

Amma Darko's Contribution in *Beyond the Horizon* to Contemporary Gender Portrayals

by

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Abstract

This paper tackles the critical issue of an African type of feminism through the novelist Amma Darko's depiction of her male characters using African cultural values and day-to-day realities in contemporary Ghana. The study reveals that African female writers like Amma Darko develop their own way of writing social and cultural constraints. It aims at rejecting the image depicted by African male writers and opens the floor to male characters portrayal as violent, selfish, and responsible for the women's social and economic hardship. Thus, we demonstrate how Amma Darko attempts to present her African male characters in *Beyond the Horizon* based on the ordeals of female characters in most patriarchal situations in Africa.

Keywords: African feminism, violence, struggle, patriarchy, resistance.

Introduction

Knowledgeable observers rightly and rightfully believe that early African fiction relegates female characters to a position of secondary importance. Indeed, African male authors purposely do not write accurately from female perspective or do not (re) present feminist ideals because they have a different view about female experience. As Achebe justifies the writing of *Things Fall Apart*, arguing that African pre-colonial history must be written by African people to avoid distortions (Booker, 1988: 65). The same reality can well be applied to women. Most of the time, life from the female point of view should be portrayed in literature by women authors, but male authors have also taken on the female perspective. While writing about women, it is possible that male writers describe female characters differently depending on gender, nationality, mood and culture. To set things right, African female intellectuals took to their pens to say what the different components of the traditional or contemporary African society look like from a female perspective, pinpointing the real role of African women in their community. Indeed, African women writers are “critical of the exploitation of women. African women explore what is useful and what is dangerous to them as women in traditional cultures” (Davies & Fido: 311)¹. It will be very difficult to contend that women have achieved full equality as their male counterparts in society. However, female writers like Amma Darko know feminist writers like themselves pursue a clear ambition: to close on female pioneers’ heels by disclosing the actual side of the masculine nature, and giving women’s perspective. The struggle for women liberation and the control of power requires the control of the mind from a female perspective.

In her first novel *Beyond the Horizon*, Amma Darko chooses her male characters’ names and roles purposely. Indeed, in the novel under scrutiny, male characters are seen, most of the time, as liars, mentally unstable, materialistic, pimps, tricky, cynical, sadistic, violent, villains, to name only a few traits specific to male characters. Darko portrays her male characters (black or white) with disgust and hatred. This paper aims to show how Amma Darko’s male characters are viewed in *Beyond the Horizon*. Half a century after ‘black feminism’, it is important to know how, somehow, Darko’s first novel fits into this literary movement to free the weaker sex from male domination. This paper is built around four pillars: definition of some key concepts, a brief survey of female characterisation in some African male fiction, a brief review of female characterisation in pioneering African female creative writing, and eventually male characters as seen through Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon*. This said, how do we define the key concepts?

Definition of Some Concepts

The definition of the concepts may allow the reader of this paper to have a relatively broad view of what ‘push’ African women writers on literary stage to have their voice heard by the whole world in the 1960. But since then, what happens to them? Do they cease the fight? Are they working underground? Or are they still writing to maintain the flame burning as President Kwame Nkrumah asked his fellow pan-Africanists?

Patriarchy

According to Harrap’s Chambers Compact Dictionary (2000), patriarchy is defined as a “social system in which a male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line.”² 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. In such a society, for instance, women are seen not heard. They live in the shadow of men from their maiden homes to their matrimonial homes; hence they are regarded as second class citizens.

Black Feminism

Writers and gender theorists agree that the experiences of African women are different from those of their Western counterparts. Moreover, even among African female writers, opinions diverge about how to tackle women’s gender issues in traditional and urban settings by an African woman writer born in Africa but living abroad, or born abroad and living in Africa, or born in Africa and has never been abroad or finally a white writer born and living in Africa. Among African scholars, there are different positions.

The common definition we have is that feminism is the woman’s freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex determined role, freedom from society’s oppression and restrictions, freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. It is important to separate African women’s struggle from their western counterparts. This feminism stands for African women south of the Sahara ideology, also called “Negro-feminism” or “African feminism” (hooks: 24)³

This form of criticism of African literature is belated firstly because the late arrival of African female writer on literary scene 1966⁴. To respond to the European literary critics who raised their voice to castigate the inappropriateness of this authentic ideology to the African context, the Marxist and feminist critic ‘Molara Ogundipe-Leslie opines that:

For those who say that feminism is not relevant to Africa, can they truthfully say that the African woman is all right in these areas of her being and therefore does not need an ideology that addresses her reality, hopefully and preferably, to ameliorate that reality? When they argue that feminism is foreign, are these opponents able to support the idea that African women or cultures did not have ideologies which propounded or theorized woman's being and provided avenues and channels for women's oppositions and resistance to injustice within their societies? (Ogundipe-Leslie Molar: 6)

Essentially, Molar establishes female writers as primarily concerned with issues related to women. Molar goes as far as applauding female writers such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta for their attempt to educate us about the woman's realm of experience. To back up Eisenstein in her "Difference Theory" there are social differences between men and women. According to her, even though men and women live in the same social group, live in different in different or separate cultural worlds and, as a result, they promote different ways of speaking, tackling and solving their problems (Uchida: 1992).

