



Subverting the Patriarchal Narrative of the Female Character in the African Novel: A Feminist Reading of Amma Darko's Novels

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Abstract: The paper re-examines feminist issues that are prevalent in the African literary discourse. Many feminist writers have on several occasions alleged lack of adequate, positive, active and credible roles in the male-dominated literary space in Africa. They contend that women have been relegated to the background for too long in African societies. Besides, women having found their voice back through the instrumentality of literature are now fighting back with all the weapons at their disposal. The paper holds that feminist writers, especially female writers are also guilty of the same misrepresentation which they accuse male writers of. The paper finds out that the female writers see nothing good in any of their male characters. The paper, therefore, contends that female writers are simply trying to whip up sentiments, recreating and reconstructing the gender questions and narratives to their advantage. The paper submits that the gender war and issues remain open in the African literary discourse.

1. Introduction

Feminism is the doctrine which declares that social, political, and economic rights for women should be the same as those for men. Feminism is a movement advocating equality of rights between men and women. According to Emenyonu:

Feminism is a pro-women movement that evolved in the west and America as a part of the women's liberation movement. As a critical perspective, feminist scholarship both originates and

participates in the larger efforts of feminism to liberate women from structures that have marginalized them; and as such it seeks not only to interpret, but to change the world in favour of women. (*Goatskin Bags*: 28).

Feminism as a social movement has grown and spread its wings beyond the frontiers of the Western World. Feminism started in the 18th century with the publication of a number of books. The first feminist book was

written in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft, entitled *A Vindication on the Rights of Women*. In 1845, Margaret Fuller wrote *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In 1869, John Stuart Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women*. Today, Feminism has given birth to a branch of literary criticism called “feminist criticism”. Feminist criticism seeks to evaluate the depictions of women in works written by men as well as women. It also seeks to correct the stereotype roles given to women in works written by men.

As a distinctive and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until the late 1960s. Much of feminist literary criticism continues in our time to be interrelated with the movement by political feminists for social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality. (Abrams 110)

An important precursor of feminist criticism is Virginia Woolf, who, in addition to her fiction, wrote *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and numerous other essays on women authors and on the cultural, economic, and educational disabilities of women within what she called a ‘patriarchal’ society, dominated by men that have hindered or prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities. A much more radical critical mode, sometimes called “second-wave feminism” was launched in France by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), a wide –ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object or “Other”, to men as the dominating “subject” who represent humanity in general; the book also dealt with “the great collective myths” of women in the works of many male writers.

Feminism differs according to cultures; the scope of feminism in the West is different from the African concept of feminism. But one thing that links them all together is the fact that their goals are the same, which is to correct the stereotype representations in works written by men as well as their struggle for equality with men. African feminism is quite different. Most African women do not want to be called feminists because of the way men view it and because Africa is indeed a rigid patriarchal society. As noted in Emenyonu quoted by Chukwuma:

In Africa, feminism is a Western importation that came with Western education and awareness. Like its Western counterpart, the feminism Africa has inherited strives for gender equality and operates on the belief that ‘anything a man can do, a woman can do better’... it is a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition (Chukwuma 1994: ix, 1989: vii).

African feminism also seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing being, while it rejects stereotypes of women that deny her a positive identity. In respect to feminism, a lot is discussed in African literature, such as: the representation and misrepresentation of women in literary texts; the education of women; the access of women to the economic means of survival; motherhood; women in the domestic sphere; women as part of their communities; women’s role in politics and revolution; sexuality; and the direct treatment of women by men, and men by women. Underlying this array of specific interests are questions of gender in representation and of the

reality or realities of life for women in Africa- past, present and future. All these offer much for the consideration of feminist thought with respect to African literatures. African writers and feminists have written a lot on the issue of gender inequality and misrepresentation, writers such as Buch Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Chimamanda Adichie, Ama Aita Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Amma Darko to mention just a few.

Amma Darko, a Ghanaian writer and feminist, has through her eagle eye portrayed the injustice of patriarchy and marginalization of women in Ghana in particular and Africa in general. This work is thus an analysis of the feminist issues raised in Darko's *The House Maid* and *Beyond the Horizon*.

