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THE GENERATIONAL LINK BETWEEN AMA ATA AIDOO AND AMMA DARKO:

A CASE STUDY OF THEIR PROSE WORKS.

BY

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I dedicate this work to my late dad, Mr. John Tidorchibe.

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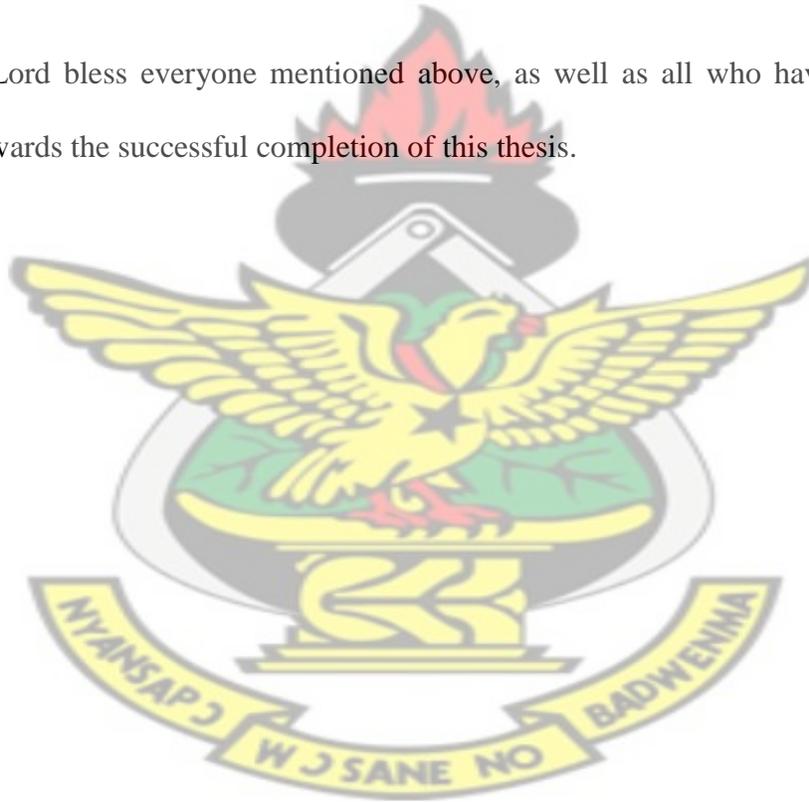
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ABSTRACT

The works of female writers have often been dismissed as self-seeking texts that champion the parochial interests of women. In fact some African feminists, especially Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, have posited that the female writer must “tell us about being a woman” and “describe reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective.”

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However, in an attempt to establish the generational link between the works of two prolific Ghanaian female writers (Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko) this thesis has established the fact that the modern feminist is not concerned with exclusively female issues but equally focuses on the political, economic and socio-cultural realities of her society. Among other pertinent issues, Aidoo’s and Darko’s prose works which have been examined in this thesis show that both female writers have and continue to explore issues such as the negative effects of colonialism, self-exile, unemployment, the plight of the poor and the marginalised, racism, and domestic violence. Though writing from two different generations, Aidoo and Darko manifest continuity in the sort of issues their works explore although their artistic skills and their attitudes towards these issues differ slightly. It is this generational link in the issues Aidoo and Darko discuss that this thesis establishes. Most importantly, the thesis draws attention to the fact that modern feminists like Aidoo and Darko are not concerned with only female issues but also with other pertinent issues of their society.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A BACKGROUND SURVEY

Female writers have, over the centuries, made profound contributions to the development of society and the expansion of the literary canon through their writings. Not only have the works of these female writers dealt with very pertinent issues of society, they have equally contributed immensely to the widening of the literary canon, especially with their addition of a new strand of literature since the appearance of female authored works in mainstream literature. The works of most of these female writers, with their focus on presenting or analysing 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 literary practitioners, 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. For instance, Ezekiel Mphahlele (a South African writer) writes in his introduction to Ama Ata Aidoo's No Sweetness Here and Other Stories that "Ama Ata Aidoo celebrates womanhood in general and motherhood in particular. She stands for the woman ...¹ The men in Miss Aidoo's fiction are mere shadows or voices or just "filters". Somewhere, quietly, they seem to be manipulating the woman's life or negatively controlling it..." (xix-xx).

Significantly, whilst Ezekiel Mphahlele might be right in his observation, his conclusion that Ama Ata Aidoo “stands for the woman” relegates this female writer’s work to what Aidoo herself calls “mbaasem.”²

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” (39). 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. (39)

From Aduke Adebayo’s article, it is clear that he attempts to reinforce the widely held notion that female writers’ works are essentially women-issues oriented. Though his tone does not indicate any animosity towards this focus of female works, his article demonstrates, using female works 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 his bid to clarify his argument, Adebayo deliberately juxtaposes the works of female writers and male

writers and concludes that “while male writers concentrate on examining the ills of colonial or independent Africa, ills like economic exploitation, political disorientation and cultural imperialism, female writers have consistently been preoccupied with the female predicament or women’s issues proving that whether it is in the pre-colonial, colonial or independent Africa, the African woman is always somebody’s slave (42). Much as Aduke Adebayo is entitled to his opinion, it is worth pointing out that his assertion is not entirely true of all African female writers. Some female writers such as Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Amma Darko, among others, have consistently discussed very pertinent issues about their societies.

Again, it is significant to note that Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie in “The Female Writer and Her Commitment” (1987), an article featured in Women in African Literature Today, writes that “Feminists have posited that the woman writer has these two major responsibilities: first, to tell about being a woman; secondly, to describe reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective” (8). For Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie the female writer has the responsibility to correct certain false perceptions about womanhood, especially the woman in Africa. She argues that “the female writer must tell us about being a woman in the real complex sense of the term” (8). Essentially, Molaria also establishes female writers as primarily concerned with issues related to women. Molaria 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... (11). However, her argument that the female writer’s second responsibility is to present reality from a woman’s perspective further gives credence to the position of this thesis—that some female writers have often gone beyond gender issues to discuss the realities of their societies.

Pertinently, in another article featured in Women in African Literature Today, entitled “Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa”, 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” (15). The tone Katherine Frank adopts in her article indicates that though she is a female, she finds the rather radical stance of some of these female writers regrettable and unacceptable. One fact which is worth noting is that just like Aduke Adebayo and Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, Katherine Frank agrees with the perception that female writers’ works have over the years fostered the parochial interests of women and not the general society.

Perhaps, no one succinctly captures the notion that women writers are preoccupied with female issues instead of national or the broader society’s issues than Eldred D. Jones, the editor of New Trends and Generations in African Literature. In his editorial, “New Trends and Generations”, he writes that women writers have often focused on “women’s situation in society, their preoccupations with family and work, their attempts to free themselves from the trammels of tradition.” He also singles out Flora Nwapa, of whom he says that “although she declined the title feminist, her writings are among the most serious attempts to present the concerns of African womanhood” (1-2). Significantly, Eldred D. Jones's editorial confirms the school of thought that condemns the works of female writers (especially African female writers) as fostering the interests of women, rather than focusing on the numerous problems the African society has to grapple with. Maybe this explains why the works of female writers had, for a very

long time, been given no notice or recognition in mainstream literature—unfortunately dominated by men.

Despite the concerns raised by the above school of thought, it must be put on record again that the labelling of female writers' works as seeking the selfish interests of women and devoid of serious issues to trigger desired change or development in society is rather unfair. Available evidence indicates that some female works have gone beyond female issues to present issues relating to the larger society. Amazingly, even some of those who dismiss women writers' works as self-seeking do agree, though reluctantly, that some of the female authored works that have appeared over the years have presented issues of national or societal interest. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, for instance, despite all her arguments that the female writer is concerned about telling the truth about the female experience, also adds that the female writer should be committed to her third world reality and status.

She explains that “being a Third World person implies being politically conscious, offering readers perspectives on and perceptions of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism as they affect and shape our lives and historical destinies” (11). She admits that “perhaps only Ama Ata Aidoo and Micere Mugo can be said to be thus politically conscious” (11). Although she argues that even in such cases the female writer often tells it from a female's point of view, the fact still remains that some of these female writers do not limit themselves to female issues, but go beyond these to discuss issues of societal significance.

What is important here is not the details of Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's discussions, but the fact that the above comments clearly vindicate the school of thought that argues that female writers do not dwell on female issues alone, but they also touch on issues of immense relevance to the broader society. No one could have better stated this fact than Sophia O. Ogwude who in her article, "An Exile Writing Home: Protest and Commitment in the Works of Bessie Head", argues that Bessie Head is not necessarily a feminist writer, but a protest writer "who writes eloquently on all that she has been exiled from: South Africa and nationality, marriage, and other intimate and meaningful inter-human relationships."³ Her article essentially seeks to debunk the notion that Bessie Head's works foster feminist ideologies.

In this article, Sophia Ogwude places Bessie Head in the midst of her South African male counterparts, who have all shown commitment to South Africa in diverse ways, especially through the medium of literature. By the close of Sophia Ogwude's discussions it becomes clear that Bessie Head's works sometimes deal with issues that have nothing to do with the female but humanity in general. But what is worth pointing out here is the fact that all the arguments advanced by Sophia Ogwude and several other like-minded critics, scholars and commentators, point to the fact that female writers may be writing primarily as women who feel the urge to tell their story (the plight of women), but they also make the effort to discuss other pertinent issues. Indeed, there is ample evidence that most of them seek to address certain challenging issues of their societies, though from the female perspective. Perhaps, the gradual realisation of this truth by many readers, critics and commentators, explains why female authored works have steadily gained recognition and patronage in mainstream literature.

Notwithstanding the current growing patronage of female authored works, the fact still remains that for a very long time female works, and the female in general, had been suppressed and treated with benign neglect by a predominantly male literary canon. As Gareth Griffiths puts it in his African Literatures in English: East and West, “early critical accounts often overlooked their work [female authored works], or misread it with a masculinist bias.”⁴ As a result of this gender bias, female writers such as Charlotte Bronte and Mary Ann Evans wrote in the forms and styles of recognised writers, all of whom were men. As a matter of fact, it was not until Mary Wollstonecraft dared to question this status quo in 1792 with the publication of her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman that female works began to gain recognition. Her book sought to expose the inequity between the sexes and advocated the use of education as the main tool for the emancipation of the female. Wollstonecraft blamed society (which was ruled by male prejudices, doctrines and ideologies) for the continued subjugation of female works and the female in general.

Another woman worth mentioning, as far as discussions on female works are concerned, is the American Anti-Slavery leader, Sara M-Grimke. Her work, Letter on Equality of Sexes and the Condition of Women “presented a strong argument against religious leaders who claimed to have found biblical support for the inferior position of women. Stressing equal rights, she underlined the point that both sexes have complementary duties to perform for the good of humanity.”⁵ What is striking about Sara M – Grimke’s arguments is that there is a visible continuity from where Wollstonecraft left off in her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Sara M-Grimke does not only side with what Wollstonecraft discusses in her book, but she even goes further to suggest the need for collaboration between the sexes for the development of the human society. For her,

society's progress is the joint responsibility of both the male and the female, and so women ought to be given the platform to use their God-given talents to better humanity.

Many years down the line of history, Simone de Beauvoir (a pioneer women advocate in France, and a Marxist-oriented female writer) in 1949 argued in her The Second Sex that “socialism is incomplete, if women are barred from participating and benefitting fully and freely from societal development.”⁶ Juxtaposing her views with those of Wollstonecraft and Sara M-Grimke, what comes to light is the fact that there is a necessary relationship between the writings of these female writers. Writing from different generations or centuries (namely the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries), these female writers' works manifest an interesting continuity in the issues they discuss. Though writing from different centuries, and for that matter different generations, their works analyse the experience of women and the need for the emancipation of women.

It is important to point out that despite this visible continuity in the opinions of these female writers, later writers such as Simon de Beauvoir and Sara M-Grimke try to break away from their predecessors such as Mary Wollstonecraft. As discussions on the works of M-Grimke and Beauviour have clearly indicated, these latter writers advocated the collaboration of the sexes for the development of humanity, and not women alone. Their works, and several similar works, have provided a twist to the focus of female writings over the centuries. As a result, the denigration of the works of female writers as feminists or parochial interest seekers has been gradually undermined and defeated. But what is most significant about the review of the works of the above female writers is the clear manifestation of the capacity of writers of different

generations to influence one another and yet still exhibit their individual authorities and capabilities to express their own thoughts and opinions.

Indeed, it is this possibility of continuity and change in a literary tradition that sets the tone for the present attempt to examine the sort of relationship that exists between the works of two renowned Ghanaian female writers; Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko. The obvious question any curious reader of the works of these two would grapple with is whether there is any relationship between these two (with regard to their thematic concerns and styles of writing). Perhaps, the fact that these two are compatriots should even increase one's curiosity to find out the sort of influence these two female writers have had on each other. Is there really any relationship between the works of these two female writers, whose ages and works clearly put them into two different generations? If there is, is it one of continuity as established in the works of earlier female writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simon de Beauvoir, and Sara M-Grimke? Or is there rather a total change in the sort of issues they discuss or in their approaches to these issues? Better still, is it one of continuity in thematic concerns and style, but a slight breakaway by Amma Darko from Ama Ata Aidoo? Answers to these questions would definitely come to light if the writing careers and some of the works of these writers are properly scrutinised.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 AMA ATA AIDOO AND AMMA DARKO AS FEMALE WRITERS

The attempt to establish a relationship between Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko reveals an interesting pattern. Though both are well-known Ghanaian writers, they have different backgrounds, as far as literature is concerned. It is common knowledge that Ama Ata Aidoo has a renowned literary background—having graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English (from the University of Ghana) and going as far as lecturing in this discipline for several years. Amma Darko, on the other hand, has no literature background. Coming from a Visual Arts background, one would hardly have given Amma Darko a chance to make any strides in an area that appears to be the preserve of only people with a literature background.

Yet no literary critic, commentator or reader can deny the fact that Darko has produced some of the best female authored novels in contemporary Ghana. Prof. Kwesi Yankah of the University of Ghana hits the nail right on the head when he writes (in his foreword to Amma Darko's Not Without Flowers) that “OVER A DECADE Amma Darko appears to have seized the centre stage of women's world, plowing, tickling and reaching into inner recesses, to tell their story” (11). Undoubtedly, alongside Ama Ata Aidoo, she has lifted women's literature in Ghana to a remarkable level. She and her senior counterpart (Ama Ata Aidoo) have demonstrated their individual artistic skills in the handling of their literary pieces and deserve scholarly attention such as this study seeks to provide.

It is fair to admit that prior to the appearance of these two giants, Efua Theodora Sutherland of blessed memory had already broken through the Ghanaian literary culture, which for a very long time had been dominated by male writers such as the Casely Hayfords of blessed memory, the Ayi Kwei Armahs, the Kofi Anyidohos, the Amu Djoletos, to mention but a few. With Efua Sutherland's concentration on developing the Ghanaian theatre, she established herself as a "Ghanaian theatre pioneer, children's author, and dramatist, whose best known works include Foriwa (1962), Edufa (1967), and The Marriage of Anansewa (1975) among others." Efua Sutherland can never go unacknowledged for her part in the establishment of the University of Ghana's School of Performing Arts.

A close examination of Efua Sutherland's life and works indicates that throughout her career in the Ghanaian literary culture, she has established herself as a strong female contender of her male counterparts, rivalled (half way through her career) by only Ama Ata Aidoo, whose appearance in 1965 with her The Dilemma of a Ghost saw an end to Efua Sutherland's monopoly of Ghanaian women's literature, and also increased the number of female writers and female works in Ghanaian literature. Ama Ata Aidoo's appearance has since given options to patrons of female works in Ghana, as she has ventured into other literary genres such as *poetry* and *fictional prose*, in addition to the drama she shares in common with Efua T. Sutherland. It is significant to state that these two female writers enjoyed a very healthy rivalry, as far as their interest in the Ghanaian theatre was concerned. Interestingly, both dramatists' works clearly reflect an interest in gender issues and the use of the theatre as a tool to preserve the Ghanaian society's cultural heritage.