From childhood males and females are different in many ways, both physiologically and psychologically. This is supported by Eisenstein (1997) who claims "that women, in comparison to men, have better memory. Men are quite accurate in maintain a sense of direction but women are not. This is consistent with the claim that men tend to do better than women on visual-spatial tests and in mathematics."⁵

Pertinently, in another article featured in *Women in African Literature Today*, entitled "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa" and cited in "The generational link between Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko: A case study of their prose works by Emmanuel Tasun Tidorchibe, Katherine Frank "lambasts female authored works such as Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1983) and Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981) for focusing on women issues to the extreme, where they foster the notion that the solution to the woes of women is "a world without men: man is the enemy, the exploiter and oppressor."⁶

Gender Issues

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978), gender is "the state of being male or female" and in many languages it is the "system of dividing nouns and pronouns into different classes, often related to the sex of the persons and things denoted."⁷

The female gender often experiences inhumane acts such as girl-child discrimination, forced marriage, retention of a girl in her paternal family for procreation, widowhood practices, genital mutilation, rape and sexual abuse, wife battering, lack of right to inheritance, leadership discrimination, physical abuse, purdah, marginalization in education and employment opportunities etc (Bamgbose, 2010:108). Even in matriarchal culture, women are not excluded from these lashes of oppression. Opara (1987:10) observes that though the Ghanaian Akan woman is exempted from the patrilineal rules associated with descent and inheritance, unlike her Nigerian Igbo and Senegalese Wolof counterparts, she is nevertheless “weighed down by the Akan law of inheritance under the matrilineal system. Although, descent is traced through the mother, the woman lives patrilocally⁸.”

Resistance

It derives from the verb ‘to resist’ that is according to Chambers Harrap’s Dictionary “to refuse to comply with something, to stand firm”. To the same dictionary, resistance means “an act or the process of resisting, the ability or power to resist especially to which damage.” One understands here that female writers’ resistance is against the system (male-dominated society, or writing) that maintains them or rank them second-class, inferior, deft, dumb, but mere witness. For example, feminist critics rank Flora Nwapa’s novels as literature of resistance.

Talking of phallo-crazy, in her theorising about feminine subjectivity and representation in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, the French Woman Helene Cixous critiques the phallogocentric bias of history stating that the “entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason (...) a privileged alibi (...) one with the phallo-centric tradition” (p. 249). She also posits that, men in their writings have shaped Medusa to an image of hideous, ‘dangerous’, that readers must not explore or else be turned to stone by its impact (Cixous, ‘Sorties’ 68)⁹, though according to the female writer Medusa seems to be exactly the opposite.

Brief History of Female Characterization in African Male Fiction

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

Things Fall Apart is considered to be the first African writing ever to set the birth of African literature in English language though there were several important like Sol T. Plaatje’s *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), Peter Abrahams’ *Dark Testament* (1942), *Tell Freedom* (1954) and Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drunkard* (1952), *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), *The Brave African Huntress* (1958) before. If in the first novel, Achebe depicts African pre-colonial time, ways and system of governance, in his second and third novels, Achebe turns “his attention away from the past to diagnose and narrate the crisis of decolonization”¹⁰ (Gikandi, 9).

In *Things Fall Apart*, “masculine and feminine social identity and language patterns reflect a distinctly negative social attitude femininity, and associated with women weakness. This novel is also a testimony to the social attitudes towards gender. (Gikandi, 9)” For instance, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) Okonkwo slaughters a goat for one of his wives who has had three sons in a row. This non-verbal action proves the extent to which the male sex is welcome in African culture. By emphasizing the weakness of femininity and benefits of masculine behaviours, the Igbo people emphasize the gender stratification of their culture, ensure the continuation of patriarchy. It can be traced if the reader follows the trials and tribulations of Okonkwo, a hero whose tragic flaw includes the fact that "his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness (Gikandi, 9)." For Okonkwo, his father Unoka embodied the epitome of failure and weakness, that now grown up he does not want to be. Okonkwo was taunted as a child by other children when they called Unoka Agbala. Agbala could either mean a man who had taken no title, a pretty much worthless or "woman." Okonkwo hated anything weak or frail, and his descriptions of his ethnic group and the members of his family show that in Igbo society anything strong was likened to man and anything weak to woman.

The position of depicting anything weak and powerless as women as has also been revealed by Purwarno in *The Role of Women in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. For example she chooses some specific passages in the novel to illustrate his position, which are “After hearing of Nwoye's conversion to the Christianity, Okonkwo ponders how he, who is called "a flaming fire” could “have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate?” (108) On the other hand, he wishes his daughter Ezinma “were a boy” (122), and he thinks that “she should have been a boy” (44).

He favored her the most out of all of his children, yet "if Ezinma had been a boy [he] would have been happier." (46) After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo, who cannot understand why he is so distraught, asks himself, "When did you become a shivering old woman?" (45) When his fellows look as if they were not going to fight against the intruding missionaries, Okonkwo remembers the "days when men were men." (141)¹¹

According to Oriaku, Chinua Achebe attempts to recapture the strength of the African past hence the stress on macho heroism and masculinity. This male dominant approach is reflected in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). His *Things Fall Apart* famous for the macho image of the protagonist-Okonkwo leaves little room for the projection of feminine values. However, Achebe's novels merit is that they have a sense of realism, and that they were no fiction at all. As he himself has noted in an essay: “*The Novelist as a Teacher*” (1965; 1973: London), he recommends his African fellows to set free their pedagogical mind to help African society “regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.”¹²

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965)

Like the other male writers, Ngugi has started his career while African literature was trying to free itself from the European grip. His first writings were then marked by his modern education, his social environment dictated by male-oriented community. He gives no way to African women presence if it is not in the back yard, caring and feeding children, doing house chores, making bed for nightly 'sexual pleasure'. However, Ngugi's writing denounces female circumcision, and congratulates women's partaking in fights and revolts against colonial masters (Mau Mau revolts). It is normal that women have part in struggle within Kikuyu community because historically "the Kikuyu were descendants of nine daughters of a tribe"¹³. Surprisingly, no serious records mention women's perspective in the revolution for it was unfortunately men who wrote them.