2. Feminism and Feminist Criticism

Feminism directly concerns itself with contemporary agitation by women for social, economic, political and cultural equality with their male counterparts. Unlike Marxism, however, feminism has no body of traditional reference materials which can serve as guidelines for its practitioners. While feminism has to do with the struggle for equality with men and for equal representation in society; it is also against male-established institutions such as cultural and traditional institutions which are constructed and designed to favour men and hoodwink women. Feminist criticism looks at these representations in literary works including those written by men and women. The major problem of feminist criticism is its lack of a properly articulated theory. According to a foremost feminist Elaine Showalter:

The absence of clearly articulated theory makes feminist criticism

perpetually vulnerable to attacks and not even feminist critics seem to agree (sic) what it is that they mean to profess and defend (Rylance 23).

Elaine Showalter is equally against the works accepted as universal when in fact what those works depict are simply limited to male perceptions. She says: "too many literary abstractions which claim to be universal have in fact described only male perceptions, experiences and options, and have falsified the social and personal contexts in which literature is produced and consumed (Showalter 37)."

In her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics", Showalter insists that a clearly articulated feminist literary theory is necessary against male ignorance, biases and prejudices: against those who, like Robert Partlow, often insist that "Feminist criticism will naturally be obsessed with phallus" or those like Robert Boyers who argue that feminist criticism suffers from lack of "intellectual candour and some degree of precision" (Rylance 25).

First inaugurated in the sixties, feminist criticism proceeds from the assumption that "the history of all societies is the history of patriarchy, of male domination and exploitation of women"; a situation which they claim has hindered the actualization of women's possibilities and potentials in all fields of human endeavour. Indeed, as it is often argued, women over the time have come to be defined as the negation of man, the human norm whose characteristics include: intelligence, rationalism, adventure and creativity; and that precisely in accordance with Frantz Fanon's concept of self-fulfilling

prophecy, women themselves have, in the process of socialization come to accept their own denigration as true and natural. Women have over the years submitted to the concept of male superiority and eventually agreed to participate in their own subordination. Against this background, feminism insists that there is nothing natural in the whole question of gender, that what constitutes femininity or otherwise is nothing other than cultural constructs which have been cleverly erected by male hegemonists of different societies and ages.

Feminists believe and hold firmly that literature represents a very strong infrastructural support of this patriarchal ideology:

Typically, the most highly regarded literary works focus on male protagonists... who embody masculine traits and ways of feeling and pursue masculine interests in specifically masculine fields of action: to these, the female characters when they play a role, are marginal and subordinate, and are represented as complementary, or else in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. Such works, lacking autonomous female role models, and implicitly addressed to male readers, either leave the woman reader as an alien outsider or else solicit her to identify against herself by assuming male values and ways of perceiving. (Abrams, 209).

Elaine Showalter argues about men's works:

If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced,

but only what men have thought women should be. (Rylance 238).

It is from the above argument of men dominating the literary scene and offering opinions from male perspectives that Elaine Showalter came up with the concept of "Gynocritics" which concerns itself with the analysis of the works of individual female authors: "Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture." (238)

According to Showalter quoted by Rylance, "The task of Feminist Critics "... is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our skepticism and our vision. This enterprise should not be confined to women" (Rylance 246).

3. African Feminism

African feminism respects African woman's self-reliance and the penchant for co-operative work and social organization but rejects the "muledom" that has been the lot of African women. It also looks at traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women, accepts an international feminism and a global sisterhood proposed by the international women's movement but rejects the European and American models of feminism such as lesbianism, violent confrontation, militancy and aggression, as is evident in their writing.

According to Emenyonu, African feminism is "assertive and individualistic breaking away from the norm and presenting a more balanced

and plausible picture of the African female character” (28). African feminists have become more assertive and have taken a stand against male treatment of women in literary works. They have collectively condemned the female image and depictions in male-created texts as not only subordinating but false. They have reacted against male treatment of women like in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1958), Okonkwo beating his wife Ekwefi, and the treatment of women as tools for pleasure in Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine*.

Feminist criticism arose out of the need to reassess the limited and most times degrading depictions of females in male-created and oriented fictional works. Women and especially, African women after many years of silence have eventually found their voices and are speaking out against these denigrations, hence, the quest for equality.