However, with Efua Sutherland's death in 1996, Ama Ata Aidoo's monopoly over female literature in Ghana commenced in earnest, as her works gained prominence in literary circles at home and abroad—particularly receiving reviews and critiques from various readers, critics and commentators such as Lynne Rienner who in the magazine entitled World Literature and Literary Criticism: New Books and Selected Backlist celebrates Aidoo as “a renowned author in multiple genres...”⁷ But this monopoly was to last only for a while, as the appearance of Amma Darko's works (beginning with Beyond the Horizon, 1995) gradually rivalled those of Ama Ata Aidoo's—especially in the area of prose. Although not an all-round writer like Ama Ata Aidoo, who has poems, plays, short stories and novels to her credit, Amma Darko has definitely distinguished herself as a good novelist. All her four novels have caught the eyes of perceptive readers, writers and critics both at home and abroad. In his introduction to her Faceless (2003), for instance, Kofi Anyidoho lauds her creativity and compares her to Efua T. Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo when he writes:

Students and scholars of African Literature who, like me, have often wondered about the apparent absence of any major female Ghanaian writers following the remarkable pioneering work of Efua T. Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo, can now rest assured that a worthy successor has emerged in the person of Amma Darko. With the publication of her third novel, Amma Darko has demonstrated a clear commitment to a productive career in creative writing. (*Faceless*, 9)

The appearance of Amma Darko's Beyond the Horizon (1995), The Housemaid (1998), Faceless (2003) and Not Without Flowers (2007) has certainly given options to lovers of female writers' works, who hitherto had to make-do with only the works of Efua T. Sutherland and Ama Ata

Aidoo. Far removed from Efua T. Sutherland because of the age or generation gap, and more especially because of Sutherland's demise, contemporary readers, critics and commentators are bound to succumb to the temptation to read her works with close reference to Ama Ata Aidoo's works, rather than Efua Sutherland's. Readers, critics and commentators may be tempted to draw affinities or differences between the works of these two female writers. It is amazing, however, that though these two distinguished Ghanaian female writers belong to different generations, their works have enjoyed a fairly healthy rivalry in terms of readership or patronage in Ghana and beyond. Clearly, Ama Ata Aidoo belongs to an older generation, which spans from the immediate post-independence era to the present era, whilst Amma Darko belongs to a younger generation.

Essentially, the works of these two Ghanaian female writers (especially their narrative—the focus of this research paper) have delved into very pertinent societal issues, but most especially into gender issues. Much like other female writers who have burst onto the literary scene over the centuries, it is expected that both Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko would write from the female's point of view. Among other things, issues concerning women such as the injustices against womanhood, the need for gender equality and the empowerment of the female, are bound to emerge in the fictions of these writers. Patriotism is also bound to make demands on them, as they would have to go beyond the comfort of their gender's predicament to tackle other issues for the larger society's benefit.

However, considering the age gap between these two writers and the obvious generation gap between their works, one cannot avoid questioning how far the issues they deal with in their respective works (especially their prose works) are related. A quick glance at the few female writers whose works have been commented on in chapter one, reveals that there is a necessary link between the works or the concerns of those female writers, although a slight variation has equally been noticed in some of these concerns they have put forward. This relationship between the works of those female writers necessarily sets the agenda of this research paper.

Indeed, what sort of relationship is likely to exist between the two Ghanaian female writers under study? Would it be one in which Amma Darko continues with the issues or concerns Aidoo's works present or does she make a complete breakaway from the older female writer's concerns? Better still, being female writers, would their works manifest some affinities in terms of their artistic skills, even if they deal with different issues? What sort of relationship really exists between the prose works of Ama Ata Aidoo and those of Amma Darko? Is it one which could be termed a "generational link" or a "generational gap"? Answers to these questions will definitely come to light after a careful examination of the thematic concerns and styles of these two writers.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 A CRITICAL REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF SELECTED PROSE WORKS OF AMA ATA AIDOO AND THE PROSE WORKS OF AMMA DARKO.

The works of Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko can never be glossed over in Ghanaian literature, or even African literature as a whole. It is undisputable that these two female writers have made giant strides in our literature. Some prejudiced male readers and critics might dismiss their works as seeking the parochial interests of women, but a close reading of the works of these female writers would prove otherwise. The following discussion is an attempt to review their prose works, whilst simultaneously highlighting some of the topical issues these works seek to bring to readers' attention and some important literary techniques used to discuss these issues.

3.1 A CRITICAL REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE THEMATIC CONCERNS AND STYLE OF AMA ATA AIDOO.

Ama Ata Aidoo's prose narratives such as No Sweetness Here and Other Stories (1970), Our Sister Killjoy (1977), The Girl Who Can and Other Stories (1997), and Changes (1991) have clearly distinguished her, not only as a good story-teller, but also as a prolific writer who is sensitive to the changing times and challenges of her generation. Some of her works, especially Changes and such short stories as "Cut me a Drink" and "The Girl Who Can", have been criticised for fostering feminine ideologies aimed at promoting the parochial interests of women; but a careful reading of some of her works would equally reveal trends beyond gender issues. Vincent O. Odamtten, in what appears to be an attempt to defend her works argues, in The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism, that "...succeeding criticism

has tended to seize upon feminism as the primary or privileged concern of Aidoo's literary project. This criticism often ignores or downplays the possibility that [these]... are simple and direct, being concerned with the real problems of ordinary people..." (80-81). Without any calculated attempt to disagree with or confirm Odamtten's argument that Aidoo's works discuss real problems of ordinary people, it is important to state that after reading some of Aidoo's works it is clear that these works seek to address certain issues within our society. The obvious question, then, would be whether these issues are parochial feminists issues or social realities that need to be addressed. Succinctly put, are these issues of relevance to the emancipation and development of the wider society or are they merely "mbaasem" [women issues or affairs], as Ama Ata Aidoo herself once put it in an interview with Ivor Agyeman-Duah in the *West Africa* magazine?⁸

Aidoo's first novel, Our Sister Killjoy, presents a condemnation of the drifting of people from less developed cultures to developed ones in search of better opportunities. As Gay Wilentz perfectly puts it in "The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*", the novel "is a relentless attack on the notions of exile as relief from the societal constraints of national development and freedom to live in a cultural environment suitable for creativity".⁹

Contemporary and realistic as this problem is, Aidoo's graphic presentation of this sociological phenomenon through Sissie's story in Our Sister Killjoy marks her out as a good writer competent in handling prose narratives of all kinds. As a matter of interest, Our Sister Killjoy presents a young Ghanaian female student, Sissie, who travels to Europe and comes back a

completely changed figure. As the novel begins, Sissie is a University of Ghana student who has just been chosen to visit Europe, ostensibly to study and work for a while. Sissie's so-called "luck" creates the impression that going to Europe for the Ghanaian is comparable to going to heaven. Both the Europeans and Sissie's colleagues are excited about Sissie's "luck". Indeed, as soon as the embassy gets to know that Sissie is the chosen one "they had come to campus looking for her in a black Mercedes – Benz" [obviously a big deal in those days], and subsequently the Europeans are eager to impress her with their superior culture and mannerisms at a dinner in her honour.

Unconscious of the deliberate attempt to showcase the superiority of the white culture over the Ghanaian culture at this dinner, Sissie gets uncomfortable with a countryman of hers, Sammy, who is a "been-to" (a Ghanaian who has travelled to Europe) and whose mannerisms at the dinner suggest that he has lost his cultural identity. According to the narrator, "He spoke their language well and was familiar with them in a way that made [Sissie] feel uneasy" (9). He paints a glorious picture of Europe, and tries to make Sissie understand how "she was unbelievably lucky to have been chosen for the trip" (9). Significantly, this whole episode serves as a foreshadowing of one bitter truth Sissie and readers later discover about the "been-tos"—the loss of their cultural identity and their willing submission to neocolonialism. Indeed, Sammy is representative of the destructive nature of self-exile, and when the narrator says of this occasion that "Time was to bring her many Sammys", it becomes obvious that Sammy represents the many Africans abroad who have been indoctrinated by western culture, and are unwilling to return home. Aidoo makes mockery of such people and makes them look ridiculously stupid

when she deliberately makes “Sammy [laugh] all the time: even when there was nothing to laugh at” (9).

Surprisingly, amid all the excitement on both the Europeans and Ghanaians sides, the character at the centre of all this excitement—Sissie—appears unperturbed, or rather unimpressed, about her so-called fortune. Sissie would rather not be easily convinced about the paradise ahead of her. Far from being ungrateful, Sissie seems only cautious not to get over-excited as she cannot fathom the sort of fate that awaits her out there in Europe. Though she recognises the good opportunity handed her, she doesn't over-estimate it.

After all the excitement and preparations, Sissie finally leaves Ghana and heads for Germany. As she travels to Germany she is comfortable in her own skin (her identity) but soon discovers along the line that she is often the only black person in the places she finds herself on her way to Germany. In Germany she is faced with the problem of racism, but unlike the other foreigners she shares the same camp with, she is unfazed and explores the various places they visit in Germany. In Bavaria where they are camped, Sissie's adventurous nature soon wins her a German female friend, Marija Sommer. Though Marija is white and Sissie is black, their good friendship brings to mind the issue of sisterhood. Marija is drawn to Sissie due to the absence of Big Adolf, her husband, who neither Sissie nor readers ever meet throughout the narrative because of his work. He reduces Marija into a mere house doll, whilst he is busily working and exploring his talent.

Marija's friendship with Sissie, therefore, fills the vacuum created by her absentee husband. From a feminist point of view, it is clear that Aidoo, like Amma Darko in Not Without Flowers, regards sisterhood as one of the major outlets to women's problems. Although no attempt is being made to label Amma Darko as a feminist, her commitment to finding solutions to women and children's problems draws her close to Aidoo in this particular instance. Significantly, Sissie's unbreakable friendship with Marija can be seen as a deliberate attempt by Aidoo to suggest that one of the ways to attain women's emancipation from the shackles of patriarchy is through sisterhood—a bond unbreakable by race, education, colour, religion or geographical differences.

Although the strong relationship between these two characters nearly results in lesbianism, it is interesting to note that Aidoo does not condemn Marija's attempt to seduce Sissie, but rather blames that on the psychological effects of Big Adolf's neglect and confinement of Marija to housekeeping and child bearing. Indeed, it is the friendship, or rather sisterhood, between her and Sissie that lessens the psychological effects of the loneliness created by her insensitive husband. Here again, Aidoo does not focus much on this theme of lesbianism, but rather employs it to expose the evils of patriarchy, which she suggests can only be overcome through healthy sisterhood.

Not surprisingly, Sissie's friendship with Marija soon incurs the displeasure of the middle class and the elite group in Bavaria. It must be pointed out that far from being racist towards Sissie, by their disapproving attitude to her friendship with Marija, these folks of Bavaria are only jealous

of Marija's "luck". Obviously charmed by Sissie's intelligence and affability, they desire companionship with her and cannot come to terms with the fact that a mere housewife like Marija has taken what they (the higher class) should have. This brings to light the issue of class distinction in the German society, and the discrimination between these classes. But most importantly, this incident brings to readers' attention one of the recurrent themes in the novel—superiority complex, and its accompanying oppression of perceived inferior groups, represented by Marija in this instance. This theme does not only apply to the bourgeois' disregard for a housewife like Marija, but also extends to the perceived superiority of developed cultures over underdeveloped ones such as Africa. For instance, on their flight to Germany, Sissie and her other African brothers are made to sit at the back of the plane, far away from where the whites are. As a matter of fact, when one of the air hostesses asks Sissie, 'You want to join your two friends at the back, yes?' (10), it is not a request for a *yes* or *no* answer, but a polite way of telling Sissie she does not belong to where she is sitting.

Aidoo skillfully employs this colonialists' attitude to expose the nature and evils of the colonial experience. As the plot of the novel takes shape, it becomes evident that the issue of colonialism and its destructive effects stand tall among all the other themes. Through a kind of poetic rendition, the narrator blames colonialism for the destruction of the cultures of colonised societies with western ideologies and practices. Adopting a post-colonialist attitude, the narrator identifies Christianity as the main tool used to perpetrate this evil—cultural imperialism. As a matter of fact, when Marija repeats the Christian name of Sissie, after the latter has told her that she was called Mary at school, one can infer that it is a deliberate act employed by Aidoo to show the extent to which western culture has permeated the Ghanaian society, and the cultures of

the once-colonised in general. When Marija finally asks, "... and you an African?" (24) readers can tell the extent to which colonialism has destroyed the cultural identity of the Ghanaian, and left the Ghanaian in the middle of two different cultures—a situation which Homi Bhabha in Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism terms 'unhomeliness' or cultural displacement (187). Apart from this cultural destruction, when the subjective narrator in her stream of consciousness says that the imperial experience was "A dubious bargain that left us plundered of our gold, our tongue..." (28 – 29), one can sense the anguish in Aidoo's tone as she exposes the exploitative nature of colonialism. Thus, for Aidoo, the colonial experience did not only rob once colonised societies of their material resources, but their cultural identities as well.

Apart from this, it is important to establish the fact that Sissie, and the other African students' presence in Germany where they are used as farm helps brings to mind the issue of neo-colonialism—a practice Ann B. Dobie in her Theory into Practice. An Introduction to Literary Criticism says "has much the same effects as traditional imperialism" (186). These students, who are legally let-go by their home governments to go and spend their vacation abroad, arrive in Germany where they are used as farm helps. This immediately brings to mind the continued stealing of the best brains from the under-developed world to the developed world under the pretext of benevolently offering scholarship opportunities and lotteries to desperate students and workers to stay abroad—a situation which is nothing but neocolonialism in disguise.

The theme of neocolonialism becomes more glaring when the setting of the novel changes from Germany to England. Having finished her work in Germany, Sissie travels to England to meet

her friend (obviously her lover). Her arrival in England reveals the presence of many African intellectuals such as Kofi, Dede, Obi, Kunle, among the lot, living in London. They are so comfortable in London that they are unwilling to return home. Sissie's gradual growth in consciousness reaches its climax at this point, as she discovers the harm the colonisers have done to colonised cultures like hers. She is so disgusted at the unpatriotic attitudes of her "brothers" that she cannot help but kill their joy by making them know they would be of better use to their people at home than they are in London.

Much as Aidoo seeks to project this unfortunate phenomenon—the migration of people of once-colonised cultures to the lands of the colonisers—as one of the direct effects of the colonial experience, she does not exonerate these migrants (the been-tos) from blame. Instead, Sissie's disgust at this practice is a direct indication of Aidoo's disapproval of the exodus of Ghanaians and other Africans abroad, especially those who never return. It is for this purpose that Sissie keeps killing the joy of her brother "been-tos" with her incessant complains about their refusal to return home. In fact, when the narrator says, "... such migrations are part of the general illusion of how well an unfree population think they can do for themselves. Running very fast just to remain where they are" (89), one can sense a subtle mockery in her tone—a clear indication of how absurd Aidoo regards the actions of these self-exiled "been-tos".

In discussing this theme of self-exile, Aidoo does not condemn only the "been-tos" but also folks at home who keep making unnecessary demands on these been-tos. For Aidoo, this justifies their continued stay abroad, as they stay on even after school, in the illusion of making more money

over there to take care of those at home. For instance, Kunle (a relative of Sissie's friend) receives a letter in which his mother tells him: "Kunle, I am not begging you for money. Am I not a mother? Do I not know you need money yourself...? But my son, there is nothing here at all. So if someone gives you a penny gift, send half to us" (106). Other characters such as Kofi, Dede and Obi also receive similar letters chronicling the needs of relatives at home. Although readers never meet the above characters, the fact that the narrator should treat them as if readers already know them, is an indication of Aidoo's determination to use characterisation as a tool to broaden the scope of her attack. By virtue of the fact that the names of these characters suggest that they come from Ghana and Nigeria, one can conclude that Aidoo is not criticising only Ghanaians but Africans in general. The guilt of folks at home increases when Kunle dies in a car accident on his way home—obviously to take care of some family businesses in his village.