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born* (1968) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1972)

In his first novel, Ayi Kwei Armah gives free way to his talent as one of Ghanaian literature pioneers. The precision here is the "Beautiful" instead of the conventional "beautiful". The author focuses on the perversion of the national idea first. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* confines the second fiddles to female characters like dependants, housewives, domestic helps, entertainers. Estella Koomson, Oyo, and Oyo's mother fall within the category of classical African female characters with subordinate parts in male-oriented fiction. This state of thing has been just slightly corrected in *Two Thousand Seasons* where according to Abena Busia there has been a gloom of hope that one of African male writers would reconsider their position, but unfortunately it has waned automatically after a season:

Throughout *Two Thousand Seasons* we see at crucial moments that it is the women upon whom salvation depends. In this text all the liberating actions are initiated by women. Only in this novel do we see women who initiate action and who have the power deeds to save the community (...) But as we have stated, the problem here is that these female figures are more often than not simply female voices, and as women, are unsexed.¹⁴

In the 19th century, African women south of the Sahara were socialised to fill specific roles in their society. However, it is important to note that these women, in the different social strata, did not necessarily view themselves as victimised or downtrodden. Women's roles in pre-colonial African society were often complementary to those of men, not equal. In that period, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana are made up primarily of patriarchal societies. In African community, anything strong is likened to men and anything weak to women. Husband is the head of the family. What happened when women writers have come on stage?

Brief History of Female Characterization in Female Pioneering Fiction

Generally speaking, feminist movements locate the oppression and subordination of African women, which is seen to be historically extremely common and widespread, in the patriarchal domination of women by men. (Fortier, 2002, p.108) In fact, they share the basic view that, western civilization is pervasively patriarchal and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic (Abrams, 1999: 234-5).

With the rise of feminism, African women began reconsidering their beliefs about patriarchy. They realized that the inferior position they long occupied in patriarchal societies is not at all naturally but socially or culturally programmed. That is, if man power is defined as redeeming manhood, then manhood is defined as the right to patriarchal heads of families like Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Then in this system, women are relegated to a marginal status. They therefore began pushing forward the idea that their biological constitution does not make them inferior to men and that the inferiority attributed to them is a mere patriarchal assumption rather than a scientific justification. African women should no longer accept this erroneous misrepresentation. The rise of artists, novelists, musicians comes thus to show the resurgence of female empowerment.

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966)

Flora Nwapa (Nigeria) was the first African woman to set writing in Anglophone world though Doris Lessing (Zimbabwe) published *The Grass is Singing* in 1950 and Nadine Gordimer (South Africa) *The lying Days* in 1953. Her first novel, *Efuru*, is written when African women were largely marginal in male writing with stereotypical roles of housewives, silent workers, child bearers, and pleasure suppliers. In responding to this quasi-fixed line of distorted portraits of African women as "baby-machines, and beasts of burden" (Gikandi, 397), Nwapa used her Igbo foremothers and oral traditional tales to rehabilitate African women. She rewrote African woman's story by dismantling the patriarchal myth of female inferiority and male superiority. In opposition to her male characters that are lazy, *Efuru* is good, intelligent, beautiful, and industrious. Nwapa uses her novels to initiate a proper sexual revolution, resistance that can give women control over their lives, and self-fulfilment outside marriage and even children. She pays tribute to the beautiful woman of the lake who can read women's heart and help them in dangerous predicament.

For Nwapa, it is essential to ‘turn loosed’, when love, respect and equality are absent in a marriage, whether full of gold and diamond. Women have to stay strong and not to accept to be subaltern to men at all. For example, Adizua was unable to afford Efuru’s bride price. But Efuru’s hard word enables him to pay. Unmistakably, Nwapa renders her female characters barren and infertile so as to empower them later by means of richness and intelligence. As if her novels were all autobiographical, in *One Is Enough*, Nwapa orders her female character, Amaka, to leave her marital household and settle alone as an important trader, industrious and “cash Madam”, to live to sexuality as a free woman; her autonomy and authority shall come after her non-attachment to male materials implanted to subordinate her. In her novels, Nwapa seems to show that African women’s conditions are shocking and critical while necessary related to their men’s.

Grace Ogot’s *The Promised Land* (1966)

In her first novel *The Promised Land*, Grace Ogot (Kenya) examines the anxiety around modern materialism brought by colonialism and represented by her male characters. She tries to place women at the forefront of nationalism and questions male fascination with the trappings of colonial modernity. She points at colonialism as the key element that brought moral confusion and decay in African societies.

Ogot presents her principal female character as source of African virtue and beauty. She finally presents African women’s “marginal status as a source of moral authority and depicts an obedient and traditional wife that subordinates a dictatorial and materialistic husband”¹⁵ as a good wife.

Ama Ata Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965)

Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana) writes about gender issues in a larger context of Ghana’s and Africa’s struggles against colonialism, neo-colonialism and other forms of oppression and exploitation. She turns her passionate critics against Ghana’s former colonial masters and demonstrates her storyteller abilities while she was still an undergraduate at the University of Ghana. The drama also centres on the importance of childbearing, and the problems of infertility in African society.

Aidoo’s *No Sweetness Here* (1970) confirms her capacity of one of the talented African writer using the past tales and shows the connection between sexual oppression and colonial domination. She then succeeds in delineating the particular confluence of forces that accelerated the marginalization of women in colonial African societies. The problems that usually emerge in a husband and wife relationship are materially based, the concern with both being: what will control who materially.

In *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1979), Aidoo sets free her revengeful writings against patriarchal dominance in Ghana and depicts the maturation of a young and educated Ghanaian woman who travels to Germany, a horrifying “heart of whiteness” as a reversal of Conrad’s journey into the “*Heart of Darkness*”. Aidoo’s female character, Sissie, finally finds her way and own voice from this perilous journey, but comes back in Africa to fall in social tribulations.

Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon*: Male Characters Undermining

The works of most of African female writers, with their focus on presenting or analyzing women’s experience, have gradually (consciously or unconsciously) carved out a distinct identity for themselves, thereby providing a unique tradition within the existing literary canon. These works have earned the name, “feminist works”, and have often attracted varied criticisms from critics and readers, depending on where such individuals stand as far as gender issues are concerned. Those who read these works with a positive attitude contend that they offer new and dynamic approaches and challenges to the literary world, whilst those who approach these works with skepticism and disdain accuse them of gender bias and dismiss them as self-seeking texts devoid of pertinent issues that would stir up change or offer better options to combat society’s challenges.