In “Representations of the Womanist Discourse in the Short Fiction of Akachi Ezigbo and Chinwe Okechukwu”, Ijeoma Nwajiaku writes:

Auspiciously, the enhanced need for self re-definition and self-evaluation has located the African female at crucial ideological spike. This assertion becomes even more credible when one considers the intensity, complexity and quality of the multifarious literary activities birthed in the last decade of the twentieth century. Indeed no preceding decade had witnessed a similar development (55).

As Kolawole puts it in her book; *Womanism and African Consciousness*:

They are deconstructing imperialistic images of the African, rejecting luminal and negative images of women that are prevalent

in African literature by men and they are reacting to mainstream western feminism. Having broken the yoke of voicelessness, these women are speaking out (1997:193).

The African woman on her road to self-actualization is not interested in battling with men neither is her preoccupations those of unhealthy rivalries and competition with men. The African woman is interested in self enhancement and of the restoration of the denigrated dignity of the African woman through patriarchy. The African woman is ready to be heard, to be seen and fitted in all positions previously occupied by men in order to assume equality in its entirety and not to be denied of anything because of her sex.

As Kolawole further observes:

The African woman seeks self-fulfillment within this plural cultural context. The average African woman is not a hater of men; nor does she seek to build a wall around her gender across which she throws ideological missiles. She desires self-respect, an active role, dynamic participation in all areas of social development, and dignity alongside the men (1997:36).

4. Female Writers and their Preoccupations

Female writers have increased in number and the quality of their works has improved tremendously over the years. At the time when pioneering female writers were writing their novels, it was imperative for them to re-examine and re-balance the position women occupy in the society dictated by men in the guise of tradition. Since these female writers were placed in the position of

responding to the distorted images of women created by men in their literary works, they were highly preoccupied with faithful portrayals of their visions. "Often departing from male fantasies and monolithic stereotypes, they have exploded myths about women through their realistic and in-depth exploration of their heroine's fictive lies" (Emenyonu 39).

Feminists have written and countered stereotypes in male oriented literary canons. In fact, in "The Female Writer and Her Commitment", Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie encourages women not to be apologetic but respond openly to false male depictions. She opines:

Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term "feminist" a bad name. Yet, nothing could be more feminist than the writings of these women writers, in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women in society (14).

5. Feminist Authors

Most female authors have come out boldly to embrace the task of being a feminist and precursor of female liberation in a patriarchal society. Such authors include: Adichie who asserts:

I am a feminist. I am a happy feminist. Women are marginalized and we need to right it. I have always said that sometimes it is the women themselves who have been brainwashed to hold themselves down, and the only way we can get away from this is feminism. I think women should be educated on what it means to be a feminist, that we should help other women. I think my work is very feminist (Qtd. in Allwell 193).

In corroborating this stance, Iniobong I. Uko in her "Transcending the Margins: New Directions in Women's Writing" submits:

It is remarkable to note that contemporary African women writers are not only establishing the new woman who is free to love and express love; they also essentially surmount all sexist depictions and picturesque portrayals (93).

According to Femi Osofisan in Allwell:

The important factor is the gradual loosening of the habits of male patriarchy in our societies, which has led to a tremendous increase in female literacy. This access to better education has without dispute emboldened the female voices and promoted the birth of more female authors (Allwell 222).

For Ama Ata Aidoo, the main issue is the impossibility of fulfilling the multiplicity of task required from a wife. When a man marries, he gets:

- A sexual aid
- A wet-nurse and nursemaid for (his) children
- A listening post
- An economic and general consultant
- Field-hand and
- If (he is) that way inclined, a punch ball.

In her novel *Changes: A Love Story* (1993), Aidoo shows the impossibility of fulfilling all these roles through a comparison of two female characters. Opokuya is labeled a traditional woman who puts caring for the family first, fitting her career round this; Esi kicks against 'tradition' blatantly, prioritizing her career over traditional wifely duties. Yet neither woman finds her position satisfactory. Whilst Esi admires Opokuya's 'full wife role' Opokuya is

jealous of Esi's freedom of movement. Also in her play *Anowa*, the female protagonist Anowa determines that, to her, wifehood will be a conscious choice rather than a passive yielding to tradition. She chooses her own husband. By implication, Anowa emerges as a heroine within this category. She successfully withstands the forces that work against her vision of a society that allows individual choice in marriage, and condemns the interference of the supernatural in human activities, and advocates hard work and result-oriented life.