Undeniably, the entire novel is an attempt by Aidoo to criticise her own society, especially "been-tos", who refuse to return home after studying abroad. This issue appears so important to her that she spends the last segment of her novel on it. Captured as "A Love Letter", this last part presents a supposed exchange of letters between Sissie and her lover. The author uses this segment to develop this issue so much that by the end of the novel, it leaves no doubt in the mind of readers that Aidoo seeks to advise her people to take key interest in the development of their homeland. Therefore, when Sissie tells her fiancé, "...so please come home, My Brother. Come to our people. They are the only ones who need to know how much we are worth..." (130) one can infer that Aidoo has employed Sissie as an authorial voice to make a clarion call on brothers and sisters abroad to come home and build a better Africa.

As the narrative draws to a conclusion, Sissie is flying home—an act which can only be interpreted as an example to her brothers and sisters still in London to reunite with their roots. Sissie’s refusal to post a letter she had been writing to her fiancé whilst on the plane, can be interpreted as Aidoo’s attempt to register her disapproval of the continued stay of Ghanaians and other Africans like Sissie’s lover abroad. Although the content of this letter is not disclosed to readers, one can guess from the previous letter that it would have nothing to do with love—perhaps a confirmation of an assertion Aidoo herself admits in her apology in Changes that she made in a published interview that she “could never write about lovers in Accra.” In another interview published in the BBC Focus on Africa magazine, she is said to have argued that “African writers have been reluctant to write about love, mainly because they have often felt compelled to deal with so-called weightier issues such as poverty, corruption and incompetent leadership” (60).

However, the appearance of another of her novels (Changes) in 1991, and her role as an editor of a collection of love stories entitled, African Love Stories: An Anthology, seem to have flawed her argument above as well as her judgement of her own capabilities. Significantly, Changes brings a sudden twist to Aidoo’s writing career. In her opening remarks, before the commencement of this novel, she admits that:

Several years ago when I was a little older than I am now, I said in a published interview that I could never write about lovers in Accra. Because surely in our environment there are more important things to write about? Working on this story then was an exercise in word-eating! Because it is a slice from the life and loves of a somewhat privileged young woman and other fictional characters – in Accra. (CHANGES, *Aidoo’s opening remarks*)

One could not agree more with Ama Ata Aidoo on the fact that “there are more important things to write about” in this country than waste time on love stories. Yet, it is significant and relieving to note that though Changes is essentially a story about lovers, Aidoo seeks to use the human relations between men and women in this novel to expose certain issues that have, over a long period of time, not engaged the attention of many writers, readers, critics, the general public, governments and other development agencies.

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The novel relates the story of an educated Ghanaian woman, Esi, who seeks to free herself from the shackles of a patriarchal society. Much like her predecessor, Sissie, in Our Sister Killjoy, Esi kills the joy of the rather patriarchal society she finds herself in, when she attempts to assert her independence from her intruding husband (Oko) in order to concentrate on her job. As the narrative begins, Esi is heading for the Linga Hide Aways (a travel agency) to arrange a business trip for her office (the Department of Urban Statistics). The nightmares of her marriage confront readers in the second chapter where the omniscient narrator relates the unending quarrels between Oko and Esi on pages eight and nine, and the effects of these morning wranglings on their poor daughter, Ogyaanowa.

In Ogyaanowa’s stream of consciousness, presented in verse form, readers are made to see her frustration and unhappiness at the constant quarrels of her Dad and her Mum. Esi’s lack of time for her husband is always the catalyst to these quarrels, as Oko complains of Esi’s over concentration on her job to the neglect of her marital obligations. This immediately sets into motion the feminist tone of Aidoo’s literary piece.

The above assertion is confirmed a few pages later on page thirteen, where Aidoo presents men as insensitive, exploitative and oppressive. Shortly after Ogyaanowa's stream of consciousness, Oko, unable to contain Esi's refusal to fulfill her marital responsibilities, 'rapes' her one morning when she is all dressed up for work. Aidoo captures this marital rape incident like this:

...Oko flung the bedcloth away from him, sat up, pulled her down, and moved on her.

Esi started to protest. But he went on doing what he had determined to do all morning. He squeezed her breast repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging in and out of her, thrashing to the left, to the right, pounding and just pounding away. Then it was all over. Breathing like a marathon runner..., he got off her and fell heavily back on his side of the bed.¹⁰ (13)

Far from endorsing Oko's forceful act, it must be pointed out that Aidoo's choice of words in the above extract is deliberately aimed at establishing this incident as a violation of Esi's rights and dignity. The phrase, "...forced her unwilling legs", has been deliberately used to show that Esi has been treated with disrespect by her husband. Certainly this incident is a marital rape, and Aidoo seeks to use it to draw readers' attention to the persistent abuse of women in their marital homes. However beyond this feminist attitude, Aidoo seeks to use this incident to remind readers of a contemporary social problem—domestic violence.

As if to suggest that divorce is the best solution to this problem, Esi decides to walk out of the marriage despite opposition from her grandmother, her mother and even her friend, Opokuya. Having divorced Oko, one would have expected that Esi would never have anything to do with a man, especially considering her quest for freedom. On the contrary, she immediately jumps into

the arms of Ali Kondey, an already married Muslim businessman. Ali is married to Fusena and has kids with her already. But Esi is undaunted by this, and goes on with the relationship. The love, romance, and challenges these two love birds go through then dominate the whole narrative. Although Opokuya's marital challenges do come up occasionally, they are overshadowed by the love relationship between Esi and Ali. It is worth mentioning that although extensive space and time is equally given to the relationship between Ali and Fusena (right from their training college days in Atebubu, through to their lives in London and later in Accra) it is actually Esi's story that dominates the rest of the narrative, especially as she struggles to maintain a fair balance between her job and her private life.

Esi's affair with Ali rises to a shocking climax when she agrees to marry Ali Kondey as his second wife—something Esi's mother (Ena) and her grandmother (Nana) can not come to terms with. Nana, for instance, asks; "You are asking me whether you should marry this Ali of yours who already has got his wife and become one of his wives? Leave one man, marry another. What is the difference?" (132). After marriage, Ali's nightmares as a husband to two women begin as he struggles to make time for both sides. "For Esi it was shame for her dependence on a man who, as far as she could see, was too preoccupied with other matters to ever be with her ..." (144). But for us as readers, what comes as an anti-climax is Esi's craving for Ali, since it was the issue of time for her job that marred her first marriage with Oko. In fact, Ali soon becomes the greatest threat to Esi's quest for independence and self-actualisation. Esi (who hitherto needed space and time for herself) is now so lonely and restless that she has to resort to "tranquillisers" (173). When the situation gets worse she seeks help from a doctor. At this point the very basis for the annulment of her first marriage with Oko begins to appear senseless. In

fact, her loneliness and restlessness is the direct result of Ali's lack of time for her. Not even the expensive gifts (like the new car Ali gives to her as her new year present) can fill the vacuum left in her by Ali's absence. So in the third year of her second marriage to Ali, Esi is faced with another divorce.

On the occasion this happens, when Ali walks out of Esi's house, he symbolically walks out of the marriage. Interestingly, even after the divorce, they still meet and have affairs as lovers, not as a couple. By the close of the narrative readers are faced with an Esi Sekyi who, having had two failed marriages, takes solace in her work and occasionally engages in sex with her "sex-partner", Ali. As the story of Esi rolls to a disastrous end, it becomes clear that for Ama Ata Aidoo high class women like Esi, and modern day women in general, would have to grapple with a lot of challenges in their male-dominated societies, especially in their bid to assert themselves and also contribute to the development of these societies. The major challenge, then, would be how to effectively blend their family responsibilities and their corporate responsibilities at their work places.

Undeniably, in these modern times when world economic challenges and changing trends have necessitated women to support families materially, one should expect that there will be a conflict between the traditional woman figure and the modern day working woman figure. The main problem, as already mentioned above, is the struggle to maintain a good home and, at the same time, be able to explore one's God-given talent in this patriarchal world. It is this problem that Aidoo seeks to bring to the attention of her audience, using Esi's story. In Esi's case her husband

is the problem. He is presented as the enemy or the barricade to Esi's self-actualisation. Perhaps, Aidoo will not escape condemnation from Katherine Frank, who in her "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa" lashes out at Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa for fostering the perception that man is the enemy of womanhood. Undeniably, Aidoo uses Esi's case to reinforce that age-long radical feminist position that men are enemies to women's emancipation. Like Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa who are accused of advocating a world without men in some of their novels, Aidoo seeks to present the challenges of the female in a modern world that is run on masculine principles and practices.

Having dealt at length with her novels, it is important to turn attention to Aidoo's short stories, where she has equally done a marvelous job in discussing pertinent contemporary issues. Her short fictional works such as No Sweetness Here and Other Stories, The Girl Who Can and Other Stories, and The Eagle and the Chicken have clearly distinguished her as a writer who is able to handle serious subject matter and thematic concerns in a very short space. This is what comes to light as one glances through these short stories, especially the two short stories selected from her No Sweetness Here and Other Stories, and The Girl Who Can and Other Stories. These two are; "Cut Me a Drink" (Selected from No Sweetness Here and Other Stories collection) and "The Girl Who Can" (selected from The Girl Who Can and Other Stories collection).

In "Cut Me a Drink", Ama Ata Aidoo depicts the deplorable nature of city life and the challenges that confront city dwellers in Ghana. The story is about a young villager who goes to Accra in search of his little sister, Mansa. On his arrival in the capital city, he is bewildered by the numerous cars plying the streets of Accra and even loses his bag. It takes the kindness of a driver

to get him to the Mamprobi car station, where he boards a car and makes his way to Duayaw's apartment. As the narrator begins to tell of these initial ordeals to his folks, who have obviously gathered around him to listen to him over a pot of drink, certain basic truths about city dwellers are brought to light. Firstly, his lost bag reminds readers of the widely known stealing in our cities, especially by desperate city dwellers who will do anything to survive, even if it demands stealing another's belongings. One might argue that the narrator does not explain how he lost his bag, but common knowledge of the presence of thieves, pick-pockets and tricksters in our cities is enough clue to conclude how this innocent villager (the narrator) loses his bag. Secondly, his amazement at the numerous cars in the city suggests, or rather reminds one, about the large populations in our cities today. This readily brings to mind the issue of rural-urban migration with its attendant problems.

After the above ordeals, the narrator finally arrives at Duayaw's residence at Mamprobi, and from his description of his host's apartment, it is clear that it is a small bedroom. In what appears to be an attempt to defend himself, Duayaw explains to the narrator how difficult it is to find accommodation in the city. In his own words, "he was even lucky to have got that narrow place that looks like a box..." (31). Duayaw's final declaration, "It is very hard to find a place to sleep in the city..." reminds one of the major problem of many city dwellers today—a decent accommodation.

Having settled down, the narrator enquires about his sister and will not renege on his mission, even when Duayaw informs him he would not be able to find Mansa because of the large number of people in Accra. Much as one might laugh at the narrator's naivety about the difference

between his village where everyone knows everyone, and the city where it is almost impossible to find someone without a proper address, the situation Ama Ata Aidoo presents to her readers is one which seeks to draw attention to the continued rural-urban drift which has led to the population explosion that cities like Accra are experiencing today. But what is most significant at this stage of the narrator's story is the revelation by Duayaw that Mansa may be married to one of those big men "living in one of those big bungalows which are some ten miles from the city."

The apparent disparity between the rich and the poor, as indicated by Duayaw, cannot go unnoticed here. Aidoo deliberately employs setting (where the rich live, and where the poor live) as a tool to depict the economic gap between the haves and the have-nots. Thus, the subtle bitter tone of Duayaw, who has to make do with a small single room apartment as he says, "...someone big has married her and she is now living in one of those big bungalows which are some ten miles from the city...", is an attempt by Ama Ata Aidoo to draw attention to the widening gap between the rich and the poor in our society.

Despite the attempts by Duayaw to dissuade the narrator from wasting his time searching for Mansa, the persistence of the latter finally yields results. Duayaw gives in and plans are made to begin the search the following day. Later in the night, the narrator gets to know Duayaw's girlfriend, who he "wants to marry against the wishes of his people" (32-33). Here again, Aidoo seizes the opportunity to hammer on one serious social problem that is gradually tearing the Ghanaian society apart—ethnicity. The narrator's revelation that the people of Duayaw oppose

his marriage to his fiancée on grounds that “she is not of our tribe...” quickly brings to mind our society’s discouragement of inter-ethnic marriages, and the continued polarisation of this nation along ethnic lines.

Surprisingly, the narrator is not surprised at the stance of his host’s people, but would rather not comment on it. His indifference, however, tells readers that the decision of Duayaw’s folks is nothing new to him—an indication of how widespread this perception is, among their people. Without any deliberate attempt by Aidoo to condemn the ethnocentric posture of Duayaw’s people, the decision of the young man to go ahead with the marriage against the will of his people is enough hint that the writer feels that for any progress or development to be attained in this society, then every divisive tendency such as ethnicity ought to get out of the way. Probably, this is a timely call on national leaders like our politicians to seek national unity or interest rather than ethnic or parochial interests.

The initial confusion and amazement of the narrator about city life when he arrived in the afternoon, gets worse later that night when they go out to a night club. He cannot cease pondering over many questions such as, “Who is paying for all these lights?”—apparently referring to the street lights— “Ei, are all these people children of human beings? And where are they going?” (33). At the club, when Duayaw’s fiancée orders for beer the narrator is thrown into total bewilderment. He tells his folks; “Yes, I remember very well, she asked for beer. It was

not long before Duayaw brought them. I was too surprised to drink mine. I sat with my mouth open and watched the daughter of a woman cut beer like a man” (33).

Apart from the fact that the narrator’s shock, in the extract above, exposes his ignorance about city life, it equally exposes certain patriarchal attitudes held by him and his folks. Therefore, when he says, “I sat with my mouth open and watched the daughter of a woman cut beer like a man”, he reinforces certain long-held patriarchal prejudices that males are stronger than females, and that females should not indulge in the vices of men as they carry children in their wombs. It is interesting to note that the above attitude is later reinforced, again, by Duayaw who asks the narrator, “And this is no wonder, have you not been drinking this sweet woman’s drink all the time?”¹¹ Here, Ama Ata Aidoo seeks to expose the unfair labelling of women as weak, and attempts to debunk this by deliberately making the narrator (a man) to drink a soft drink called “lamlale” whilst Duayaw’s fiancée (a woman) drinks a strong alcoholic beverage like “beer”. It is worth pointing out that traditionally, women are neither expected to be found in bars unaccompanied by men, nor drink strong alcoholic drinks—a preserve of men. Thus, when Duayaw’s fiancée drinks beer instead of lamlale (lemonade—a soft drink which was generally consumed by women in the early post-independence Ghanaian society) one can tell that it is the above patriarchal notion that Aidoo seeks to debunk. The argument above is further strengthened by Lynne Rienner’s assertion in a review on African Love Stories: An Anthology (which has Aidoo as its editor) that “[the] anthology debunks preconceived notions about the African woman as impoverished victims, showing their strength, complexity, and diversity.”¹²

Interestingly, research has authenticated Aidoo's obvious attempt to portray the strength of women in this short story. For instance, in an article written by Barbara Ehrenreich in Time magazine, entitled "The Real Truth about the Female", it is established that in sports (athletics) "... women are more resistant to fatigue; the longer the race, the more likely they are to win it" (44). The writer adds that, "[today's] women stars can run, swim and skate faster than any man of few decades ago..." (44). What is more, she writes that a research conducted by Hales in 1995 in the U.S. Army on the female's physical potential revealed that "41 out-of-shape women—students, lawyers, bartenders and new mothers—achieved the fitness level of male Army recruits in just six months of working out..." (44). Essentially, what Barbara Ehrenreich's article does is that it showcases the strength of women in sports and even in the armed forces, which lends weight to Aidoo's attempt to debunk the traditional notion that regards women as weak.