David Lodge’s *The Art of Fiction* (2011) gives us the true secret of characters’ naming in a novel. He discloses that names in fiction are never neutral, never given for the simple reason to give a name, even when the author (male or female) chooses not to give a name. Lodge argues that “They always signify, if it is only ordinariness. Comic, satiric or didactic writers can afford to be exuberantly inventive, or obviously allegorical, in their naming. Realistic novelists favour mundane names with appropriate connotations (Emma Woodhouse, Adam Bede). The naming of characters is always an important part of creating them, involving many considerations, and hesitations, which I can most conveniently illustrate from my own experience.”¹⁶ By disclosing the clue of fiction writers in their artistic work of characterizing, let’s consider that of Amma Darko in *Beyond the Horizon* (2007).

In *Broadening the Horizon* (2007), the book of critics concentrates on women as “victims of patriarchal violence”. Darko portrays her male characters in such a ‘disdainful manner’ that it seems all the blame is to put on male-oriented and materialistic society. Over the years, women all over the world have been subjected to various forms of suppression and oppression. In line with this, Onwueme (2010) observes that “Through the ages and across cultures, women have been subjected to one form of suppression or another. This ranges from the physical, mental, spiritual, social, educational, economic, to the political one. This can be traced to the cultural mores and ideologies of patriarchy which condemn women to subservient positions in the society.”¹⁷

As Oforu (188) cited by Koussouhon in “Portrayal of Male Characters by A Contemporary Female Writer: A Feminist Linguistic Perspective”¹⁸, Darko, in her fiction, “presents an objective feminist literary voice meant to identify and expose societal ills against women.” Darko, as argued here, is bound to counter existing conventional ideologies of gender positioning. Koussouhon rightly confirms the opinion of Adjei (48) who points out that Darko will forcefully seek “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 a new social order in which women are in control of their destiny. (49)”¹⁹ To prove this postulation, this paper draws the reader’s attention on how male named or nameless characters are depicted in the roles they play as husbands or fathers or as lovers.

Akobi Ajaman

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Akobi is described as a ‘boy’ not a man, meaning he is immature. He has a “big flat nose”²⁰, meaning he is not good looking and Darko attacks these weaknesses of his personality. He is the first Naka’s son ever to earn a Form Four General Certificate, but unfortunately all that he can do with this degree is ‘messenger clerk in ministries’. It is important to remind to the readers that messenger clerk is the most inferior position in any administration in Africa and even in European countries. This implicitly means that Akobi is not intelligent enough to major to another higher degree though being the *vedette* in his village. Darko makes him be the problem of Mara, the nightmare, her non accomplished dream, ‘the door’ by which comes all the trials facing by Mara, the female protagonist. Throughout the novel, Akobi Ajaman, Mara’s husband and finally Mara’s pimp is given negative talks and is painted as brutish, very wicked, exploitative, eccentric, materialistic, lustful, greedy, deceitful, manipulator, reckless and heartless, all that fits a bad and dangerous man. He is an authoritative and shockingly brutal character:

Then suddenly there was this angry roar of, ‘Get up!’ like an over-irritated boar and the next second I was up at attention on my two feet. I didn’t know which I was most, scared, angry or perplexed. He studied me like he was studying filth (...), and before I knew what was happening...Wham! first slap...wham! wham! wham! three more in succession. And I scurried into what had now become my favourite corner, slumping to the floor. What had I done wrong? But I was to be given neither reasons nor explanations. (Ibid., 17)

This scene of violence is preceded by Mara’s announcing her new state as carrying a baby, thus a mother-to-be. In such a case, any expectant woman would normally expect her husband to be tender, solicitous of her wish, and be in seventh heaven over the prospect of being father; oddly enough, the only return is a roar and a bullying.

The autodiegetic narrator in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara, is constantly battered by her husband at the least peccadillo. Mara's pathetic perpetual ordeals from her brutish husband ring as follows, "When I forgot the chewing stick for his teeth, which he always demanded be placed neatly beside his bowl of served food, I got a slap in the face. And when the napkin was not at hand when he howled for it, I received a knuckle knock on my forehead (Ibid., 19). In this wake, Gbaguidi posits that "'Hatred' towards male characters in Amma Darko's (...) seems obvious since they are assigned wicked roles in the story. Male characters are taken as useless and irresponsible partners (23).

To avoid a worst situation, an elderly character, Mama Kiosk, warns the protagonist to see now the situation with her normal eyes, not just like a green wife. Mama Kiosk rings as follows, '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' (Ibid., 17). For Akobi, it is the end that justifies the means, not the contrary and as he grows up in a patriarchal system, he does not mind treating his wife both as a slave and as a source of income. He forces her to leave with his German wife as a "sister" and a house maid. Akobi exploits Mara's sheer 'greenness' for his own selfish ends. Mara bitterly points out:

it was natural that after I had woken up first at dawn, and made the fire to warm up water for Akobi, and carried a bucketful of it with his spongebag to the public bathhouse for him, and returned to wake him up to tell him his bath was ready- it was natural that I also had to stand outside while he bathed just in case some soap suds should go into his eyes and he should need me. Moreover, it was me who always carried back the empty buckets and the bathing accessories and saw to drying his towel ready for next morning since he hated wet towels touching his skin. It was natural, too, that when he demanded it, I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat while he slept all alone on the large grass mattress since, after all, mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his wellbeing, which included his pleasure. (p. 12-13)

As soon as Akobi flies to Germany, he drops his 'primitive' name and takes on a more acceptable one (Cobby), meaning that he does not like that African name before and Africa as well, though the new name 'Cobby' sounds also a Ghanaian name that is Kobby²¹. Darko draws the readers' attention to the fact that African men are likely to change their attitude while in a new socio-cultural environment guaranteeing more economic power.