6. Critics on Darko

According to Juliana Daniels Ofofu (2013), Darko uses her fiction as a vehicle to cross-examine the complexities of the Ghanaian woman's life in relation to culture and gender. She further explains that Darko's novels are insights which capture her philosophical reflections on the plight of women and girls in contemporary Ghana. To Ofofu, Darko's novels provide important lenses through which we can better understand some of the core cultural contexts of feminist issues in contemporary Africa as a whole.

Felicia Annin (2013), justifies Darko's feminist presentation in *Housemaid* and *Beyond the Horizon*. She is of the opinion that Darko's literary contribution is geared towards fighting the imbalances that exist between the genders in Ghana. To her, these imbalances have further reduced women and girls who are in the poor and the needy bracket to social ghetto in Ghana. Though Annin's study is an overview of Darko's novels, she provides a great

approach and direction towards the understanding of Darko's fiction.

Umezurike Uchechukwu Peter (2015), takes a critical look at the issue of resistance in *Beyond the Horizon*. He interrogates female autonomy against the backdrop of established traditional and modern socio-cultural formations. His study highlights the actions of the female characters as rooted in the material practices of ideology which makes it rather impossible for them to reconstitute their agency, especially against the prevailing phallogocentric African culture in which they find themselves.

Philomena Yeboah (2012), traces the nature of the trials of motherhood and analyzes the causes and effects of the trials of motherhood on mothers and daughters. Her study argues that the trials of motherhood if not eliminated or at least be mortally attenuated, will result in daughters not wanting to emulate their mothers in the area of child-bearing. Daughters may want to elect not to bear children and become mothers in a system that circumscribes them instead of honouring them. Her study further highlights the strategies used by those mothers who are able to train good daughters irrespective of the challenges they face as mothers. She concludes that women can carve out dignified images of themselves through motherhood.

From the foregoing, we can deduce that the current study is remarkably a different approach from the existing studies which largely center on conflicts, motherhood and character portrayals. This study deals with the

subversion of male characters in Darko's novels.

Amma Darko, whose writing is the focus of this paper, is a rising feminist voice in Ghana. Darko, through her narrative postures and significations, exhibits strong anti-patriarchal tendencies and attempts to deconstruct and demolish the patriarchal status quo by reducing men both to worthless, irresponsible, physically grotesque images and to wicked husbands and fathers in order to engineer new social order in which women are in control of their common destiny. The result is that taken together, there is not a single man of honour in her novels. She creates female characters who are repositories of knowledge and wisdom and who act as commentators and counselors expressing the female view point, female counter forces based on group solidarity, and through authorial intrusion in terms of sympathy and empathy.

In *The House Maid*, she depicts a Ghanaian society where women have been maligned and oppressed. The first paragraph of the novel is very impressive:

In Ghana, if you come into the world a she, acquire the habit of praying. And master it. Because you will need it, desperately, as old age pursues you, and Mother Nature's hand approaches you with a wry smile, paint and brush at the ready, to daub you with wrinkles (1).

This portrays the oppression women go through in a patriarchal society. Old age is being associated with witchcraft; women are subordinate to men and have

ignorantly accepted the docile roles and position imposed on them by men.

Also, in the novel, when a dead baby is discovered in the bush, the men all have one voice; they blame the woman for abandoning her child, thus, describing women as witches capable of evil acts. When the dead baby attracts public attention, the comment of the driver is noteworthy. He says: "It has to be the woman. It is always the woman. Ah! Who committed the world's first sin" (8)?

Darko has a very sharp and keen eye in her observation of the evils committed against women by misogynists. Misogynists are men who regard women as evil creatures. They premise their argument on the fall of man in the Garden of Eden where Eve lured Adam to sin by giving him the forbidding fruit. Consequently, misogynists see women as the cause of their troubles and downfall, hence, their hatred for women. The truck pusher in the novel is of the opinion that when the woman is caught, "her womb should be removed, cut in two, and given to her to swallow by the count of three" (6).