Perhaps local evidence from Ghana and beyond, where women engage in farming activities and man the homes as well, should further strengthen Aidoo's attempt to show that females are not weaker than males. In any case, a cursory survey of any typical farming community would even reveal that females work far more than males who, on returning from farms with their wives would leave the house chores to their wives whilst they chat over pots of palm wine, pito or akpeteshie. Certainly, the female may not be as weak as generally perceived, and this is exactly what Aidoo seeks to portray by using Duayaw's fiancée's actions in "Cut Me a Drink". Obviously, this is one of the reasons why Aidoo can be labelled as a radical feminist. Despite this fact, this tale still remains the tale of a villager's amazement at city life on his first encounter with the city.

After all the initial shocks, the narrator finally comes to terms with the lives of city dwellers and begins to dance with one of the young ladies at the club. The narrator uses images and similes to depict the lady as a whore, when he says that

...she was as black as you and I, but her hair was very long and fell on her shoulders like that of a white woman. I did not touch it but I saw it was very soft. Her lips with that red paint, looked like a fresh wound. There was no space between her skin and her dress. (35-36)

Common knowledge of how most prostitutes dress in order to entice clients, and the fact that the place in question is a night club are ample evidence to conclude that this lady is a whore. Undeniably, Aidoo uses this lady to expose the low life some city dwellers live—selling their bodies and dignity for money. This is later affirmed when the narrator says that when he went back the second time to dance with the lady, he discovered that “someone had gone with her already” (36). Eager to dance again, he falls on another lady of the same group. After a short dance they go to buy beer and cigarettes, where he discovers that the very lady he has been dancing with, and who wishes to drink beer and smoke cigarettes, is his sister, Mansa. This turn of events contrasts sharply with the initial speculation by Duayaw that perhaps Mansa is now married to one of the rich men “living in one of those big bungalows which are some ten miles from the city” (32).

However, this epiphany works well to the advantage of Aidoo, who is obviously bent on depicting the corrupt, shameless and dehumanising lifestyles of some city dwellers, especially folks like Mansa and her friends who migrate from rural areas in search of greener pastures in

the urban areas. For these helpless victims of rural-urban migration, they must work to keep body and soul together, irrespective of the type of job. No wonder Mansa shamelessly declares to her brother (the narrator) that “any form of work is work”. This concluding segment of the narrator’s tale immediately brings to mind the issue of unemployment and its adverse effects on the youth. Definitely, no matter how little the space and time given to this issue is, Aidoo seeks to draw attention to the frustration of unemployed youth, like Mansa and her friends, who would do anything to survive, even if they have to sell their bodies and dignity.

As the narrator brings his story to a close, there is the indication that the women are weeping for the moral decadence of their daughter in the city. For he says, “Oh my mother and my aunt, oh, little sister, are you all weeping? As for you women!” Without any deliberate attempt to gloss over the patriarchal tone of the narrator, which is evident in the statement, “As for you women!”, attention ought to be drawn, instead, to the fact that the weeping of the women is employed by Aidoo as a warning to rural dwellers who regard the city as paradise. Aidoo sends a clear signal to all that the city is not as glamorous as it appears. As the story ends, the men (the narrator and his uncles) despite their male ego can do nothing about the situation. But unlike the women who are weeping, they will rather express their sorrow in the cutting of drinks, as the narrator declares, “My brother, cut me another drink.” Significantly, Aidoo’s ability to directly transliterate vernacular expressions to English (for example the one above) does not only demonstrate her mastery of language, but also often give her works a unique diction.

In another story, “The Girl Who Can” (from The Girl Who Can and Other Stories collection) Ama Ata Aidoo presents a young girl, Adjoa, who is nearly pushed off her dreams by her “patriarchal” grandmother ,Nana, who thinks her proper place is a marital home, and not school or athletics. She cannot cease complaining about the thin legs of her granddaughter. She argues that,

‘...if any woman *decides* to come into this world with all her two legs, then she should select legs that have meat on them: with good calves. Because you are sure such legs would support solid hips. And a woman must have solid hips to be able to have children.’

(29)

‘Legs that have meat on them with good calves to support solid hips... to be able to have children.’ (30)

For Adjoa’s grandmother, the preoccupation of a girl should be marriage and procreation. Patriarchal as her perception is, Nana’s attitude reinforces the argument of some feminists that female subjugation is not perpetrated by only males, but even females themselves. These female collaborators, like Nana in this short story, are clearly under condemnation by Ama Ata Aidoo for the fostering of certain male prejudices such as the relegation of the female to child-bearing and housekeeping. According to the narrator Nana’s rather patriarchal perceptions extend to her stance on girl - child education. Adjoa captures it as follows:

School is another thing Nana and my mother discussed often and appeared to have different ideas about. Nana thought it would be a waste of time. I never understood what she meant. My mother seemed to know and disagreed. She kept telling Nana that she, that is, my mother, felt she was locked into some kind of darkness because she didn’t go to school. So that if I, her daughter, could learn to write and read my own name and a little

besides—perhaps be able to calculate some things on paper—that would be good. (31)

It is interesting to note that Nana’s negative attitude towards girl child education, as clearly shown in the extract above, has been deliberately employed by Ama Ata Aidoo to expose the gross gender inequalities that exist between the two sexes, especially with regard to opportunities like formal education. The major cause, for Ama Ata Aidoo, is wrong perceptions or negative attitudes like that of Nana’s, and the consequence is the condemnation of the female to total darkness. This powerful image (darkness) effectively conveys a sense of the ignorance, the denial and the bondage the female is perpetually trapped in. Therefore when Adjoa says that her mother “felt she was locked into some kind of darkness because she didn’t go to school” (31), it is actually Aidoo herself, just as any women’s rights advocate, arguing that education is key to female emancipation. Far from being feminist, Aidoo is perhaps only drawing attention to the already existing low girl-child enrolment in our schools, and most especially, encouraging girl-child education as a way of empowering the female to venture into public life. In recent times, many Ghanaians have complained about the few number of female legislators in parliament, and other respectable positions in various aspects of the Ghanaian society. Aidoo’s solution to this problem is simple—girl-child education should be encouraged.

Notwithstanding Adjoa’s grandmother’s pessimism about the relevance of Adjoa’s education, Adjoa is allowed to go to school. At school, she capitalises on her long legs to win trophies in athletics for her school. Ironically, the very thin, long legs which incur her grandmother’s displeasure and skepticism about her ability to give birth, become her ticket to fame in her school

and her district. Her success at school eventually changes her grandmother's negative attitude towards her. Adjoa tells readers that:

All this week, she has been washing my school uniform herself. That is a big surprise. And she didn't stop at that, she even went to Mr. Mensah's house and borrowed his charcoal pressing iron each time, came back home with it, and ironed and ironed and ironed the uniform, until, if I had been the uniform I would have said aloud that I had had enough.

(32)

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As if the above are not enough, the old lady travels all the way to the district capital during the district inter-schools competition to watch her granddaughter. Ama Ata Aidoo crowns it all with a touch of humour when the narrator says that when she finally wins the cup for the best all-round junior athlete, Nana "carried the gleaming cup on her back. Like they do with babies, and other very precious things. And this time, not taking the trouble to walk by herself. When we arrived in our village, she entered our compound to show the cup to my mother before going to give it back to the Headmaster" (32).

In the midst of all these sudden changes in Nana's attitude towards Adjoa, one cannot fail to acknowledge the didactic tone adopted by Ama Ata Aidoo in this short story. Adjoa's success in athletics, despite the complaints of her grandmother that her thin legs would make it impossible for her to give birth, clearly indicates that everyone has a unique talent which, when given the platform, one would be able to use for the benefit of society. Besides, Adjoa's success in sports clearly shows that child-bearing is not the ultimate goal every woman should be aspiring to attain. Indeed, when Nana later remarks, "saa, thin legs can also be useful thin legs can also

be useful ‘even though some legs don’t have much meat on them, to carry hips ... they can run’ (32-33) it is a concession of this truth, which Aidoo seeks to pass on to all and sundry, especially women who are pinned down by the misconception that their proper place is the home—child-bearing and housekeeping. Besides this feminist point of view, parents cannot fail to acknowledge the fact that Aidoo is seeking to encourage them not to place limits on their children, but to allow them to explore their full potentials for their good and the good of the broader society.

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Thus, although this story revolves around three female characters, Aidoo uses it to address a very serious problem in our educational sector today—the low girl-child enrolment in our schools—and in a broader sense gives counsel to parents and guardians as to how to treat children with certain perceived defects. Indeed, the two short stories of Ama Ata Aidoo reviewed above, coupled with her two novels reviewed earlier, indicate that she raises very pertinent political, economic and social issues. But prime among these are women and children’s issues.

In exploring these issues, Aidoo has demonstrated great skill in her ability to employ plot, setting, diction, characterisation and other literary techniques to communicate effectively with her readers. One remarkable skill no reader can miss is her ability to handle literary genres of all kinds; prose, drama and poetry. Although her works cut across all these literary genres, it is her ability to combine these literary forms in one piece of work that is worth commending. Aidoo has certainly dazzled many with her ability to effectively mix prose and verse in her works. She is able to switch from prose to verse with so much ease that readers can easily get carried away

by the beautiful lines and miss the real message they convey. In some of her prose works, Aidoo consistently wanders off into verse. This is particularly evident in her Our Sister Killjoy, where the entire piece seems to be a very long poetic rendition of her thoughts. For instance, when readers encounter narrations such as,

But what she also came to know was that someone somewhere would always

see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean.

A way to get land, land, more land.

Valleys where green corn would sway in the wind.

A grazing ground for highland cattle

A stream to guggle the bonnie barns to sleep.

Gold and silver mines,

Oil

Uranium

Plutonium...

Power, child, power.

For this is all anything is about.

Power to decide

Who is to live,

Who is to die, (13)

they might wonder whether Aidoo is writing a prose work or a poem. However, one beautiful aspect of this blending of poetry and prose is that, the verse forms often provide a musical touch to her literary pieces, through Aidoo's use of fast rhythm, repetitions, rhymes, onomatopoeic words and other sound devices.

What is even more significant about this style is that whenever Aidoo breaks into verse she sounds very philosophical, and it is often on such occasions that she seizes the opportunity to raise very topical issues which can easily be missed by readers who get carried away by the poetic beauty of her lines. On most occasions these poetic renditions are her own authorial comments. This probably explains why they are often so philosophical and pregnant with meaning. In Our Sister Killjoy, for instance, when she writes,

A common heritage. A
Dubious bargain that left us
Plundered of
Our gold
Our tongue
Our life—while our
Dead fingers clutch... (29)

one can infer that Aidoo is exposing the exploitative and destructive nature of colonialism. Philosophical and poetic as these lines are, one can tell that they present the dominant theme of this novel—colonialism and its evils. Also, in Changes, Aidoo's verse forms are equally philosophical, and are sometimes used to draw her audience close to some of her characters through stream of consciousness. For instance, through these poetic verses, readers are allowed (on page 8) to journey into the sub-conscious of Ogyaanowa to know her inner thoughts and the psychological effect of her parents' incessant quarrels on her. Also, Aidoo allow readers to journey into Ali's subconscious when she writes:

Guilty in spite of the fact that by all the precepts of his
upbringing Esi was indeed his wife, and yet by 'home'
he meant only one place, which was where Fusena and

his children were. Hopelessly guilty because he knew that there was not the slightest possibility of him ever being able to establish any rituals in the relationship with Esi. (143)

These inner thoughts provide very useful information that aid in the proper shaping of some of the themes of the novel and help readers to comprehend the actions of Ogyaanowa and some other characters such as her quarrelsome parents (Esi and Oko) and Ali.

Another unique feature of Aidoo's prose narratives is her ability to weave into her narrations, traditional oral story-telling techniques and mannerisms. This is very evident in her short stories, where she tells her stories as if her audience were sitting right in front of her. Her narrators and her audience have direct contact in most of her stories. It is the deliberate interactions between these two parties that produce her stories, just as is often the case in traditional story-telling sessions. In her "Cut Me a Drink", for instance, readers come face-to-face with this style when the story is presented in the form of an interaction between the narrator and his folks (uncles, aunts, mother and sisters). Although these other characters do not speak in the story, the narrator's involvement of these characters through statements such as, "I say, my uncles if you are going to Accra and anyone tells you... Yes, my uncle, he did not deceive me. (39) Do you cry 'My Lord', mother? (40) Oh, my mother and my aunt, oh, little sister, are you all weeping? (44) clearly create a scene of a traditional story-telling setting where the actions of both the narrator and his audience combine to produce good results. That Aidoo is able to transport traditional folktale features into written literature is indicative of her outstanding craftsmanship. Indeed, as J. De Grandsaigne (ed) in his African Short Stories in English: An Anthology rightly

puts it, Aidoo is able to “bridge the gap between the tale and the short story and between oral and written literature” through her remarkable style of writing (46).

Significantly, she transports this oral literature feature into her longer prose works such as Our Sister Killjoy and Changes. In these novels, Aidoo makes conscious efforts to involve her readers in her narratives. She deliberately makes her narrator address Sissie as “Our sister” and her readers as brothers and sisters in Our Sister Killjoy in order to achieve this goal of bridging the gap between oral and written literature. This effectively brings the reader and the narrator to the same level, and successfully evokes the same sense of communalism normally created in oral or traditional story-telling sessions.

It must be added that it is for this same purpose that Aidoo uses the subjective narrator in most of her prose works. In these prose works, the “I” narrator is deeply involved in the actions of each of the narratives and contributes very effectively to the plot of each narrative. In Our Sister Killjoy, for instance, the subjective narrator is involved in the narrative and frequently addresses Sissies’ as “Our Sister” and her audience as ‘My brothers’. In most of her short stories, especially in “Cut Me a Drink” and “The Girl Who Can” Aidoo narrates her stories through characters that are part of the narratives and relate the stories from their subjective points of view. Undeniably, these characters are the pivots around which the plots of Aidoo’s stories are built, and it is through the lenses of these subjective narrators that Aidoo passes on her messages.

The reference to plot quickly brings to mind another unique artistic feature of Aidoo's prose works—her non compliance with the traditional or the conventional plot structure. A cursory look at her prose works would reveal what seems to be her loathing for conventional or traditional plots. Conventionally, the plot of a novel should constitute elements such as an expository part, rising actions, the climax of these actions, a gradual fall of these actions, and a final resolution or conclusion to these actions.¹⁸ In other words, a good plot should have a relaxed atmosphere or actions at the beginning of a story, which should gradually rise into a climax, before falling into the anti-climax. This should eventually pave the way for the concluding or resolution segment, where all conflicts are resolved and the narrative ends on a satisfactory note. However, like most modern novelists, Aidoo does not conform to this plot structure. Structurally, her plots begin on notes that are already characterised by tensions and conflicts, which gradually rise to a climax where the atmosphere is so charged that both characters and readers can almost feel the heat in the narratives.

In her Our Sister Killjoy for instance Sissie's conflict with the world around her starts right here in Ghana, at the beginning of the novel when she encounters a culturally indoctrinated Sammy at the dinner with the whites. This conflict increases with Sissie's fast growth into a consciousness of the imminent disappearance of the identity and culture of her race. As she tries to salvage the situation by criticising her "been-to" brothers for refusing to return home after their studies abroad, the conflicts and stiff oppositions she meets create a tensed atmosphere in the narrative, and this is sustained to the end of the novel where Sissie returns home and refuses to post a letter she had been writing on the plane to her lover in London. This act is symbolic, as it is clearly an act of condemning the continued stay of her lover and her other African brothers abroad.

As the novel ends, one can sense Sissie's anger against the self-exiled "been-tos", and the narrative eventually ends without a resolution of the conflicts and tensions in the novel. As a result, readers are left to speculate on what Sissie's next move will be, since the novel ends abruptly without any indication of what her plans are. Is she going to continue fighting till her brothers see reason and come home, or will she give up and allow the status quo to remain as it is? This sort of plot structure is definitely far from being a conventional one, and goes a long way to showcase Aidoo's independent artistic creativity. Far from suggesting that novelists who conform to the traditional plot structure are not creative, an attempt is only being made to celebrate Aidoo for her remarkable handling of her plots.

