She blamed her father for allowing Dunga to do what he did. She say;

He took ones left in my vein,
the ones he brought and the
one I used to know. In broad
day light he vanished with my
life, my future, my happiness,
my joy every thing went away
with him and it was you who
made it possible" (76).

Besides, denial of freedom is another act of domestic violence on the side of Tamara.

Every matured person is permitted by the law of the country to freedom of association and expression but to an extent. In the case of Tamara, she was not permitted to do anything on her own except on rules and regulation that made her to fall in love wrongly again to Obed who is the opposite of her. She accepted Obed because she longs to be free like him and because she needs companion:

I did not think twice before I accepted his proposal. I never had time nor paused to find out if what I had for him was love, I just went on with it. I had no time to discover his background. It was not that necessary to me. I didn't care about his past, only the future made sense to me. I didn't matter who he was, where he came from, all that mattered was how he was sent to me, an answer to my prayers. I was comfortable with all his lies... for Mr. Ignatius... he granted me my own freedom (85).

Tamara's relationship with Obed resulted into an unwanted pregnancy which Senorita helped her to abort. She was sexually exploited and abandoned. Another issue in

this novel is of prostitution. On leaving the country with Senorita, Tamara was pushed into the world of prostitution where she became addicted to sex and became a professional in the act. On Tamara's arrival to Spain, the first thing she saw when she and other girls were led into the compound was the positions of some girls at the gate which passed a message to her but she refused to accept it.

Many of the girls were almost naked, with strings and clothes tied all around their private parts. I could see that clearly even from a distance I could see the cleavages and the curvatures of their bodies. They were almost naked yet they sauntered round with reckless abandon smoking garishly as if that day was pronounced their last day, I saw their private parts shared clean. (107).

The night of their arrival, a white man (Bruce) was sent to have sex with Tamara but she fought hard with him and after that, it dawned on her that she came to Spain for prostitution. She cried to be sent back to Nigeria but senorita told her that it is not

possible again rather she should accept it and work for her freedom which will take her a year or two depending on how she works. This is a clear case of female trafficking for sexual exploitation.

I cried and cried, senorita could not console me. She left me knowing that I would calm down. In the end she was right. "So I will become a prostitute"? "I am sorry, you have no choice". "How long will it take me to work out my freedom. "Perhaps two years or more, it depends on your speed and marketability, but I am not afraid of that, you are a young beautiful girl, men will queue up for you. And if that happens, let's say two years or so you will be free" (116).

Tamara narrates to her father how she accepted the business and the improvement so far. She says;

Father, that was how I became one of them. That night I took my first man. His name was Zambrotta. He was Spanish.

After him I took another that I cannot remember his name. I waited for Bruce. I know he would come and at last he did. He came with hatred but I melt it. I pleaded and he pardoned me. He did not fuck me hard like he threatened. It was almost close to lovemaking and he had a nice time. He continued to patronize me and often paid me more than the necessary fare. Father, all these were when I was still an amateur. Before I was twenty, I became an expert prostitute. I was often selected for outside jobs to sleep with prime ministers, politicians and rich business tycoons. Often I carried Nigerian and some African, but my clients were mostly whites, Spaniards and Italians top the table (117).

Tamara became a professional prostitute that she proudly told her father,

My profit continued to rise each day. I could now carry over fifteen men a day. My

best day was the day I carried twenty one and princess rewarded me for it... There could hardly be a day did not carry up to eight men my worst day was the day I had only two and I could not sleep" (118).

Tamara finally gains her freedom, but refused to leave the business rather she planned on how to sustain it. She says;

When I began to grow old, I would recruit other girls just like I was recruited to sustain my business. Father, I finished my degree in prostitution. I was running my masters programme and would have finished up to PhD level and become professor of prostitution from a prestigious county like Italy, if not for Carlos Baggio" (119).

Tamara told the reader the first lady who motivated her on the prostitution business her name was Aisha. Aisha is a drug addict who after taking drugs could carry over thirty men a day. Tamara was able to carry over twenty

men a day because she took in to taking drugs as well. This led to her kidney problem and one of her kidneys was removed. Some weeks after the operation, she was back again to her business but it was not very good as she were before she says;

They were my worst days as a prostitute, no father, as a commercial sex worker, a professional at that sounds better, right? But in a few months' time, I defied the doctor's instruction and resumed my work. I started from just three men a day to five. When nothing happened to me and no more pains anywhere. I extended the number to ten. In a matter of time I settled again into full business... Against the hospital's advice, I continued to take hard drinks and smoke my cocaine, but those were only at special moments when I could not help it. I needed them so much in order to be fit in my business and deals (130).

Tamara made a lot of money through her

prostitution business but she had only a short time to live because she had cancer and she was expecting a baby. She gave birth to a baby girl but she could not survive the cancer disease. So, all the money she made was shifted to her husband Carlos and her daughter Tamara.

In fact, Tamara was so proud of her achievements as a prostitute that she boasts about it but the only challenges she told her father she had which was also a sign of her achievement was that any man she sleeps with always comes back for her. She even used the opportunity to double her price. She says;

Father, I had this problem, all the men that sleep with me always came back.... I was scared, not as a result of the amount of jealousy it created but, I was afraid of my own survival. The men were beginning to suffocate me.