Just as it is the case in a patriarchal society, the men in the novel are not interested in knowing the circumstances surrounding the abandonment and subsequent death of the child; they are just interested in the fact that a woman has further extended her witchcraft by abandoning her child in the bush.

Another issue which Darko raises in *The House Maid* is the fact that women are a problem to one another, thereby provoking the central problem of intra-gender conflict. The novel is a celebration of the different lives of

women in Ghana. Men are given peripheral roles that are of no great significance and inconsequential; this fact makes the novel more of an advice to women. She is against women indulging in meaningless and unhealthy competitions with one another. For instance, Tika who is Sekyiwa's daughter falls in love with Owuraku; they both write an exam which she fails but Owuraku does well and proceeds to the university to have his degree. Tika decides to give up on education and go into business. She learns from her mother's friend how to make good gain in business by sleeping with rich men and bankers to get loans. When she learns of Owuraku's girlfriend in the university, instead of her to settle issues with Owuraku, she regards the girl as her competitor; she indulges in lavishing more money and gifts on Owuraku to get his attention away from the girl. In her ignorance, she believes that her money was much more valuable than education. She says: "How can she even try to step into my shoe? What has she to offer Owuraku? Money is the power word. Not book."(24). However, her plans fail as Owuraku smartly avoids marrying her after he graduated from school.

Also, Darko stresses the issue threatening women solidarity. She emphasizes that women are problems to one another. If they can overcome their jealousies and rivalries amongst one another, they will be able to stand together in sisterhood to confront male domination and oppression. She buttresses this point in her novel when Tika decides to employ a house girl who would help her out with her chores. She

decides to choose a girl from her father's family as a way of making up for the wrongs her mother did to her late father. With the help of Teacher, she decides on the girl 'Efia' whose life would have been greatly upgraded in the city but for the greed and selfishness of her father, her grandmother and her mother Maame Amoakona. When Tika loses her womb to an abortion, Efia's parents and grandmother decide to use the opportunity to lay their hands on Tika's money. Efia's grandmother tells her that "the woman you are going to live with is a rich but wasted woman". She encourages Efia to get pregnant so they would convince Tika to adopt the child as her own, thereby making the child, the sole inheritor of Tika's wealth. She says:

Old and wrinkled as I am, when I bombard her with the volumes of tears I shall shed, she will need an iron heart to turn down my fervent plea to forgive my granddaughter. I will sob like a child, go down on my weak old knees and beg her to have mercy on us (47).

Thus, Efia, her mother and her grandmother plot against a fellow woman whose intention is only to give Efia a better life as payment for being her house help. However, their plans backfire as Tika smartly sees through their wicked plans and decides to play along with them. Efia is frustrated at the end, having got pregnant and blaming it on the infertile Nsorhwe who insists on a DNA test before he takes responsibility. Their plans fail and Efia steals a reasonable amount of money from Tika and escapes to an uncompleted building where she stays with her friend Akua. In her wretched

condition, she gives birth to a baby girl who dies immediately. Efia decides to go to the village to give the child a proper burial but the stench of the dead girl was unbearable for her and the passengers in the bus. She gets down with the excuse of going to ease herself, goes into the bush and abandons the baby there. She goes to Teacher to ask for forgiveness and to plead with Tika to forgive her after she confesses to her mother and grandmother's failed scheme to reap where they have not sown. Darko depicts this to advise women to keep away from unhealthy struggle and rivalry against one another which is fruitless. With solidarity they can help one another and better their lives just like the solidarity between Tika and Teacher, both of whom are successful in Accra.

Furthermore, Darko in her novel confronts and demolishes male dominance and exploitation. She revolts against patriarchy by reducing men to worthless, physically grotesque appearance and wicked husbands in order to engineer a social order in which women are in control of their common destiny. The result is that there is no single man of honour or admirable character in her novel.

For instance, in *The House Maid*, the men though given peripheral roles are all irresponsible and shameless. Attui, one of Tika's customers married two wives and has twelve children and two concubines, yet he is still a randy goat sleeping around with other women. He is proud of his many wives and yet he is shameless in his adulterous act. He says: "It is a great honour when a man dies

and in his obituary you read 'widows' (12).

Another trivial male character in the novel is Mr. Nsorhwe who is so ugly that one could not really stand his appearance. His wife marries him simply because he is rich and she wants financial security. Not only is he ugly, he cannot get a woman pregnant because he is sterile.