The same plot structure is found in Changes, where immediately the narrative commences readers are confronted with the incessant conflicts between Esi and her husband, Oko, as well as Esi's internal conflict as she struggles to assert herself in the patriarchal society she finds herself in. The tensions and conflicts are sustained throughout the narrative, and culminate in Esi's two failed marriages. As the narrative ends, the conflicts remain unresolved and the sudden end to this novel throws readers into suspense. As a result of this open endedness, readers are once again left to speculate whether Esi Sekyi would soften her stance and come to terms with the realities of her patriarchal society, or continue on her self-destructive path to an illusory freedom and fulfillment.

The issue of Esi's struggles in the rather patriarchal society she finds herself in immediately brings to mind Aidoo's feminist tone in most of her prose works. Aidoo is, by every standard, a

radical feminist, and her feminist tone runs through almost all her prose works. Although she discusses broader issues such as the negative effects of colonialism, neocolonialism, self-exile, rural-urban migration, and unemployment, among others, gender issues such as the evils of patriarchy and the general predicament of the female, stand tall in her works. Being a female writer, one would expect that her commitment to her gender would definitely give her works a feminist tone. Despite this, one cannot gloss over the fact that Aidoo's works have equally exposed very contemporary problems in Ghana that need serious and urgent attention.



CHAPTER FOUR

3.2 A CRITICAL REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE THEMATIC CONCERNS AND STYLE OF AMMA DARKO.

Amma Darko, another Ghanaian female writer, is outstanding in her discussions and exposure of the challenges of her society, especially those of the modern Ghanaian woman in today's fast growing world. As Lynne Rienner (ed.) rightly puts it in a review of Vincent Odamtten's Broadening the Horizon: Critical Introductions to Amma Darko, Darko's works reflect her "compelling story-telling talent and unflinching criticism of what Ghana has become as its people are increasingly enmeshed in the network of global capitalism."¹³

Amma Darko's four novels (Beyond the Horizon, The Housemaid, Faceless and Not Without Flowers), reveal her remarkable concern for the most ignored and gruesome issues of the Ghanaian society. Writing, first and foremost, as a female writer, one would expect that female issues would take centre stage in her works. This is exactly what would be discovered about her works, although these issues do not in any way put her into the class of feminists. In her very first novel, Beyond the Horizon, Amma Darko presents a female character, Mara, and the ordeal she goes through in Ghana and later in Germany through no fault of hers but her insensitive husband, Akobi.

The novel commences with what appears to be the middle of Amma Darko's novel's plot. It begins in Germany, with Mara sitting half naked in front of her dressing mirror in a brothel where she works as a prostitute. Then, through a flashback, she relates how she got out of Ghana and how she finally ended up in the shameful and hapless situation she finds herself. She begins her story with her marriage to Akobi, a civil servant who worked at the ministries in Accra. Akobi had come down to their village, Naka, and asked for her hand in marriage. Having paid the necessary dowry and met all the necessary requirements, Mara was then given in marriage to Akobi without her consent. Although Mara does not indicate that she was married to Akobi against her will, the fact that her consent was never sought is an indication of the patriarchal nature of the society Amma Darko presents in this novel.

According to Mara, since Akobi worked in the ministries in Accra she had to relocate to Accra with him after their marriage. But the horrible and pathetic way in which she describes Akobi's apartment in Accra clearly shows that he lived in a dirty slum or ghetto.

...there wasn't the group of huts with large compounds about them and backyard gardens that I was used to in the village, but 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. In these gutters, due to the lack of any drainage system, all the water from dirty washing and bathing, and urine too, collected until it evaporated.

...the resulting standing water not only stank but also bred nasty shades of algae and generations of large fat mosquitoes... As if that wasn't enough,... fifty yards away there was an unhygienic public toilet beside which was the area's only public rubbish dump. And so this also not only brought in swarms of flies in their thousands but polluted the

surrounding air so intensely that one hardly ever woke up in the morning without either a splitting headache or a bleeding nose. (8)

Parts of the corrugated-iron sheet shelters had rusted away and left little holes... large enough for inquisitive mice and other creatures to slip through. Lift a pan here and out jumps a toad. Pull a chair there to sweep behind it and what should dash feverishly past but a bright orange-headed lizard. Spiders, wasps and cockroaches were all about...

(9)

Such details clearly show that the area in question is the popular Sodom and Gomorrah slum in Accra. The vivid images employed by Amma Darko to describe this setting are enough to make anyone, who is familiar with Sodom and Gomorrah in Accra, arrive at this conclusion. But as to whether these descriptions fit present day Sodom and Gomorrah or not, is not important at this stage. Rather, what is important is the ordeal Mara goes through there. In this slum, Mara suffers all kinds of inhumane treatment from her husband. Apart from the frequent beatings and injuries, Mara suffers violent sexual harassments which can best be described as marital rape from her husband. What is more, any time he forces her into such sexual abuses on his bed he later makes her sleep on a mat on the floor instead of sharing the bed with her. Perhaps, apart from using Akobi's treatment of Mara to reinforce the feminist ideology that regards some men as oppressive and exploitative, Amma Darko also seeks to remind readers of a problem that has persistently robbed families of peace—domestic violence. Thus, like Aidoo, Darko uses Mara's plight to expose the gross abuse of women in their marital homes.

Mara is reduced to a mere slave, not just for Akobi, but even for their neighbours. She is made to empty people's rubbish in return for foodstuff which she is obliged to use to cater for herself, Akobi and their son, Kofo. Meanwhile, whatever earnings Akobi makes from his work as a civil

servant goes into savings to be used for a project that is never disclosed to Mara. He even sells Mara's things, especially the gold jewellery that Akobi's father gave to Mara when she gave birth to Kofo, for his undisclosed project. Mara finds out about this project only when she demands for her gold jewellery and threatens to hit him with a broken block. Akobi then discloses;

'I deposited the money for my passport and a ticket' (33). 'I am going to Europe to live there for just a year or two at most,' he began, 'and to work. Mara, do you know that there is so plenty factory and construction work waiting to be done there in Europe but with so little people to do them? That is why I sold your things, Mara. I want to go there and work, work hard. And I tell you... I will make so much money that I can buy us everything. Everything, Mara! Television, radio, fridge, carpet, even car! (34)

The premise on which Akobi decides to travel to Europe is rather naïve and unrealistic. But Amma Darko employs his naivety to discuss a contemporary problem that is robbing this nation of its best human resource—the migration of people from the underdeveloped world to the developed world in search of better living conditions. Thus, Amma Darko picks up this issue from where her predecessor, Aidoo, leaves off in her Our Sister Killjoy where she criticises “been-tos” for their self-exile and submission to neocolonialism. One would notice a visible continuity of this theme by Darko, when she begins to expose the tendency of Ghanaians running away from the challenges of their country to other perceived heavenly destinations abroad in search of greater opportunities, through Akobi's story. Arguably, Akobi is just one of Aidoo's “been-tos” reincarnated in Darko's Beyond the Horizon. What is most significant at this stage, however, is the fact that this episode provides a sudden twist to the novel's plot. Hitherto, all had been centred on Mara and her sufferings at the hands of her husband and the society around her.

But with Akobi's travel plans coming to the fore, a broader societal issue—the movement of Ghanaians abroad to seek greener pastures—comes to centre stage. Akobi, like many ignorant Ghanaian youths, is leaving the nation to go and enjoy the perceived paradise out there in Europe.

Absurd as Akobi's notion about Europe is, Mara naively believes him and helps out in all the preparations towards his journey to this heavenly destination. Shockingly, even the whole Naka village, where both Akobi and Mara hail from, buys into this ridiculous idea of Akobi and makes generous contributions towards this trip. Even his father who hitherto refused to sell their family land, sells it and gives the money to his son. Much like Ama Ata Aidoo, Amma Darko uses all these details to expose the misconception that the West is a haven for prosperity—a perception that has often made people from less developed cultures like ours to sell off all their possessions in order to travel abroad in search of greener pastures.

Interestingly, even the gods of Naka are not left out of this whole excitement; they are duly contacted, appeased and sacrificed to, for the success of Akobi's trip to Europe. The superstitious nature of the people of Naka really comes to light on the eve of Akobi's departure, when a medicine man comes to Accra from the village, by foot, to deliver a simple message from the gods to Akobi. He tells him, 'Shake hands 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!'(42)

Promising everyone (especially Mara) heaven on his return from Europe, Akobi finally departs from Ghana. Surprisingly, despite all the struggles and sacrifices Mara makes to make his dream come to reality, he leaves without even saying good bye to her. Rather, on the night before his departure, he spends the night with another woman (a co-worker called Comfort) in a night club. According to Mama Kiosk, an elderly woman, a neighbour, and the only friend Mara has in their slum, on the day of Akobi's departure it is this Comfort who sees him off at the airport. Apparently, Akobi is too ashamed of an illiterate wife like Mara (whose name, alluding to the Bible, suggests bitterness)¹⁴ and rather feels comfortable with an educated woman (Comfort, whose name literally suggests convenience). Conscious of Akobi's shyness to admit that she is his wife, both in public and in their home when friends come to visit, Mara decides to develop herself to a standard she hopes will make Akobi proud of her, on his return from Europe. She admits that:

I needed plenty changes outside me still, I knew, but I had started and made significant strides and was content with my steady progress. For instance, I no longer wore African clothes, neither new nor old. No! I wore dresses, European dresses... You know, it sounds nothing special, said just simply: I no longer wore dresses. But it was something special. It was an outward transformation... (48)

Whilst back home Mara is busy positioning herself to fit into the ideal wife of Akobi, the latter seems to have forgotten all about her on his arrival in Germany. He neither writes nor replies any of the letters Mara sends every week. His silence is, however, subtly overshadowed by the unnecessary requests Mara makes in her letters to him. In one of her letters, for instance, she writes:

Dear my one and only Akobi,...

I forgot to tell you about thread in the last letter. Please don't forget, when you are coming, to buy and bring with you large bundles of thread of all colours, especially red because red is now the psychedelic colour that people wear. Even I have, too, I have sewn one red dress.

Bye-bye... (50)

Ridiculous and unnecessary as these requests seem, Amma Darko uses them to show the high expectations Mara and the entire Naka village, have with regard to the benefits they hope to accrue from Akobi's stay abroad. Unsurprisingly, when Akobi's silence is long overdue, the people of Naka begin to complain bitterly and those who contributed towards Akobi's trip begin to question the wisdom behind supporting Akobi in the first place. As Mara narrates, "Things were getting rough and everyone was blaming everyone else but himself for everything, from why Akobi was sent to school in the first place, to why this his trip to Europe received encouragement" (50).

However, tempers and nerves soon calm down with the arrival of Akobi's letter. He asks Mara to join him abroad, and this rekindles the hope of the people of Naka. But it must be established that Amma Darko deliberately uses the behaviour of the people of Naka, especially that of Mara, to criticise the unnecessary pressure relatives at home often put on these illegal migrants. Here, again, one can sense a common attitude shown by both Aidoo and Darko towards this particular subject. Both do not spare folks at home for their unreasonable demands on "been-tos" and their part in the continued migration of relations abroad.

Mara leaves behind their two children and goes to join her husband in Germany. But on the eve of her departure, Mara has a terrible nightmare (56). Incidentally, this nightmare serves as a foreshadowing of the horrible things Mara later suffers in Germany. Though one cannot gloss over this foreshadowing, it is important to note that some of the things which happen right from the airport in Ghana to the time Mara finally settles down in Berlin are equally significant and worth pointing out. First and foremost, readers are brought face- to- face with the rot in the Immigration Service of Ghana when the agent hired by Akobi to bring Mara to Germany gets away with a fake passport, thanks to “a five-pound note which (her) agent smartly pushed into the clerk’s palm”(56). Besides this, the ordeal migrants go through at the various German airports and embassies contrasts sharply with the glamorous perception Akobi and other folks in Naka have about Europe. Mara narrates that in East Germany,

Many with whom we travelled were paying money to some East German official and heading somewhere. My agent replied, when I asked him why we weren’t joining them, that these were also people without West German visas but who got themselves cheap and bad agents. ‘They are going to end up in refugee camps,’ he added... ‘They will be put in camps and be compelled into a life that even their bush ancestors never lived... (58)

Above all these Darko’s novel exposes the painful and fraudulent ways which Ghanaians, and Africans in general, use to enter Europe. Even Mara enters West Berlin with a fake passport—one which belongs to another woman who “has a valid staying permit for West Germany for at least five years, thanks to some poor wretched and destroyed German drug addict she married” (59).

Indeed, all these details provided by Amma Darko are a true reflection of the terrible things illegal migrants from under-developed cultures like ours go through when they sell all their belongings here and journey to the perceived paradise in the West. The issues of fake passports and contract marriages are always a source of worry to these illegal migrants. As a matter of fact, the realistic and contemporary nature of this problem makes this novel a documentary rather than a work of fiction. Having lived in Germany, it would only be fair to conclude that Amma Darko is presenting the bare facts as she witnessed them in Germany, especially how her fellow African brethren, who were illegal migrants, were treated. She merely attempts to use Mara's story to present this reality.

As the story progresses, Mara gets to West Germany and is again entrusted into the care of a new agent, Osey, who turns out to be a rapist and a racist. He attempts to have carnal relationship with Mara, and makes faces to scare white folks on the train they are travelling on. However, through him the racist nature of the Germans is equally exposed. He tells Mara about the cruel and inhumane manner in which the Germans treat and regard blacks. He tells her:

Mara, first we must tell you that life here in Germany for us black people, from Africa especially, is very very hard. In the eyes of the people here, we are several shades too black for their land. And many, not all, but many, don't like us, because for them we are wild things that belong in the jungle.¹⁵ I told you they call us monkeys, didn't I? (76)

Although Osey may have incurred readers' wrath with his initial immoral conduct, he is still very useful in providing deep insight into the theme of racism, and also updates readers on certain key

details such as his disclosure that Akobi has changed his name to Cobby. Through him we also get to know that his wife is saving money in order to pay a white man to marry her so as to help her gain German citizenship (77). Darko's ability to allow her omniscient narrator to withdraw from the narratives so that readers can get direct and useful details from characters through characters' dialogues, monologues and streams of consciousness is remarkable, and works to her advantage by giving credibility to her omniscient narrator.

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On arrival, Mara discovers that all these details are true, and that her husband has even entered into a contract marriage with Gitte (a German lady) in order to secure German citizenship. Mara is then asked to pretend to be Cobby's sister so as to aid Cobby achieve his selfish ambition. She also discovers that Cobby has defrauded Gitte, and has deceived her into believing that he is building a house in Ghana for both of them. On completion, they would then relocate to Ghana and live happily as husband and wife. Here, once again, the vulnerability and gullibility of women, irrespective of their race or background, is brought to the limelight. This actually universalises the problem of women, as readers are made to realise that regardless of the setting, women's problems have remained similar, if not the same. Added to Gitte's case, the violent sexual intercourse Cobby and Osey occasionally have with their African wives, coupled with the occasional beatings meted out to them, is enough to establish females as victims of domestic violence, oppression, and deception.

Having settled down with Cobby in Germany, Mara is deceived into prostitution by her own husband. Mara, who left the shores of Ghana with high hopes, soon finds herself working in a

brothel against her wish. With the threat to send a copy of a video, in which Mara is having sex with some men, to her folks in Ghana, Mara is left with no option than to consent to Cobby's wicked plans. Worst of all, all the money she makes out of the trade goes to Cobby. However, through the help of Kaye, the wife of the owner of the brothel, Mara is able to have extra men in order to make extra money for herself. Through Kaye's assistance she is able to save enough, secure a residence permit through a contract marriage, and even send some money home for her parents and her two children. Having secured her residence papers and a five years visa, Mara then sets out to expose Akobi. She tells Gitte about Akobi's deception and fraudulent activities, and relocates to Munich where she continues with her prostitution. As the narrative draws to a close, Mara is not only a complete whore but also a drug addict who "can't go through a day without sniffing "snow" (139). The only good news is that nemesis finally catches up with Akobi and his accomplices—Akobi is jailed in Germany and "everything he and Gitte owned is taken away by a bank he owes" (138-9). Despite this poetic justice, or nemesis, the harm inflicted on the physical body, the emotions, the psyche, and the dignity of Mara can never be atoned for, as she is evidently set on a path of no return. She decides to stay in Germany till her death, hoping that her family in Ghana never finds out about her tragedy.