As he has no respect and consideration for Mara in Accra, he does the same thing while in Germany with Gitte, his German woman. He marries Gitte which sounds “Bitte”²² just to have “the citizenship and enter that inner circle of the ‘human’” (O’Connell and Odamtten, 50). He knows that he has to secure his new status with another woman, Comfort, that typewriter, with whom he intends to have a love affair behind his bush wife, Mara. To attain his selfish and Machiavellian goal, Akobi “‘imports’ Mara by an illegal and illicit route to Germany with the intention of selling her into prostitution” (*Idem*) Once Akobi starts living off immoral earnings from Mara’s loose work, he undertakes to renovate a house in Sumanyi in Comfort’s village, not in Naka as he promised to Mara. Darko portrays this side of Akobi to show the lying and deceit face of his and indirectly to all the other African men. Siding with Darko on this deceitful feature of some African men, Odamtten posits that African “men are deceivers, abusers and leaches [...]” (*Idem*).

Moreover, Akobi forbids Comfort, his lover, to work for fear he might lose her at her work place, but coerces Mara (the bush and naive girl) into taking to prostitution, which generates financial resource for his selfish interest. He has been eventually jailed when the affair of Mara’s procuring is disclosed. He loses everything he and Gitte own because taken by the bank they owe.

Osey

The name Osei²³ is given to a noble person in Fante’s naming chart. Darko gives to this character ironically the name Osei to mock at his mood and his behaviour. He is the third man and very arrogant toward women whether white or black. He is Akobi’s friend and smuggler, the one to help Akobi to come to Germany. He also was too “well-versed in German mentality”²⁴, however has no respect for woman. Osey, like Akobi, has also an African woman (Vivian) that he exploits. He nearly rapes Mara in a train to Hamburg. The autodiegetic narrator in *Beyond the Horizon* depicts the sexual assault she has been victim of from the shameless character, Osey, smuggling her in Germany, the ‘Promised Land’. Mara’s sexual assault rings as follows “Are you wearing something under your sweatshirt? (...) What are wearing under your sweatshirt? (...) Osey suddenly shoved his hand into my sweatshirt from below, causing me to spring up like I was on fire.” (*Ibid.*, 64-65)²⁵

Apart from having behaviours which leave much to be desired towards Mara, Osey beats his African wife “demanding to know where she was between 2p.m. and 4 p.m. and how come she had got back at 4p.m and not 2p.m. They got in a fight, him beating her with anything that came to hand: coat hangers, books, cushions, bags, while she unsuccessfully tried to hit him back with one hand and to shield her face with the other.” (*Ibid.* 73) According to the narrative of Vivian, Osey beat her one day with a pressing iron because he saw her “shagging with a GI. Soldier” (*Ibid.*, 128). Corroborating the saying that “birds of the feather flock together,” Akobi and Osey are not only procurers, brutish, chauvinists, but both are also violent with their respective African wives. This is to show the extent to which men can be extremely violent against their wives sometimes.

Mara's Father

As a 'good' African patriarch, he is polygamous and in the novel, he is portrayed as a man who deliberately engages his under-age daughters in a marital relationship devoid of love, affection and sense of humanity. He is the one who often arranges husbands for his daughters. Indeed, returning from her daily chores on that fateful day, Mara is far from thinking that, her fate has already been sealed in that she has already been commoditised by her selfish biological father and "given away to this man [Akobi] who paid two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin" (Ibid., 3). Mara recounts her fate in her village, Naka, when she has been informed by her mother that her father has found her a husband: "[...] 'good news'. Your father has found a husband for you [...] 'a good man'" (Ibid. 4).

All I did was grin helplessly because I clearly remembered the same good new news as this that mother had given my older sister two years before. Found, too, by father. And my sister was now a wreck. But father, it appeared, had a different formula for choosing or accepting husbands for his daughters, which took more into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man. (p. 4)

The same father once says that he is proud that his daughter, Mara, is married to the first Naka son with a school certificate. This proves the lack of love Mara's father has for his daughters and also the 'last-word-ship'²⁶ a father has in patriarchal African society. In this state, Mara's father is a patriarch, life owner because the social system gives him right to and does not condemn if he out passes that.

Akobi's Father

He is a farmer like the other villagers in Naka. However, an idiom goes like this "Like father, like son". In Africa when a man is strong, violent and brutal, people say he takes it from his father. Akobi's father is a materialistic undertaker who earns his money and notoriety from Naka's villagers' ignorance particularly when an epidemic cholera and dysentery have struck. He sells coffins at that time and doubles the price to earn money from the back of the poor villagers. People fear him because:

He was a man who seldom issued threats but pitilessly carried out those he issued. A man who once shocked the entire village and beyond when he threatened to give the dying chief's linguist a 'banana funeral' because the old man owed him eight shillings and sixpence, and who, true to his word, presented the corpse on the funeral day wrapped in two large banana leaves. Unscrupulous though it was, it earned him great respect.²⁷

Gitte's Father

He is German. He refused his daughter to marry a Negro, an African, a foreigner. When his position was not accepted, he began drinking and then blamed Gitte's mother and beat her for not having brought her up properly. He blames his wife because he thinks that everything bad comes from women and that women are made to care for children at home, the same way African men think. Darko makes him behave as an African patriarch. But the difference is about the point of discrimination. As a German, he may have his 'reasons' to discriminate African and other foreigners. In this way, it is quite normal for him not to accept a black man's relationship with her daughter at that time. He is also among men Darko does not give a name to.

Franz

He is Gitte's junior brother, the only one Gitte's brothers who accepted to visit her secretly after her marring a Negro. He is young and unconscious of the racial discrimination prevailing around him. His attitude towards Gitte confirms the innocence of teenagers.