Imagine all the men I have carried coming back to me and the piles of new ones waiting. Even when I increased my charge, that seemed to make me more costly and unique and it increased their numbers (125).

Tamara saw herself as the only Nigerian girl who broke the record in Italy or even in the whole world when it came to prostitution "she says;

I broke every old record and set new ones in a question of two years and little wonder what I would have achieved if I had continued it was a record anyone will be at the very point of death to break I did what Lionel Messi did for world football to world's prostitution in Italy. It is not making mouth. My record is there and I beat my chest that I did it! Tamara, the only

Nigerian girl! (125).

As an expert prostitute she was, she narrated some hints on how she treats her clients. She says;

I made my money no doubt, but unlike others I tried as much as I could to satisfy them, my clients, pampering each man, understanding his sexual psychology and giving him time to come around with enough stimulation I have mastered over the years. I took care of them and gave them something worth their money. Many often kept shouting, "I love you!, you're the best I sweet! Kill me!" (126).

Prostitution is never a good business that one should involve in but Tamara saw it as a very nice business which made her see that her clients get satisfaction with their money. As a business woman each time she did not satisfy them very well she often felt unsatisfied. She says; "I had difficulties trying to satisfy the list of my customers in one day and that always left me with feelings of emptiness and unsatisfaction" (126).

Tamara's prostitution got to the level that she is been booked in advanced for a business trip and the men are not shaken by her demand because she satisfied them very, well.

Conclusion

Women, as we often see, are not fighting for equal rights but only equal opportunities. The novelist explores the theme of gender oppression as a scourge that has its source in traditional beliefs, religion and politics. This study feels that the problem is that these aspects of society have been structured and solidified by patriarchy to marginalise and silence women who constitute a half of the human population.

This study, therefore, enjoins the writer in crying out that women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed by promises. This is because women are the nation's primary, fundamental roots, from which all else grows and blossoms. The significance and appropriateness of the choice of this novel for this study thus lies in the observation here that it entails a new definition of women's roles and position as forces of tradition and modernity impinge on black women's consciousness in contemporary society.

Asika in his work *Tamara* explored the impact of domestic violence and prostitution woven around the main character, Tamara. She is a girl that is full with promising future as some girls of her type but due to the kind of father she had, her future was ruined. She encountered a lot of domestic violence from her loved ones which pushed her into the act of prostitution. Asika was able to use the story to pass across a message to the wider society. He tries to make people know that violence can be found everywhere including in the home and he also aimed to use his novel to correct this ill in our society by making parents to beware and take caution. The novel *Tamara* principally deals with some social and moral issues which are woven around families in societies. The novelist aims at exposing those factors that are responsible for disintegrating the family and so affect society negatively. He presents characters whose words and actions represent the image of people in contemporary Nigerian society. This simply means that he is concerned with practical issues that affect society and not merely the aesthetic qualities of his work. `Asika is of the view that the loss of moral values such as get rich quick syndrome, selfish desires , prostitution, and endless search for freedom

are responsible for the decline of moral values in contemporary society. The author blames the parents for failing in different ways, especially in performing their roles as parents. He presents characters that are morally depraved and marked by the absence of virtues. The consequences of their actions however result in a huge tragedy that ruins their lives, family and future. In creating fictional characters like *Senorita*, Tamara Tamara's father and Kizito, Asika explicitly exposes the reality of human experiences in order to educate and expose the readers on the consequences of these characters' actions and decisions. He presents varied human experiences in order to create moral awareness as well as expose some societal problems for better society. To achieve this task, Asika presents the fictional story of Tamara, a young girl, who is lured into prostitution as she searches for moral support, love and freedom which are absent in her immediate family. Her father's attitude subjects her to emotional torture and sends her in an endless search for freedom. In search of love, she loses her virginity to Dungan, their family driver at the age of sixteen. The same quest pushes her to have sexual relationship with Obed which results in an unwanted pregnancy. Tamara's broken home creates a vacuum for

an outsider (*Senorita*) who lures her into prostitution. She becomes addicted to hard drugs and alcoholic drinks, in order to boost her sex drive. Her dreams are shattered when the doctor reveals that her kidneys have been badly damaged as a result of cancer. Though Tamara marries Carlos, and gives birth to a baby girl; her future, hope and dreams are marred by her past life style. She only remembers her lonely childhood and blames her father for her mistakes. It is thus important to note that Tamara's actions and experiences lead to her tragic end. She only stays in her sick bed waiting for death to strike. The characters in Tamara are thus employed in order to condemn social vices such as excessive materialism, prostitution and sex trafficking. Tamara, does not only highlight social values inherent in African societies, but presents such values that contribute to the formation of human personality. Characters like Tamara and *Senorita* serve as reference points in creating moral awareness, which contribute to shaping the moral behaviour of the readers. The story of Tamara reflects the experiences of young girls in African societies. In Africa and other parts of the world, sex-trafficking and prostitution have become common issues that debase and dehumanize womanhood.

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