The word NEMESIS as used above brings to mind Amma Darko's last novel—Not Without Flowers. The novel does not only demonstrate the true meaning of NEMESIS, but also sets out to expose certain social evils and problems within various sections of the Ghanaian society. Though gender issues such as the oppression and injustice perpetrated against women and children continue to take center stage in Amma Darko's works, one remarkable thing about Not Without Flowers is that in presenting these issues, the writer does so in such a way that in the

end they cease to be gender issues but become national issues that need to be addressed by society. This is what comes to light as one reads this “story of misery, pain, agony, dilemmas, [and] frustrations” (11). The novel presents a tale of failed relationships and their daunting effects on victims, their families and society as a whole. The pains, nightmares, agonies, and the lust for vengeance which characterise each episode of the novel successfully create a vicious cycle of cause and effects—effects which permeate deep into lineages and family ties, so that in the end innocent souls like Cora and Randa are condemned to perpetual sorrow because of the actions of adults like Pa.

The story essentially revolves around the mental instability of Ma. But there are very shocking revelations that emerge about certain aspects of the Ghanaian society as this story unfolds. As the narrative commences in the prologue, Kweku, Cora, Randa, Beam (a journalist), a benevolent farmer and his son, are making an attempt to extract the mother of the first three, from the QWCS Prayer Camp where Ma had been dumped due to mental illness. As Cora and Randa wait in the van at the foot of the hill, whilst the men make their secret intrusion into the camp, one thing immediately hits readers—the insanitary and inhumane conditions inmates of this prayer camp are exposed to. No better words could have succinctly captured this than the words of Amma Darko. She captures the whole scene as follows:

On the floor, where the farmer’s son had pointed, was a figure. She was frail and huddled on a mat on the floor, fast asleep. There was no pillow for her head... She was about sixty, with skeletal features, and completely bald... Around each of her ankles was an iron ring linked to a thick iron chain... The frail old woman stank of stale urine. She must have wet herself several times while chained. Kweku’s blood churned. They tiptoed

to the next figure, also bald and huddled on a mat with no pillow. The ankle was also chained. (27-28)

Shocking and disgusting as these details are, the novel clearly sets out to give a voice to the millions of voiceless inmates holed up in mental homes and so-called prayer camps. But most significantly, readers are violently shaken out of their complacency as the piercing narrative voice of Amma Darko awakens them, and society as a whole, to the realities of our modern Ghanaian society. “Whip to Conquer Satan” (26) as the name of the prayer camp suggests, exposes the level of the violation of the fundamental human rights of inmates of many mental homes and so-called prayer camps. Perhaps a quick recall of the recent exposure of the deplorable conditions and the high level of violation of the fundamental rights of mental patients at the Accra Psychiatric Hospital, coupled with the gross abuse of minors in some orphanages and children’s homes in Accra, by the Ghanaian investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, draws Amma Darko’s novel very close to contemporary Ghanaian readers. What is more, it makes this novel a real documentary piece which seeks to expose this social problem that society seems to have turned a blind eye to.

The most absurd of all the initial revelations in the novel is the revelation of the import of the whipping of inmates in these prayer camps. As the farmer’s son explains, “To them, mental illness means possession by evil spirits” (30) which must be exorcised through whipping of victims—an act Beam rightly associates with the “Stone Age” and not the “twenty-first century” (30). At this early stage of the narrative, society cannot afford but bow in shame for such uncalled-for cruelties against humanity. In fact, as the team of men inside the wooden structures

of the prayer camp depict the rot in this prayer camp through their dialogues, our society's dirty linen is clearly being washed in the eyes of a baffled audience as they come face-to-face with the realities of prayer camp operators, who "[employ] people who do a wonderful public relations job for them all over" (31). As Amma Darko indicates, the target of these criminals is the "well-to-do" (31)—and these well-to-do folks, like Kweku and his siblings, easily fall for such tricks. And as Kweku admits, they are never allowed to see their relations once they are sent there. Yet, these children keep sending money every month for the upkeep of their mother (Ma), who obviously never gets the money nor the food. With all these vices and evils that are perpetrated at the prayer camp, one cannot help but join in the rescue mission for Ma to be liberated from this hell.

The rescue team successfully gets Ma out of the camp. This puts a smile on the lips of Ma, who "scanned the faces above her, closed them again, and extended the corner of her lips into a beautiful, weak smile" (33). As the rescue van speeds home, Beam—and perhaps readers—cannot fathom how three educated, "rational" young adults could stoop so low into believing that a mental illness could be treated in a prayer camp. Though Beam sounds patriarchal when he says that "We do know that our women are more receptive to these prayer camps and 'pray-for-me' prophets", his curiosity reveals the gullibility of our society, and the extent to which our society has allowed fake men of God and fraudsters to cheat and destroy innocent lives. As Kweku makes an attempt to explain how their mother got into the prayer camp in the first place, readers come face-to face with the source of Amma Darko's title—Not Without Flowers. Kweku reveals that Cora had been having recurrent nightmares about the funeral of Ma which was celebrated with lots of flowers. Coincidentally, Ma's mental illness, which had hitherto been

under control due to the medications from the psychiatric hospital, got worse as she destroyed every single flower she caught sight of. Indeed, as evidence from the novel indicates, Ma loathes flowers, and unconsciously destroys all the flowers in the house under the influence of a voice she keeps hearing in her mind. The narrator relates it as follows:

The knife was in Ma's hand and the voice was screaming blood... She was holding the purple lily and the voice was...

Blood!

Ma's hand closed around the flower like the head of a fowl about to be slaughtered unto the gods...

Whoosh! Whack! Whoosh! Whack! Search! Blood! Look! Sniff!

Blood! Blood! Blood!

One after the other, the blooming flowers fell. Lilies, roses... (169-170)

Ma's hatred for flowers and her mannerisms, even as she destroys these flowers, only show that she is mentally deranged. However, readers' attention is quickly whisked away from this uncomfortable spectacle to the mystery behind Ma's dislike for flowers, as readers get to know that her illness is caused by a woman called Flower. With the mention of the name "Flower", several questions begin to race through readers' minds: Who is "Flower"? And what has "Flower" got to do with Ma's mental condition?

Answers to these questions soon surface as Pa's¹⁶ extra marital affairs with Flower, a young university girl called Aggie, who is only a year older than Kweku (Pa's son) comes to light. It becomes obvious that Ma's loss of Pa to this young mysterious "Flower" is the cause of her

mental instability. Perhaps, what aggravates her situation is Pa's demise (through suicide) due to his inability to meet the material needs of his ever-demanding campus girlfriend.

Having taken loans from banks, his office, and even sold his personal belongings, Pa is left with no choice than to commit suicide. Indeed, all these traumatic experiences obviously break down the mental defences of Ma, thereby resulting in her mental instability. Without pretending to be a psychologist, or a psychoanalyst, or a neurologist, Amma Darko proves beyond doubt that mental illnesses are psychologically induced and have nothing to do with evil spirits or demons. This leaves Ma's children, and society as a whole, totally condemned for dumping mental patients like Ma in unhygienic prayer camps and crowded psychiatric homes, to rot.

After rescuing Ma from the prayer camp, Kweku, Cora and Randa, determined to bury their mother with flowers, set out on a mission of revenge that proves deadly and devastating to all players involved. First, Randa, the youngest of the three, begins an attachment programme with MUTE, a Non-Governmental Organisation which specialises in the documentation of neglected information, but which occasionally engages in charity programmes such as the rehabilitation of street children, and other women issues (as it does in Faceless where it rehabilitates Fofo). At MUTE, Destine (Randa's undercover name at MUTE) comes face-to-face with Aggie, the Flower who destroyed their father. Aggie is now married to Idan, and works with MUTE. Through her contact with Aggie, Randa soon finds out who Idan is, and gradually works her way into his life. She practically destroys Aggie's marriage, as Idan loses control over himself. As the narrator puts it, "She became his proverbial *santrofi* bird... And when Randa called, Idan went

running” (107). When Randa feigns pregnancy, the prospect of Idan becoming a father at last, after several years of no issue between him and Aggie, completely endears him to Randa.

Aggie’s life comes crumbling in the midst of all this, and she is beset with mysterious nightmares that create a rather gothic atmosphere in the novel. Superstition and darkness gradually pervade the narrative as Aggie struggles to figure out the source of all these nightmares. To worsen her plight, she soon receives an anonymous letter with the word, “NEMESIS.” It soon becomes apparent that Destine (Randa) is the writer of this anonymous letter, and that she is the young girl ruining Aggie’s marriage. Here, the theme of revenge, which is the pivot around which all the tension, mystery, superstition, and gothic atmosphere in this novel revolve, becomes more glaring than ever, as Aggie discovers she has been a victim of a revenge plot. However, this epiphany comes rather too late, because by then Destine has already packed her things and bolted out of MUTE’s premises for good.

Whilst Destine is earnestly ruining Aggie and her marriage, her elder sister, Cora, is simultaneously working to break up Aggie’s parents’ marriage. Having posed as a researcher, she locates Aggie’s parents and successfully weaves her way into the marriage of Ntifor and his two wives, Penyin and Kakraba. With the aid of a fake pastor, Prophet Abednego, she convinces Ntifor to divorce Aggie’s mother, Kakraba, in order to receive healing from a boil ailment. Absurd and cruel as this prophet’s prophesy is, Amma Darko employs it to expose the activities of fake men of God who have virtually taken over the streets of our cities, and are peddling all

kinds of falsehood to make a living. But most significant of all, one can tell that society is being condemned for creating a conducive atmosphere for fraudsters like Abednego to thrive.

Most essentially, Amma Darko uses this episode to showcase at least one ‘beautiful’ aspect of traditional polygamous marriages. Far from endorsing polygamy, Amma Darko probably seeks to present one of the possible things women can do in order to overcome some of the challenges of their time—relying on sisterhood. This is the sisterhood Penyin demonstrates through her shocking reaction to Abednego’s prophesy. Though she is not the one being sent out of the marriage, she is the one who rises up to defend Kakraba. She practically chases Cora out of their house with a pestle. Indeed, it is this fact—that in traditional African marriages co-wives do not see themselves as rivals or enemies but rather as sisters—that Amma Darko sets out to establish. In doing this, it must be emphasised again that Darko does not in any way promote polygamy. Rather, she suggests sisterhood as one of the key solutions to the challenges of the modern woman. For Amma Darko, if women can overcome their challenges, then it would require the collaborative efforts of all women, and society in general.

The issue of sisterhood immediately brings to mind the subplot of this novel—the Pesewa family saga. This is the same sisterhood demonstrated between a female character, who is only known as ‘Fifth Wife’, and her other co-wives after the death of their husband, a rich man called Pesewa. In the midst of all the superstitions, mysteries, and tensions in the main plot, readers’ attention is intermittently drawn away from the pain and agony of Ma’s illness, as well as her children’s quest for revenge, to the subplot—the Pesewa family saga. Despite the seriousness of

the main theme in this subplot, one cannot overlook the fact that the humorous crowd always gathered in front of Harvest FM and the Pesewa family house, tend to reduce the role of this subplot to mere comic relief employed by Amma Darko to help readers escape from the tensions and agonies in the main plot.

Built around the Pesewa family saga, this subplot presents the death of Pesewa and its aftermath. Married to five wives, Pesewa contracts the HIV Virus and commits suicide to escape society's stigmatisation. The entire Pesewa family suspects Fifth Wife as the one who infected Pesewa with the virus. As a result, the Pesewa sisters try to force her into a humiliating widowhood rite, and it takes only the timely intervention of a media house called Harvest FM and a non governmental organisation called MUTE, to save Fifth Wife from this barbaric practice. Even though she does not go through the proposed widowhood rites, Amma Darko employs it to tell the sad predicament of the millions of helpless women, like Fifth Wife, who are continually being subjected to various kinds of outmoded and dehumanising cultural practices in Ghana and several parts of the world.

As the narrative unfolds, it even turns out that Fifth Wife is innocent of all the allegations. Rather, it turns out that Second Wife is actually the one who transmitted the virus to her husband and her co-wives except Fifth Wife, who escapes thanks to her persistent use of a condom with her late husband. Amidst the tensions, accusations and counter accusations that characterise this subplot, one can clearly tell that Amma Darko sets out to educate her audience on the causes, effects and prevention of the deadly AIDS disease. She equally exposes society's negative

attitude towards the disease and its victims. Therefore, when Pesewa commits suicide out of fear of society's stigmatisation, he is not as guilty as the society that has driven him into this abomination.

Perhaps, Chinua Achebe's portrayal of the abominable nature of suicide in the African society in his Things Fall Apart, should be enough to help anyone who does not know this truth to realise how much a slur Pesewa's suicide casts on his society.¹⁷ Society's guilt becomes more intense when Pesewa's fears are confirmed by the deliberate isolation of the other four widows from the rest of the family house due to their AIDS status. As Amma Darko puts it, "The number of people entering the quarters had reduced drastically. The servants who brought them their food wouldn't look into their faces" (265). It is worth noting that Amma Darko uses setting as a tool to show society's stigmatisation of AIDS patients by the physical isolation of the widows who contract the HIV/AIDS virus to the boys' quarters. The quarters' physical detachment from the rest of the house is a powerful image that effectively evokes a sense of the gap society has created between victims of AIDS and the rest of society.

In her attempt to make the AIDS disease a universal problem and show that it is no respecter of persons, Amma Darko deliberately builds her narrative in a direction that is rather frightening. Firstly, in her attempt to make this issue a universal one Amma Darko does not assign any specific names to the characters involved, and readers only know them as First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Wife. This manner of characterisation leaves no doubt in readers' subconsciousness that each of these characters could be anyone at all, irrespective of age, sex, colour

or location. Her characterisation successfully puts across her message that AIDS is no respecter of persons, hence the need for precaution by all.

Also, as the mystery behind Pesewa's contraction of the HIV virus slowly unfolds, it becomes evident that it is Second Wife who passed it on to a chain of others. Of all the victims, however, it is Randa's contraction of the disease that is most tragic and unfair. She gets the virus from her unfaithful fiancé, Dam, who happens to be one of Second Wife's numerous boyfriends. As the narrative rolls to an end, it becomes obvious that it is not Randa alone who is innocently infested with this virus. Other characters such as Idan and Aggie are hit by these unfolding events. Aggie discovers that her contraction of the disease is as a result of a revenge ploy against her due to an illicit affair she had with Ma's husband when she was a student on campus. She also discovers that her marital problems, as well as those of her parents, are all ploys by Cora and her siblings to avenge the death and mental illness and death of Pa and Ma, respectively.

Significantly, this epiphany results in a sudden twist to the plot of the novel. All the tensions and conflicts that pervade the narrative from the onset, soon give way to a more relaxed and serene atmosphere in the novel, as Aggie realises her mistake and duly apologises to Ma. As Aggie walks out of Ma's room and Ma tells her, "Tell my children I want to smell some flowers. Tell Kweku to bring me some flowers...", it becomes obvious that there is finally a resolution of the conflict, tension, and mystery that have resulted in the rather charged atmosphere in the novel. What is more, as Ma asks to "smell some flowers"—something she hitherto did not want to see—one can tell that her anguish, pain, depression and psychological trauma are no more. As

the novel ends on the above reconciliatory note, one can tell that despite this, Ma still has to face society's stigmatisation of victims of mental illness, as well as live with the reality of Pa's absence from her and the rest of the family.

The absence of Pa from the rest of the family quickly brings to mind the problem of absentee fathers—a problem elaborately discussed in Amma Darko's third novel (Faceless). Indisputably, it is unfair to compare Pa with irresponsible men like Kwei, and Kpakpo who impregnate Maa Tsuru and shirk their paternal responsibilities. But the fact remains that Pa's suicide renders Ma a single mother, just like the single mothers in Amma Darko's novels, especially Faceless.