Another male character is Efia's father, Papa Kaawire, who is useless; the only thing he knows how to do well is to drink himself to stupor with "Akpeteshie". Another inconsequential male character is Efia's grandmother's husband who marries five wives and when he dies, Efia's grandmother does not cry for him. According to her, he dies leaving her with troubles and more troubles. She says that when she dies she will tell God to let her and her husband marry again, on the condition that she will be the husband and he can be the wife.

Another male character who symbolizes male exploitation against women is Owuraku, Tika's school lover on whom she lavishes money and gifts. Owuraku knows he is not going to marry Tika yet he accepts her gifts and money. When he graduates from school, Tika asks him when he will come and see her people to start marriage preparations which she offers to sponsor since Owuraku has no money. He refuses saying: "...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?" (24)

He avoids marrying her after calling her shameless, yet when he takes money

and gifts from her he does not see it as shameless to be sponsored by a woman. Darko favours the feminist ideology of the equality of the sexes. She portrays characters such as Tika and Efia's grandmother in their determination to assert their rights. After Tika fails her examinations and decides to go into business and to make it by asserting that her failure in life has ended with the examinations. She is a successful rich lady in Accra. She travels around the world and acquires wealth by all means possible, including using men to feed her fantasies or desires. She decides not to bear a child for Attui and goes for an abortion. She equally decides not to get married but to settle for lovers. She defies the African concept of motherhood. For her, motherhood and wifehood are not all that make a successful woman but rather money. Thus, she pursues wealth.

Efia's grandmother equally assumes equality with men. When they want to pour libation to the gods and Efia's mother Maame Amoakona goes to call her husband because she believes it is a man's duty, Efia's grandmother defies tradition and goes ahead to perform the libation ritual in place of Papa Kaawire whom she considers useless and irresponsible.

Male writers depict the rural woman as docile and never wanting a change and reacting against modernism. But the feminist Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, in her critical work, "The Female Writer and Her Commitment," says that:

The rural woman wants change and innovation. She wants power, wealth and status like the men. She wants to ride a car rather than walk; use plastics or metal instead

of calabashes; use a gas or electric stove instead of firewood, despite all our middle-class nostalgia for that past (34).

Darko agrees with Molara in her novel. She portrays village women such as Efia's mother and grandmother in their struggle for money. They hatch a plan to get Efia pregnant so that when Tika adopts Efia's child all her wealth would go to the child and eventually to them. Even when Efia's mother visits Tika, she feels so comfortable in the soft leather seats and bed and wishes that all would eventually come to them.

Darko also portrays women using the instrumentality of 'bottom power' to get what they want. She portrays Akua, the village girl from Kataso, who on her way to the city, does not have money for transport, yet, she stops a driver who tells her the fare and she says she has no money. The driver asks her if she will not pay. She unbuttons her blouse and shows him her breasts. They go to a secluded spot near the bush for quick sex after which the man takes her to Accra and drops her off. Also, both Tika and her mother use their body to get loans and pay off their debts. Even the girls who stay in the uncompleted buildings are also in the business of using their bodies as payment for whatever services they get. One of the girls whose name is not mentioned says to Akua and her friends: "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 (95)." Darko encourages women solidarity. For her, the most important thing for

women to do is to stand by one another since they have shared experiences. She portrays this through the solid relationship between Tika and Teacher whose bond became stronger as a result of their shared experiences. Thus, "Together, they laughed and cried; laughing and crying away their pain, their disappointment, their anger, their fear. And laughing with hope" (107).

While Darko's *The House Maid* is a novel about women solidarity, her first novel *Beyond the Horizon* is a revolt against patriarchy and the tradition that suppresses women. She dissects the issue of marriage and offers a way out. Gone are the days when marriage is for better, for worse; she urges women to join forces together and fight their common enemy: 'man'. In *Beyond the Horizon*, "man is the enemy, the exploiter and oppressor, the devil, etc". She portrays women as victims of exploitation, rape, abuse, abandonment, wickedness and battery. These women finally triumph through their solidarity with one another. Thus, her novel *Beyond the Horizon* is a celebration of female bonding and the breakdown of the male institution of slavery called marriage through perseverance, patience and long suffering.