Alhaji

This eccentric and materialistic is the landlord of the 'house' hired by Akobi, the Ministries messenger clerk. In the common sense, being Alhaji is a very renowned and respected social status in Africa, but this man of Darko is far from representing that. To embed his authority over his residents, Alhaji "had strongly forbidden any tenant to carry out any form of repair work on his "shabbily-constructed corrugated-iron sheet shelters, chicken houses like"²⁸. Darko lets the reader know that Alhaji does not like contradiction so that "Anyone who disobeyed him risked eviction."²⁹ Alhaji is the type of all-powerful and unprincipled landlords who have strong tastes for money without giving any thought to the comfort of their real estate.

Alhaji's tenants live in indescribable grimy rooms living together with vermin, exposing the occupants to all sorts of bad conditions. No wonder, Mara has a kind of shock wave when she is introduced into what is going to be her residence as a newly married woman. This is the depiction made by the newlywed, "To say I was shocked when Akobi brought me to his home in the city would be an understatement. I was stunned [...] Akobi had to tell me this was his home before I believed it [...] [It was] a cluster of shabbily-constructed corrugated-iron sheet shelters that looked like chicken houses, while all about and between them shallow, open gutters wound their way" (Ibid., 8). It goes without saying that only wicked and unscrupulous landlords rent out such rooms. No tenant is allowed to refit the house otherwise trespassers will be systematically thrown out of Alhaji's 'precious' property. Alhaji, being the sole proprietor, is the only one entitled to carry out any kind of renovation work and charges back his tenants accordingly.

‘My agent’

The Ghanaian feminist writer, Amma Darko, gives to this male character no name as we have announced earlier. He is Akobi’s friend and smuggler. He makes his life smuggling illegal immigrants to Western countries. In this wake, Mara, the narrator in Amma Darko’s first novel, informs the reader about how her agent makes his life smuggling African people into Europe:

My agent knew his way about in these things. He travelled regularly between Africa and Europe. Men paid him to smuggle their wives and girlfriends, who had no valid visas, into Europe, a very risky but lucrative business that had rewarded him with a beautiful family house by the seaside in the city’s coastal area, four food transport trucks and all the much-worshipped trappings of life à la civilisation: television, radio, fridge – you name it ... he had it all[....] Akobi, for instance, had paid him his return trip to Europe, plus of course the cost of his labour. (Ibid., 57)

With the fees Akobi has paid him, Mara’s ‘agent’, as a professional smuggler, has helped her to slip through the net of the emigration department to go illegally to Germany, with no ‘physical damage’, for a better life. The job of smugglers is essential to help illegal immigrants go through visa control line by bribing the system. Once again, the Ghanaian woman writer’s intention, by depicting a gloomy picture of one the characters in her novel, is crystal clear: to show the readership that, men must be held responsible for women’s ostracism from the highest echelons of decision-making body. Indeed, the male character Akobi decides and acts on behalf of the passive female character Mara, his wife. Mara’s agent, another male character, appears as a tool regarding Mara’s moral and physical torments imposed on her by an irresponsible husband.

1st Secretary to the Housing and Construction Minister

Darko depicts him as an ugly, fat with flabby pot belly. He is sex greed who “had laid half the pretty girls about who still continues to lay them, the likes of Comfort, in exchange for empty promises of a bungalow and a Morris Minor.”³⁰ This means that he lies to women around him by using his higher administrative and political position. He sexually exploited the girls of his ministry as one could overuse sockets and threw them away whenever one felt they were more practical. He has no respect for his post and for women around him. He represents the archetype of the African politician with / of a corrupt mind, who lies to the people and promises all that he can never afford.

Oves (Overseer)

Overseer, nicknamed Oves, is Mara's lord, master and pimp; the second one after Mara escapes from Pee. He uses Mara as a source of income. According to *Collins English Dictionary, Complete and Unabridged*, a pimp is "a person, especially a man, who solicits customers for a prostitute or a brothel, usually in return for a share of the earnings; a despicable person". Oves then indulges in this debasing job to make a living. He is not tolerant of his prostitutes at all. He has no wife. He only gets a snow-white Siamese cat. Like the male characters Akobi and Osey, Oves exploits female characters to assuage his self-centred interests. When his prostitutes do not prove they are up to it, he drugs them to make them active in bed with their customers. At this level, Amma Darko is showing Oves's sadomasochistic and inhumane feature towards female characters through the physical pain and distress he inflicts upon them. In a nutshell, Oves is portrayed as a materialistic character and exploits female character to attain his aim.

The Medicine Man and His Assistant

Amma Darko introduces these two characters very briefly when Akobi is getting prepared to immigrate to Germany. Believing Europe is the only place he might have a better living, Akobi resorts to their mystical power to make his migration process easier. While Akobi consults the medicine man, the latter gives him a charm to ward off evil in Europe and warns: "Shake hand with no one at the airport tomorrow. Someone is intending to plant bad medicine at the last minute inside your palm so that all will go wrong for you in Europe!' That was it." (Darko, *op. cit.*, 42). In fact, Darko is pointing out that idea of superstition filling of some African people south of the Sahara willingness to undertake something important; an idea pushing them to inquire, from the oracle or an occultist, whether the venture will prosper or not. Akobi's approach to consult the medicine man, before setting off for Europe, is then quite understandable. Nevertheless, one can point out that no one needs to cast a spell on Akobi because of his bad attitudes towards female characters especially his wife, Mara; unsurprisingly, such an attitude leads him to jail in Germany where any infringement of women's rights is heavily penalised.

The Giant Man

All that the reader knows about this nameless character is that he is German and one of Mara's sexual customers and best spenders. This man is simply Mara's torturer and has no fondness for Mara in bed; the only thing that matters for him is to assuage his sexual pleasures with her in coin of the realm. This nameless male character is violent and brutal towards Mara simply because he lacks the bravery to stand up to his unbearable wife who ill-treats him at home. Feeling impotent before his wife, who keeps him at bay in the marital home, the giant man somehow satisfies a desire for personal revenge on the poor Mara.