Set in Accra's popular slum, Sodom and Gomorrah, Faceless commences with the story of a street girl, Fofu. Her predicament and ordeals reveal some profound truths about the lot of the street child out there on the streets. At the start of the story, she is sleeping in a stall at the Agboghloshie market and is nearly raped by Poison (the notorious street lord of Sodom and Gomorrah). As she escapes from this rapist, readers are hit by the very first danger these street children are exposed to—sexual abuse, and its consequences. Amma Darko immediately seizes this opportunity and educates her readers on the plight of street children. Through her authorial comments, she shows how street children lack parental control, and are exposed to alcohol, pornography, sex, and all kinds of immoralities. She concisely captures their plight as follows:

Fofu would have spent the Sunday night into Monday dawn with her friends across the road at the squatters' enclave of Sodom and Gomorrah watching adult films her fourteen

years required her to stay away from, drinking directly from bottles of akpeteshie, or at best, some slightly milder locally produced gin. Ultimately she would have found herself waking up on Monday morning beside one of her age group friends, both of them naked, hazy and disconcerted; oblivious to what time during the night they had stripped off their clothes and what exactly they had done with their nakedness. Sucked into life on the streets and reaching out to each new day with an ever-increasing hopelessness, such was the ways they employed to escape their pain. (25)

Filth and sin, suffering and ignorance, helplessness and woes ruled the days. And caught in the middle of it all, were girls like Fofu who grew up never ever really experiencing what it means to simply be a child. (93-94)

Having escaped Poison's attempted rape, Fofu is forced to go home, which is a few kilometers from Sodom and Gomorrah, to inform her mother, Maa Tsuru, about the incident. Through her rather hostile and impolite conversation with her mother, it comes to light that Fofu and her elder sister, Baby T, have been pushed into the streets by their mother to labour and feed the rest of the family. Pathetic as it sounds, the natural order of responsibility is reversed and the children now have to feed their irresponsible mother, whose preoccupation is procreating with irresponsible men like Kwei and Kpakpo. As a result, these children are forced to live in the streets, act like adults and fend for themselves, their siblings, their mother and her irresponsible husbands. No wonder she appears to have lost control over Fofu. Perhaps, her total loss of respect and control over her daughter has been employed by Amma Darko to emphasise the harsh realities of poverty and irresponsible parenthood. In any case, what respect does a parent expect to earn from a child she is unable to cater for, but rather exploits to survive? And what moral right has a mother, who will sacrifice her children just to keep her numerous irresponsible husbands?

The dialogue between Fofu and her mother soon reveals that Baby T was hired, or rather sold, to Maami Broni in return for monthly remittances that always come to Maa Tsuru in envelopes. Her world, however, comes crashing when Baby T is one day found dead “behind a blue rasta hairdressing kiosk salon at Agbogbloshie (47). This incident quickly shifts readers’ attention from Maa Tsuru’s irresponsibility, mental slavery, laziness and superstition to the mystery behind Baby T’s death, especially the connection it has with Poison (the street lord of Sodom and Gomorrah) and Maami Broni. Like Fofu who ponders, “My sister was staying with Maami Broni. Then she dies. So Maami Broni comes to inform you about it. You, who are her mother. And because of that, Poison gets upset? For which reason he tries to rape me? It doesn’t make sense to me” (48), readers are left in this suspense and this mystery which pervades the whole narrative is only unravelled at the end of the narrative. At the end of the narrative, readers get to know that Baby T was a child prostitute who died as a result of the severe beating meted out to her by Poison and a severe head injury she sustained when she attempted to refuse to serve a client called Onko.

Determined to escape the predicament of Baby T, Fofu dresses up like a boy so as to run away. But luck eludes her when she attempts to steal money from Kabria. Ironically, she is saved from being lynched by a mob, by her own victim. This encounter, again, provides a sudden twist to the plot of the novel, as focus is shifted from the street child phenomenon in Sodom and Gomorrah to Fofu’s rehabilitation. In fact, it marks the beginning of Fofu’s involvement with Kabria, a mother of three kids and a wife “to Adade, her architect husband”, and a non governmental organisation called MUTE. As the narrator rightly puts it, “Fate’s machinery got into motion... and placed on a string two destinies joined carefully at their seams by an unclear thread” (34).

Fofo's involvement with the all female NGO universalises the street child problem, as MUTE sets out to rehabilitate Fofo and unravel the mystery behind the death of Baby T, and also bring the plight of street children to the attention of the public through a collaboration with the media—Harvest FM.

Typical of Amma Darko, who will always seize any opportunity in her narratives to discuss or expose certain gory truths about her society, MUTE's first point of call when it begins its investigation is the police station, whose "sorry sight" raises questions about how well our state institutions and agencies are resourced to carry out their mandates. Amma Darko puts it like this:

The police station stood in a very busy area and was, simply put, a sorry sight. Broken windows, leaking drains, cracked walls and peeling paint greeted Vickie and Kabria. The officer behind the outdated front desk, who seemed bored with his world...(107)

The confidential reports cabinet itself. One drawer was so badly dented that it couldn't shut close. Another's handle was missing...

"And now pick up the phone!" he ordered Vickie. Vickie rested a bland look upon Kabria's face and whimpered, "It's dead"

...And it hit Vickie. "A vehicle. You have no vehicle?"

..."No. We don't. Not even a battered Tico. (109-111)

From the extract above, it is evident that Amma Darko's search for a lasting solution to most of our problems begins with the empowerment of the various institutions and machineries to carry out their mandates fully.

Amma Darko also brings to the attention of her audience, the poor living conditions of the people of the inner city of Accra. After their rather unpleasant ordeal at the police station where they find no leads on Baby T's murder except the poor condition of the police station, Vickie and Kabria pay a visit to Fofu's mother. Like Vickie and Kabria, Amma Darko's audience are shocked out of their complacency at the "narrow alleys and dilapidated buildings", as well as the "fully choked" drains in the heart of Accra (112). But our attention is immediately whisked away from these gory details when Vickie and Kabria meet Naa Yomo, Maa Tsuru's grandmother, who provides very useful history to both the visitors and readers. Ironically, Maa Tsuru, the object of interest to the visitors, locks herself up in her room and will not speak to Kabria and Vickie. It soon comes to light, through Naa Yomo's account, that Maa Tsuru is a single mother who has been pinned down by the superstitious belief that her inability to get a responsible husband and her inability to take care of her children is the result of a curse pronounced by her mother on the day of her birth.

With regard to her private life, Maa Tsuru's boyfriends, Kwei and Kpakpo, come into her life, impregnate her and abscond without taking responsibility for the pregnancies. Sadly, whenever they go and return Maa Tsuru welcomes them back, but after impregnating her they disappear from her life again. This is the cycle Maa Tsuru goes through and gives birth to all her six children. Four of these children (the elderly ones) have been pushed out into the streets to fend for themselves and the rest of the family. The first two boys who remain unnamed and their two kid sisters, Baby T and Fofu, engage in all kinds of activities, including stealing, in order to bring money home for Maa Tsuru to feed herself, her irresponsible lovers and the two young sons she makes with Kpakpo. As these unpleasant details begin to unfold through MUTE and Harvest

FM's involvement in Fofu's rehabilitation and investigation into Baby T's untimely death, readers can not cease wondering why a middle aged mother like Maa Tsuru would allow superstition to pin her down to such an extent that it devours her and her innocent children. Surprisingly, even older characters like Naa Yomo condemn this and blame Maa Tsuru for her sorry state. In a rather philosophical tone, Naa Yomo tells Kabria and Vickie on the occasion of their first visit to Maa Tsuru:

“...when the seed of a curse finds a fertile ground in a human mind, it spreads with the destructive speed of a creeping plant. And while it does, it nurtures superstition, which in turn, eats into all reasoning abilities and capabilities of facing responsibilities. The only reason why my six living children are all living in their bungalows, is because, after the death of our fifth child, my husband, God bless his soul, stopped nurturing his superstitious mind and focused more on facing up to his responsibilities...”(120)

Far from merely condemning Maa Tsuru for her mental slavery and irresponsibility, Amma Darko sets out to expose a social problem that has rendered many innocent children homeless, uneducated and victims of all kinds of dangers in the streets today. Indeed, in the midst of all the tensions, superstitions and suspense in the narrative, Amma Darko does not mince words in her attempt to establish the above fact that irresponsible parenting has great repercussions on both street children, like Baby T, Fofu and Odarley, Fofu's friend and the society as a whole. This is what might shock many readers, who out of complacency, might be tempted to dismiss the street-child phenomenon as the problem of only the street children, and perhaps those directly related to them.

However, as Harvest FM partners MUTE to bring some of the causes and effects of streetism to public attention, it becomes evident that the problems of these children are essentially the problems of the wider society. Through Harvest FM's GMG Show, Ms. Kamame, the CEO of an unnamed NGO working with street children reveals very profound truths about what pushes children into the streets. Top on the list of factors she discusses are poverty and irresponsible parenthood. As if to shock readers out of their complacency, Amma Darko reveals that streetism is never the lot of only the victims and their families but the whole society. Apparently using Ms. Kamame as her authorial voice, she bluntly states:

“...the consequences of the phenomenon affects the entire society of which you are [an] integral part. Ours is a society where the family is the nucleus of our culture... The physical and psychological effect of the detachment is to render them easily susceptible to survival through jungle street tactics and foul means. Then me and you who thought it was their problem alone, wake up one day to the rude realization that we have no choice but to share this same one society with them.” (141)

The question we should be asking ourselves is, are these the kind of beings we want to share our society with? So you see, it is not their problem alone. It is our problem too. All of us. (142)

The rhetorical question posed by Ms. Kamame in the extract above violently wakes up the rest of society to the realisation that the street-child menace has gradually assumed a universal dimension. As the society in Amma Darko's novel gradually wakes up to this painful truth, readers also begin to advance closer to unraveling the mystery behind Baby T's death.

Amma Darko's ability to alternate between the broadcast work of Harvest FM and the investigative work of MUTE is commendable, especially as she successfully coordinates their activities to expose the culprits behind Baby T's murder. Sylv Po, apart from hosting resource persons like Ms. Kamame on his GMG Show where he addresses the street children phenomenon, also partners the all- female MUTE workers as they go to Fofu's native home and later Sodom and Gomorrah to meet the dreaded street lord, Poison. The meticulous investigation carried out by this group soon reveals that Baby T was sent to stay with one Maami Broni, a brothel owner who introduced Baby T into prostitution. Poison is an accomplice of Maami Broni in this business, and so naturally Baby T fell under his control. The proceeds from Baby T's prostitution are shared between them and a token is given to Baby T's mother every month.

Perhaps, one would be baffled into asking how a mother would give out her daughter to be used as a prostitute in return for monthly remittances. Without any attempt to defend Maa Tsuru's action, it must be established that events within the plot show that Maa Tsuru does this to keep Baby T away from a relative of theirs, Onko. He rapes Baby T when she is barely twelve years old. Unrepentant of his crime, Onko after appeasing Maa Tsuru with a few notes, begins to make advances at Baby T, and when confronted by Maa Tsuru he shamelessly declares, "I love her!"(169). In order to forestall any further abominations, Maa Tsuru readily agrees to send Baby T to Maami Broni when Kpakpo brings up the idea. Onko's exploitation of Maa Tsuru and her daughter can never go uncondemned by any moralist. But most importantly, Amma Darko seeks to use Onko to expose the exploitation of the poor and the defenceless by the rich and the strong in our society today. In an era where everyone is striving to meet his or her egocentric needs or

make personal gains by hook or crook, Amma Darko's novel could not have come at a more appropriate time than this.

It must also be pointed out that Maa Tsuru's decision to trade off her daughter to a complete stranger, and her ignorance of her daughter's prostitution in the city do not exonerate her from blame, but rather add to her irresponsible parenting. Beyond her, Amma Darko seeks to take on parents, especially irresponsible parents, for the numerous social problems that have bedevilled society for sometime now. As sociologists and psychoanalysts have often pointed out, the family is a child's first point of contact with society, and so the failure of the family to play a responsible role in shaping the child unleashes dire consequences on society as a whole. In this regard then, in her attempt to find a lasting solution to the street child problem which is the major thematic concern of Faceless, Amma Darko's first point of call is the family. As a matter of fact, when Ms. Kamame on the GMG Show says that "Ours is a society where the family is the nucleus of our culture.... The physical and psychological effect of the detachment is to render them easily susceptible to survival through jungle street tactics and foul means...." (141) one can tell that Amma Darko is using her as an authorial voice to define the essential role the family must play in order to combat streetism and other social problems in our society.

Fortunately, in the world of Amma Darko's Faceless, when the living fail to rise up to salvage a situation the gods do. Creating a rather superstitious and mysterious atmosphere in the novel, nemesis catches up with Onko when the gods punish him by destroying his business—a punishment Naa Yomo concludes is the result of Onko's defilement of a minor like Baby T. In a

desperate move to get his crumpled business back on track, Onko goes to a juju man who demands that he brings Baby T's pubic hair for him to cast away the spell. This sends Onko knocking on the door of Poison who, unaware of Onko's diabolic intentions, gives him access to Baby T. In what appears to be a scuffle between the two, Baby T falls and hits her head against a stone lying at a corner in the room and dies. This point marks the resolution in the novel's plot, as the mystery surrounding Baby T's death is finally unrivalled, paving the way for a better comprehension of the novel's general plot. The suspense which pervades the narrative, right from the beginning when Baby T's body is discovered behind the blue kiosk at Agboglobshie, is finally laid to rest as readers get to know who kills Baby T and how it happens.

Amma Darko's skillful handling of her plot can never go unacknowledged, as readers soon discover at the death of Baby T that Amma Darko actually begins the novel with the end of the story. Then, through a skillful use of the flashback technique, she takes her readers on an investigative journey that finally unravels the mystery behind the events at the beginning of the narrative. In fact, what appears to be the beginning of the narrative finally turns out to be the concluding segment of the novel. To crown it all, Amma Darko ends her novel with an epilogue which provides readers useful information about the aftermath of Baby T's death. Onko commits suicide, and Baby T is later dumped behind a blue kiosk at Agboglobshie by Poison's gang. In an attempt to conceal her real identity, her hair is shaved and her body is badly mutilated beyond recognition.

Also, in order to appease her soul, Maami Broni who confesses on Sylv Po's show that Baby T's "spirit is seated inside my head like a chief in state. She is with me wherever I go" (230) sacrifices a white fowl at the spot where Baby T's body is dumped. The mention of the sacrificed fowl quickly brings to mind the juju man who prescribes this sacrifice as the way out of Maami Broni's psychological trauma. The absurd demands he makes on his client, and the failure of his prescription, are deliberately employed by Amma Darko to expose the limitations of traditional medicine and the exploitative nature of traditional practitioners like him (215-217). Yet, his contribution to MUTE and Harvest FM's uncovering of the culprits behind the murder of Baby T can never be underestimated, as he provides very useful information that leads to the solving of the puzzle in the novel.

However, this does not in any way take away the credit from a character like Kabria who, despite her problems with Creamy, her old VW Beetle car, and her demanding family, works tirelessly to uncover the truth about Baby T's death, as well as the rehabilitation of Fofu. Others such as Aggie, Vickie and Dina make up the full list. But as events in the novel clearly show, their success in this regard, and their creation of public awareness on the plight of street children would not have been possible without the involvement of Sylv Po and his media house, Harvest FM. By the end of the narrative it becomes evident that the fight against streetism, crime and other problems of our society require the collaborative efforts of all stake-holders; individuals, government, non-governmental organisations, the media and the society as a whole. Amma Darko has used her novel to raise very pertinent issues and some practical solutions to these issues. Like her other female counterpart (Ama Ata Aidoo) she has shown the female writer's passion in addressing very pressing issues of our society.