In *Beyond the Horizon*, the story is told through the first person narrator: Mara who is also the heroine of the novel. Her experiences are rendered vividly to be a warning to women who may still be under the illusions created by men through their various machinations. Mara's experiences are such that anyone who reads them would not want to be such a woman. In the novel, Darko condemns marriage by arrangement; she

prefers women to decide whom they want to marry as against the traditional way of parents passing their girl children as possessions to any man who shows up and pays their dowry. This is the case of Mara and this sort of marriage is what eventually destroys her illusions as she learns her lessons the bitter way. She recounts how she was bought. She says: "but that was before I was given away to this man who paid two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin to my family, and took me off as his wife from my little African village, Naka, to him in the city (3)."

If she had a choice, or even a say in her marriage, perhaps she would not have married Akobi. Darko is against this sort of arrangement because to the men, a good man is that man who could afford the bride price in large amounts. And these possessions in the body of wives are in turn expected to 'Obey and worship' their husbands no matter what they do to them.

Also, Darko depicts the brutality and inhumane treatments these women receive at the hands of their husbands. They are subjected to different rounds of battery. Mara recounts her experiences with Akobi. Shortly after their marriage, she goes to the city with him and involuntarily takes up the job of throwing away dirt for Mama Kiosk, one of her neighbours, who in turn pays her with foodstuffs and vegetables. When Akobi learns of it he orders her to stop doing that and she obeys him and tells Mama Kiosk what her husband said. Mama Kiosk asks Akobi why he stopped his wife from helping her and

he denies any knowledge of it. That night, he goes home and beats up Mara. When she dares to ask him why, he gives her more slaps. According to her, he replies: “Shut up! He roared, landing me a slap on one cheek. I scurried into one corner and slumped on the floor, my burning face buried in my hands. I understood the world no more” (11).

Darko also portrays the exploitation women are subjected to at the hands of their husbands. Akobi knows very well that the woman he wants to marry is Comfort, but because of his low income, Comfort does not reciprocate his feelings; instead, she goes with ministers who have fleet of cars. Akobi maps out a plan on how to get Comfort by exploiting and abusing another woman. He marries Mara simply as a means to achieve his dreams of marrying Comfort someday.

The fact that most African wives are treated like house maids does not escape Darko’s attention. She portrays this through Mara who is more of a slave to Akobi than a wife. She recounts all she has to do:

So I started looking for work in addition to keeping home, earning foodstuffs with my rubbish dumping, serving him still to the full which meant still being the first to get up in the morning to make fire and warm water for him and stand by while he bathed, and of course also carrying the bucket of water daily to the bathroom for him in spite of my physical change. And I dared not ask questions or make demands (17).

Even when she gets pregnant and informs Akobi thinking he will be happy, she is taken aback by the

question which he greets her with: “And why did you get pregnant?”(17). She tries to press further and Akobi gives her four slaps and refuses to speak with her until after three days when he eventually tells her to get a proper job so she can take care of herself and her baby, that he has “more important plans” for his money, as if she did it alone, as if she got herself pregnant.

Akobi treats Mara as a sex object, not even one of pleasure but of disgust; he orders her in and out of his bed as he wishes. Mara recounts one of her experiences after she has been battered by Akobi in her pregnant state:

He was lying on the mattress, face up, looking thoughtfully at the ceiling when I entered. Cool, composed and authoritative, he indicated with a pat of his hand on the space beside him that I should lie down beside him. I did so, more out of apprehension of starting another fight than anything else. Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and layout my mat because he wanted to sleep alone (22).

Mara is an outright victim in a loveless marriage. Her parents, by marrying her off to a man she does not even know or love, had compromised her chances of happiness. She says: “I don’t know what it is to love a man. I never learnt it because I wasn’t taught. I never experienced it because I never got the chance to love before this marriage was arranged with Akobi” (86).

Darko further stresses the need for solidarity amongst women as the only way to achieve their goals and defeat

their common enemy. The city becomes easy and bearable for Mara through her relationship with Mama Kiosk. As she says: "Between Mama Kiosk and me now existed a mother-daughter relationship. I had grown to trust her and to talk openly with her about everything..."(23). Mama Kiosk takes good care of Mara and instructs her to be careful so her husband does not destroy her. She tells her to see red with her eyes, her way of telling Mara that men cannot be trusted. She says: "This your ministries man, he is not only a bad man and a bad husband, he has also got something inside his head. I only hope that he won't destroy you with it before you too start seeing red with your eyes like I do" (24).