Then filled with this rage and anger, which is eating away at him, the nameless male character wants Mara to accept to be that woman he so much hates but feels impotent before her. This is how the powerless omniscient narrator and protagonist, in the novel under scrutiny, depicts the ordeal she suffers from the giant man,

Then filled with the loathing of revenge for this wife he'd love to kill, but lacking the guts even to pull her hair, he imagines me to be her, orders me to shout I am her, and does horrible things to me like I never saw a man ever do to a woman before in the bushes I hail from. But I bear it because it is part of my job. I listen attentively to his talk and comfort where I can. And even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me a nigger fool I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he's just called me a princess, for I've got a job to do, and I've got to put my all in it. (Ibid., 2-3)

The female character, Mara, appears as a scapegoat in this pitiful situation and is compelled to undergo the nameless male character's diktat lest she should lose a well-to-do sexual customer.

The German Homosexual

He is nameless and 'marries' Vivian, an illegal African immigrant, to help her have papers after a down payment. In fact, this German male character takes an unfair advantage of the fact that the African female character Vivian does not have any staying papers to live peacefully in Germany to make her dream of a better future come true. The German homosexual extorts a tremendous sum of money from Vivian so that the latter can ever dream of living undisturbed in a German setting. As Gbaguidi posits: "All things considered, the character Vivian will have to pay out about 14 600 Deutschmarks making FCFA 5 402 000 or €28 470 before getting a residence permit in Germany" (38). It appears that the female character Vivian, like the other illegal African immigrants, is the victim of some wicked male characters.

An African Man

He is nameless and Amma Darko gives no more detail about him. He is the owner of the restaurant where Cobby's sophisticated lover, Comfort, had worked before being asked to stop because of a fight.

Pee

He is Mara's first lord and pimp. His name is Pompey but shortened as 'Pee'. Oddly enough, he also exploits his wife (Kaye) in prostitution. He finds for his whores stage shows and sex video business. He is a rigid man and disciplined 'businessman'.

Dr. Schroeder

His name sounds German. Amma Darko gives us no more detail. He is the prostitutes' gynaecologist, the one to whom fortnight check-ups are done. He may be also an abortion practitioner and all that illegal practice in this milieu.

GI

GI is the nickname given to American soldiers working abroad. His real name is Marvin (p. 130). Why does Darko link this American soldier to drug addiction? Is it sole desire to prove to her readership the extent to which women can bear men's drug addiction or to illustrate the irresponsibility sense of them? These questions lead us to check to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2013) which results in:

Members of the armed forces are not immune to the substance use problems that affect the rest of society. Although illicit drug use is lower among U.S. military personnel than among civilians, heavy alcohol and tobacco use, and especially prescription drug abuse, are much more prevalent and are on the rise. The stresses of deployment during wartime and the unique culture of the military account for some of these differences. Zero-tolerance policies and stigma pose difficulties in identifying and treating substance use problems in military personnel, as does lack of confidentiality that deters many who need treatment from seeking it. Those with multiple deployments and combat exposure are at greatest risk of developing substance use problems. They are more apt to engage in new-onset heavy weekly drinking and binge drinking, to suffer alcohol- and other drug-related problems, and to have greater prescribed use of behavioral health medications. They are also more likely to start smoking or relapse to smoking.³¹

This result above confirms our fear on Marvin's disinterest to Vivian to the detriment of his hashish rolls. It is known that drug abusers lack moral principles or willpower and that they could stop using drugs simply by choosing to change their behavior what Marvin is not ready to do. In reality, drug addiction is a complex disease, and quitting takes more than good intentions or a strong will.

In conclusion, Darko's representing Marvin as hashish addict shows us that some of her male characters are sick and then need a pressing 'feminist therapy' to be cured. Insidiously and fortunately almost all the male characters in the novel need this urging therapy. As Luckas (1988: 22) has defended in one of his essay that the 'intellectual physiognomy... is the chief factor in creating living personality" and Darko seems to be much aware of Luckas's observation before writing her novel. Luckas also says:

Characterization that does not compass ideology is not complete. Ideology is the highest form of consciousness; ignoring it, a writer eliminates what is important in delineation of character. A character's conception of the world represents a profound personal experience and the most distinctive expression of his inner life, (ideology) at the same time it provides a significant reflection of the general problem of his time.

Each character represents a specific personality, (ideology), a unique living experience that Darko utilizes in her advantage. By depicting Marvin as hashish consumer, Darko illustrates the moral and social decay of modern society extended to someone who represents "authority, law and order". Darko gives the final and lethal blow to what remains of masculinity by drawing our attention to "a drug addict soldier".

The German Guy

As we have mentioned above that some men in Darko's text are sometimes nameless, this German guy is among them. He accepts to 'marry' Mara to allow her to have Germany resident papers. The marriage was arranged with a Caribbean woman who looked like Mara, then forged her signature and everything was settled in Copenhagen, being a very far distance away for Mara to go without being noticed by Pee. The German guy came to take his cash and left the marriage certificate proving they are "man and wife. Then when all the visits to the Foreign Office had been made and the countless forms had been filled, and the blessed stamp of five-year resident's visa in passport, he received the other half of his money."³² Like the other men who do nothing to women without sexual or financial reward, Darko portrays the German guy as materialistic and money greed because after having received all that previous cash he asked Mara in addition "to pay him two hundred Deutschmarks a month for the next two years (p. 121)."

Private Detective

His name is Gerhardt Strauss. This male character's name is Gerhardt Strauss. He is German and "private detective for all cases" (Darko *op. cit.* 132). He has been hired to unveil the riddle around the double life the male character Akobi and his African set are leading in Germany along with to break up the procuring network in which they indulge. The private detective even goes to Africa for an efficient and successful investigation. According to the narrator, he is a good detective and unfortunately the only male character in the novel under investigation to show kindness to female characters. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, the Nigerian feminist writer cited in "African Feminists Towards The Politics of Empowerment" by Professor M.A. Meyre Ivone Santana da Silva supports that:

the commitments of the African women writer to the empowering of the African woman is to deconstruct the African woman stereotyped images and fight against several forms of oppression that women still suffer in Africa. The first relevant aspect towards a politics of empowerment for African women in Ogundipe-Leslie's view is the demystification of certain male stereotypes of the African woman as goddess or as Supreme Mother, self-sacrificing and suffering willingly and silently. An African woman is frequently seen as fertile mother of the nation, an image that African male writers have contributed to disseminating.³³

This mystification of African mothers is due to the importance of motherhood in Africa. This theme is of extreme relevance to African societies, so as a result, it will be present in most of the works by African women. Although motherhood is not an exclusive concern of black women, it has been given a different relevance by black women and mainly by African women due to the imposition of mothering in Africa.

Commenting on "The Roles of West African Female Writers in Contemporary Times" in *Feminism and Black Women's Creative Writing: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, Aduke G. Adebayo writes that female writers (especially African female writers) write to tell "the truth about their own experiences as well as the experiences of women in general". A few lines down his discussion, he further shows the narrow focus of female works when he writes that,

Most African female writers create out of the necessity to tell their own stories in thinly-veiled fictional forms; seeing themselves as representatives of African women and correctors of certain well-worn prejudices concerning African women. In short they tell it as it is. This explains the predominance of the semi-autobiographical mode and the sociological orientation of their writings.³⁴

From Aduke Adebayo's article, it is clear that Darko attempts to reinforce the widely held notion that female writers' works are ³⁵essentially women-issues oriented. Though her tone does not indicate any animosity towards this focus of female works in male deconstruction, Darko demonstrates, like her counterparts such as Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *The Slave Girl* (1977), Zulu Sofola's *The Sweet Trap* (1977), Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981) and *Efuru* (1966), among others, that the preoccupation of the female writer (especially the Africa female writer) is to bring to the frontline, the predicament of the female in our patriarchal society. In this novel to clarify her argument, Darko concentrates too much on examining the ills treatment like economic exploitation, political disorientation and cultural imperialism on Africa represented her by "greenhorn" by her colonial masters such as Akobi, Osey, the giant man, Oven and the other male characters.

After fifty years of black feminism (1966-2016), of fight against male chauvinism and male 'maso-materialistic-uncontrollable' behaviour, contemporary female writers have consistently been preoccupied with the female predicament or women's issues proving that whether in Africa (Naka and Accra) or Germany (Hamburg and Munich), the African woman is always somebody's slave.

In *Amma Darko: Writing Her Way, Creating a Writing Life*, Louise Allen Zak writes about Amma Darko in these lines: "Time abroad provides not only time and psychic distance but also the emotional impetus to begin to write. Chastened by what she saw of the lives of African women in Germany. Darko found she had a message."³⁶

In *Beyond the Horizon*, it appears to us that Darko, in her debut, writes her own life experience as the Congolese writer, Julien Kilanga, confirms in an interview while presenting his novel *Retour de la Manivelle* (2016), he says "while writing fiction, you write a part or a whole of your own experience. No novel is denuded of the writer's own life experience."³⁷

Conclusion

To cap it all, the portrayal of male characters in *Beyond the Horizon* somehow is a way for Amma Darko to deconstruct the male social rule and demonstrate the villainy and greed of African male writers whether living in African or in Europe. Darko as a contemporary writer exhibits with no limit male characters' chauvinism and masochism. Literature not being too far from reality, because ideas to construct a fiction are taken from daily experience, things heard, seen, and gossiped. Darko's male characterisation is found real, concrete and could be taken as metaphor.

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⁹ Cixous, Helene (1980). '*The Laugh of the Medusa*'. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 245-264.

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¹² *Idem.*, p. 9.

¹³ Kenyatta, Jomo (1966). *My People the Kikuyu and the Life of Chief Wangombe*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Abena, P. A. Busia, “Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah’s Novels”, *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1992), p. 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ Lodge, David (2011) *The Art of Fiction*. London, Great Britain, Vintage Random House (2011). Edt (First published) Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd 1992, p. 37.

¹⁷ Onwueme, J. U. (2010). “*Literature and the Pressure of Women Liberation*” in Luke Eyoh, *Journal of Nigerian English and Literature (JONEL)* vol. 8. Uyo: Scholars Press.

¹⁸ Koussouhon, L. (2015) *Portrayal of Male Characters by A Contemporary Female Writer: A Feminist Linguistic Perspective*, in *International Journal of Advanced Research* (2015), Volume 3, Issue 12, 314 – 322, ISSN 2320-5407.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁰ Darko, Amma (1995). *Beyond the Horizon*. Harlow, Essex: Heinemann, p. 10.

²¹ In the list of Ghanaian child naming.

²² Gitte sounds Bite which means pardon or please.

²³ Osei is Fante’s meaning of ‘noble’.

²⁴ Darko, Amma (1995), p. 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64-5.

²⁶ This is our own coinage to mean the often supreme power of decision African fathers have on their daughters’ life. When they say ‘this is this’, no other word can pass; it is a gospel truth. The last word is always theirs’.

²⁷ Darko, Amma. (1995), p. 8.

²⁸ Darko, Amma. (1995), p. 8.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 9.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

³¹ DrugFact: Substance Abuse in the Military, March 2013, p. 3

³² Darko, Amma. (1995), p. 120.

³³ M.A. Meyre Ivone Santana da Silva (2004). African Feminists Towards The Politics of Empowerment, in Revista Eletrônica do Instituto de Humanidades ISSN -1 16 67 78 8-3 31 18 82 2, Volume III, Número IX - Abr-Jun 2004.

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³⁵ *Idem*, p. 12.

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³⁷ Interview of Julien Kilanga by Benaouda Leb dai, “Cultural Landscape and Adolescent Literature”, (University of Maine, France (June, 2016).