Mara who does not know that things will get worse neglects the warning of Mama Kiosk. She eventually learns the bitter way. Akobi secures his visa to travel to Germany and he convinces Mara that he is going in search of greener pastures in order to give her a better life. Mara, the brainwashed illiterate that she is, believes him and in his absence works hard to make herself a better woman before Akobi returns. She learns how to sew and buys herself new clothes. Two years has gone yet she patiently awaits Akobi's return. Finally, she gets a letter from Akobi informing her of his plans to bring her to Germany to work and be with him; little did she know of the surprise that awaits her in Europe. When she gets to Europe, the reality of the situation dawns on her. She realizes that Akobi does not live up to their plans. At first, she endures the pain of living with Akobi and his German wife Gitte as Akobi's sister.

She gets a job as a maid for their white neighbours but unfortunately for her, she loses the job because illegal black employment is not allowed. At this point, Akobi decides it is time to let her know the real reason he brings her to Europe. Osey, Akobi's friend, plays a video tape for her in which she is naked and men of different colours take turns with her. She remembers the night Akobi takes her to a party and get her drunk. It is with this tape that Akobi and Osey blackmail her into prostitution. The worst is that the money she earns goes into Akobi's account or else the tape would go public. Mara, having been stripped of every sense of respect, pride and dignity, lives up to her reputation as a prostitute.

Moreover, Darko stresses the need for solidarity amongst women. It is through solidarity that Mara is eventually able to fight and defeat her enemy, Akobi. At the night club where she works, she meets Kaye, her manager's wife who advises her on what to do. She tells her that the money she is making through such means should be hers and not to the man who has ruined her life. Through Kaye, Mara contacts a detective who investigates Akobi and she realizes that Akobi is married to Comfort whom he brought to Germany a year after he left and of course before Mara. She learns too that Comfort does not work. Akobi takes care of her with the money Mara is earning. She also learns that Akobi has married Gitte just so he can get a permit to stay in Germany and that contrary to what Gitte thinks, he is not building any house for them in Africa. The only house he renovates is Comfort's father's house.

Mara feels sorry for Gitte who is a victim just like her. Akobi uses both of them to fulfill his dreams of marrying Comfort. Mara decides to undermine him, Akobi, after getting sufficient information from the detective. She sends a letter together with facts and evidence of Akobi's lies and infidelity to Gitte. Akobi is arrested and put away in prison while Mara finds a new pimp to work for through Kaye's help. She decides to work as a prostitute to earn a lot of money and better the lives of her sons in Africa.

She thanks Kaye for helping her and decides to pay her but Kaye refuses the money and says that her payment is "sisterhood solidarity". The novel, *Beyond the Horizon*, is indeed a celebration of solidarity amongst women and the deconstruction of the avowed feministic biases in female writings in Africa. It is considered the only way to defeat patriarchy and unfavourable institutions erected by men to subject women to their whims and caprices.

7. Conclusion

Feminism is an intellectual, ideological, and political movement that advocates equal rights between men and women. A lot of critical and literary works have been written on the issue of feminism.

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Women over the years have been maligned through various systems such as cultures and tradition in a patriarchal society. Now that they have an opportunity to be heard, these women are no longer silent. African feminism as an intellectual movement dwells on the issues that affect women in Africa. Through writers whose works have examined and re-assessed the roles women play in works written by men. Amma Darko, a Ghanaian novelist in her novels, *Beyond the Horizon* and *The House Maid*, urges women to stand together as that is the only way they can be happy and dismantle patriarchal biases in all its manifestations.

Her works portray the injustice against women in a patriarchal society and offers women a way out. Feminism manifests itself in various shades in African literature, especially in fiction written by women and some male feminists. The paper concludes that the impression of most female writers in Africa that nothing good can come out of men is further sustained in Darko's novels studied. Female writers are as chauvinistic in disposition and conception as their male counterpart who they often accuse of deliberate female misrepresentation.

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