In The Housemaid, another of Amma Darko's novels, Amma Darko continues to thrill her audience with her ability to handle both gender and other social issues in a very objective and unflattering manner. In this novel readers are confronted with an extremely exploitative society where the strong, rich and powerful exploit the weak and poor. Without any deliberate attempt at depicting males as oppressive, Amma Darko relates a tale in which women and children are victims of men's exploitative antics. In fact, as the story commences, Amma Darko adopts a rather radical feminist tone when she declares that in Ghana if you come into the world as a *she*, acquire the habit of praying... (3). Arguably, this is likely to incur the wrath of anti-feminists who might immediately dismiss this novel as another female authored work that seeks to promote female agenda. Yet, succeeding sentences would indicate that far from presenting an exclusively feminist issue, Amma Darko sets out to present a very contemporary social issue—the problems faced by the aged in the Ghanaian society today. The story of the old woman at Braha who is branded a witch, neglected and isolated to die in penury and misery, reveals a contemporary social problem which government and other human rights groups and organisations are still grappling with in Ghana—the branding of the aged as witches by the younger generation. This is how Amma Darko chooses to start her story. She tells the story of this old lady who is neglected by society, branded a witch and banished into seclusion.

However, the story soon takes a sudden twist when a dead baby and clothes stained with blood are discovered near the old lady's hut at the outskirts of the village of Braha. The news of the abandoned dead baby and the bloodstained clothes spreads like wild fire across the country. As the search for the culprit gains public attention and interest, the novel's setting shifts from a rural setting, Braha, to an urban setting, Kumasi, where a sharp battle of the sexes gradually ensues.

Almost all the men call for the head of the woman who has committed this abominable act, whilst the women on the other hand argue that it should be the shared responsibility of both the woman, and the man who impregnated her. Humorous as the heated arguments between the Kumasi Central Market women on one hand and the male truck pusher, the taxi driver and the wheelbarrow pusher on another hand might be, they reveal very profound truths about the everyday life of the ordinary Ghanaian—the usual gossips at work places, the friendly arguments, the struggles to make ends meet, the petty squabbles and even fierce fights like the one which ensues between some taxi drivers at the Central Market on page 10, and the unemployed, idle young men and women who will stop at nothing to feast their eyes on such scenes. But above these daily engagements of these ordinary people, very topical issues such as patriarchy and irresponsible parenting emerge, as the men try to blame the woman behind the abandonment of the new baby, whilst the women try to shift the blame to the irresponsible man who shirked his responsibility after impregnating that poor girl, thereby compelling her to abandon the new baby.

The issue of irresponsible parenting is further emphasised when the story quickly shifts to the challenges of the family of Mami Korkor, one of the market women who is a single mother. Her daughter Bibio cannot forgive her for going ahead to make four babies with her husband, even though she knows he is irresponsible. It is significant to note that though Amma Darko does not in any way endorse the disrespectful nature of Bibio, she nevertheless employs her conduct to sound a word of caution to parents, and the older generation as a whole, that their children, or rather the younger generation, will not forgive them for their irresponsible behaviours and decisions. This provides a rather didactic tone to the novel, as Amma Darko seeks to draw

readers' attention to the fact that the decisions and actions of the present generation will definitely have dire consequences on future generations. Most significantly, Amma Darko is obviously making a clarion call on policy makers of this nation to be wary of decisions and policies made, and how they use the resources of this nation, for posterity would judge them. In fact like Bibio, the future generation would definitely look back in anger at the present generation should anything go wrong.

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Although Mami Korkor is not as superstitious and lazy as Maa Tsuru in Faceless, her petty trading is not able to provide a decent life for her children. As a result, they have resorted to scavenging on rubbish dumps in search of food and clothes. On one occasion her two boys pick up some clothes stained in blood and bring them home. Media publicity, police investigations and public co-operation soon link these clothes to those worn by the mother of the abandoned baby in the village of Braha. Akua, one of the kayayei at the Central Market, informs the police that the bloodstained clothes that have been found belong to Efia, a friend of hers who was a house help to one Tika.

Tika is a thirty-five year old single, childless business woman who lives in Accra. The narrator hints (on page 17) that her present state as an unmarried woman is the direct result of her sour first relationship with Owuraku, a schoolmate of hers at form five. Though unmarried, Tika is embroiled in gross promiscuity with various men, just like her mother Sekyiwa. It becomes obvious that Tika and Sekyiwa's sexual immoralities are employed by the narrator to expose the rot in the Ghanaian society. Here, the theme of corruption is so elaborately discussed that one

can virtually see and feel the moral decadence in the Ghanaian society. For instance, when Tika in her stream of consciousness, wonders what her mother “is doing with herself? Still sleeping around like a teenager?..” (63), one can infer that using Sekyiwa’s immorality as a symbol of the corrupted moral standards in her society, Amma Darko seeks to expose the corruption and exploitation of the helpless in her society.

Men such as Samuel (the son of an apostolic pastor), Riad (a half-caste shop owner), Mr. Attui (a factory owner) and Nsorhwe (a bank manager) use their money and positions to exploit women sexually, whilst these women in turn use their bodies as tools to expand or get their businesses going (25). One would hardly be challenged if he or she concludes that the willingness with which female characters such as Tika and Sekyiwa consent to the unreasonable sexual demands of these men is a further testimony of how widespread the rot in the system is. These female characters are so ambitious that they would do anything to get their businesses running. They hardly even have time for family. Sekyiwa, the narrator indicates, is so engrossed in her business that she neglects her daughter and her husband. In fact, when young and innocent Tika asks her mother, “so when you finish making money will you play with me” (20) it is a calculated attempt by Amma Darko to expose the greed and selfish ambitions of Sekyiwa, rather than a request for a YES or NO answer.

Worst of all, Sekyiwa is unfaithful to her husband and maltreats him till he dies. In Amma Darko’s novel, therefore, women cease to be victims of domestic violence but rather become perpetrators of this evil. This perhaps offers a better insight into the issue of domestic violence,

as the perception that men are usually the perpetrators of this evil seems to be questioned here. Amma Darko's disapproval of Sekyiwa's violence against her husband is clearly evident when she deliberately makes other characters such as Tika and her father's village folks condemn Sekyiwa, and regard her as an evil woman. There is no basis for arguing that Amma Darko seeks to use Sekyiwa's case to entrench a feminist ideology by showing that society is ganging up against a fellow woman. Rather, Amma Darko sets out to use society's condemnation of Sekyiwa as a 'husband-beater' to condemn domestic violence, regardless of the perpetrator, whether male or female.

Due to her busy schedule, Tika decides to seek the services of a housemaid. She falls on a woman from Kataso, her father's hometown who is popularly known only as "Teacher", who helps her secure a maid (Efia) from the village to Accra. This is how Efia, the purported mother of the abandoned baby in Braha, comes to live in Tika's house. On arrival, she soon wins her mistress' admiration with her hard work. However, in an attempt to satisfy her greedy relatives back in Kataso she deliberately gets pregnant according to the proposal of her grandmother and her naïve mother. These two opportunists, realising that Tika has no child, envisage that since Tika has no child she will adopt Efia's child, should the latter get pregnant and give birth. Efia's child will then become heir to Tika's fortune, which in effect leaves Efia and her relations partakers in this fortune. Unfortunately, their greedy plans back-fire as Tika will have nothing to do with Efia's pregnancy, except to get the alleged man responsible to take responsibility. But this would only happen after a DNA test—an idea which sends shivers down the spines of Efia and her dishonest folks. Here, again, the theme of corruption, coupled with the theme of greed,

comes to light, as readers come face-to-face with the dishonest and desperate measures these opportunists are employing to steal Tika's wealth.

It soon becomes evident to readers that Nsorhwe, who is accused by Efia as being responsible for her pregnancy, is actually impotent and so could not have fathered Efia's child. Aware of her evils, and in a desperate attempt to escape the embarrassment, Efia steals her madam's money and absconds to Kumasi, where she later has a still – birth in an uncompleted structure serving as shelter for Akua her friend, and some other kayayoo girls. In what appears to be an act of superstition, Efia decides to go and narrate her ordeal to her folks so that some rituals can be performed before she buries the dead baby. Unfortunately, on her way home she runs out of luck, as the dead foetus begins to produce a bad stench in the car. Efia is forced to alight in the middle of the journey and throw the dead body into the bush. This is the baby that is discovered in the first chapter of the narrative at the outskirts of Braha, and which generates so much controversy and debate all over the country.

The role of the media in generating public interest in this case can never go unacknowledged. Newspapers keep publishing any clues or leads or information about the case to the public. However, the whole puzzle that pervades the narrative, as the search for the culprit behind the abandonment of this dead baby continues, is finally unravelled by Efia herself. Having gotten rid of the dead baby, Efia takes a bold step and returns to Tika to confess all that she has done. This epiphany leaves readers, like Tika, alarmed at the attempt by Efia's folks to reap where they have not sown. But most importantly, readers might be disgusted at the level of greed, ignorance,

superstition, corruption and exploitation that the society in this novel is caught in. These thematic concerns leave no doubt in any one's mind that Amma Darko is a woman of her time. These thematic concerns, and of course those in all her novels, establish her as a contemporary writer who is not just interested in telling tales about her society, but using these as media to expose certain negativities in her society in order to effect necessary changes. Much like Ama Ata Aidoo, Amma Darko has clearly stuck to pertinent issues or themes that are worth commending.

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In discussing these issues Amma Darko skillfully employs tone, the structure of her plots, setting, diction, characterisation and other literary techniques to communicate effectively with her readers. As far as tone is concerned, Darko adopts a very objective and a critical tone in her works. Although she discusses gender issues she does not adopt the rather radical tone of Ama Ata Aidoo. Darko is a moderate feminist and a realist who presents the challenges of women, children, the poor, and the voiceless in an objective manner. This objectivity is achieved through her consistent use of the omniscient narrator. Darko's omniscient narrators often present the bare facts on the ground without any sensationalism. This tends to give her works a rather critical tone, even as she exposes injustices against women and children and the down-trodden in general. Although Darko's main characters (Mara, Fofu, Tika and Ma) are females, she tells their stories objectively so that the reader is able to read beyond these females, since they (the female characters) are only symbolic representations of the down-trodden and the voiceless in society. Perhaps, it is this attitude towards the issues they discuss that draws a thin line between the works of Aidoo and Darko, as the former is clearly a radical feminist, whilst the latter is a moderate feminist.

With regard to the structure of her plots, Darko has demonstrated her maturity in presenting very complex plots that are carefully knitted together through the use of flashbacks. Darko clearly has a penchant for building complex plots. Breaking away from the conventional plot structure which always begins narratives from the beginning, Darko's plots always begin in the middle. In other words, all her novels plunge directly into the middle of the narratives, and then through a series of flashbacks, she relates the ordeals of her characters. In Beyond the Horizon, for instance, she begins her narrative with what should have been the middle of her novel. As the narrative commences, readers meet Mara sitting in front of a dressing mirror in a brothel in Germany. After this, through a series of flashbacks relayed through the eyes of Mara, readers get to know how Mara got to Germany, and what eventually led her into prostitution.

In much the same way, in Faceless the narrative begins with Fofu's plight at Sodom and Gomorrah, and the discovery of Baby T's body at Agbogbloshie. Here, again, through the flashback technique Darko fills her readers in on who, how and where Baby T was killed. She equally takes readers through an educative tour of the street-children phenomenon—outlining its causes, effects and solutions. The same plot structure is found in The Housemaid and Not Without Flowers. In both novels, the author starts the narratives with mysterious and mind-boggling events such as the dead baby discovered in the village of Braha and Ma's abandonment in a prayer camp due to her mental illness. In both cases, again, Amma Darko relies on the flashback technique to unravel the mysteries surrounding these events.

One unique thing about Darko's plot structure is the close-ended nature of her stories. Unlike Aidoo, who prefers sudden or open endings, her novels often end with resolutions of the

tensions, suspense and conflicts in the narratives. In Beyond the Horizon, for instance, the novel ends on a note of poetic justice where Osey and Akobi are imprisoned for their evils whilst Mara now has the chance to start a new life if she wishes to. In fact, Amma Darko ends her novel on a very satisfactory note in which readers know how everything ends—the bad are punished and the innocent are free. Similarly, in Faceless, the novel ends on a satisfactory note as the mystery behind the death of Baby T is unravelled, and Fofo is also rehabilitated by MUTE. Not Without Flowers equally has the same satisfactory ending. By the end of the novel, all the tension, mystery, and suspense are brought to an end, and Aggie goes to make up with Ma whose mental condition immediately stabilises and she asks Aggie to tell her children to bring her flowers. It is worth pointing out that though the close-ended nature of Darko's novels breaks the conventions of the modern novel, it demonstrates her commitment to finding lasting solutions to the problems of her society. Although Darko might not go uncondemned by modernists such as Virginia Woolf and Anton Chekhov who insist that the writer should not be prescriptive in his or her work, Darko's prescription of some fundamental solutions marks her out as a female writer who is both committed to the development of her gender and her society as a whole.

Another unique feature, as far as discussions on Darko's style are concerned is her love for grotesque details. This comes to light when one considers the sort of settings the actions of her novels are set in. Most of her settings are urban, and are usually places like Sodom and Gomorrah (in the case of Beyond the Horizon and Faceless) that are full of filth and stench. Her love for the real or bare facts often renders her diction very descriptive. She spends time describing the physical settings in the novel so much that readers are able to visualise the realities on the ground. The images are so strong that readers can almost smell the choked

trenches, gutters, and refuse dumps that surround her characters. For instance, in Beyond the Horizon, when she describes the physical setting of the novel in the following words,

...there wasn't the group of huts with large compounds about them and backyard gardens that I was used to in the village, but 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. In these gutters, due to the lack of any drainage system, all the water from dirty washing and bathing, and urine too, collected until it evaporated. ... the resulting standing water not only stank but also bred nasty shades of algae and generations of large fat mosquitoes... As if that wasn't enough,... fifty yards away there was an unhygienic public toilet beside which was the area's only public rubbish dump. And so this also not only brought in swarms of flies in their thousands but polluted the surrounding... (8)

the effect on readers is enormous. Words or expressions such as “shabbily-constructed corrugated-iron sheet shelters that looked like chicken houses”, “open gutters”, “lack of any drainage system”, “water from dirty washing and bathing, and urine too, collected...”, “unhygienic public toilet”, “swarms of flies in their thousands”, among other grotesque details, are powerful images that evoke disgusting sensations by painting a very awful picture of the setting of the novel. These grotesque details work very well to the advantage of Darko, who is obviously bent on exposing one major challenge in our society today—poor sanitation. Apart from this, her use of urban settings to expose the deplorable nature of city life just marks her out as a good writer competent in using her tone, her plot, her diction and her setting descriptions to rouse her readers to the challenges and realities of their time.

Discussions advanced in this thesis so far, clearly indicate that both Aidoo and Darko have not allowed their commitment to their gender to impede their commitment to the wider society. In fact their works have successfully explored issues that cut across the social, political, cultural and economic aspects of the Ghanaian society. Issues such as the negative effects of colonialism, self-exile, unemployment, the plight of women, children and the downtrodden in general, domestic violence and several other issues which Aidoo has been discussing continue to take centre stage in Amma Darko's works. To a large extent, therefore, there is a visible continuity in some of the issues these two female writers delve into in their respective works. Indeed, Amma Darko has continued with Aidoo's interest in exposing and addressing certain challenges of her gender and her society.

Despite this visible link between the works of Aidoo and Darko, one cannot fail to acknowledge the fact that in Darko's works the position and role of women in society take a slight twist. In Aidoo's works women are highly oppressed, confined to housekeeping and denied access to use their God-given talents to work for the advancement of their societies. However, a few years down history Darko presents women such as Kabria, Aggie, Ms. Kamame, Kaye, Cora, Randa and several others who step out of their homes to solve problems confronting them and their societies. This is the thin line that draws the works of these two female writers apart. Also, both writers have explored their thematic concerns with their individual artistic skills, especially the way they employ plot, setting, diction, characterisation and other useful narrative techniques to explore their themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONCLUSION

The works of female writers have certainly made very positive contributions to both the literary canon and society as a whole. Throughout history, female writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, among others, have produced works that have exhibited very distinct characteristics, especially their concern about women issues. As reviews of the various female writers' works in the earlier chapters of this thesis have shown, though the initial focus of female writers' works was to fight for recognition, they gradually began to tell the story of the female from the female point of view.

Today, the modern female writer is not only concerned with gender issues but other issues relevant to the development of the broader society. In Ghana, the immense contributions of female writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko cannot go unacknowledged. Though writing from different generations, the two have certainly enjoyed good patronage from their readers. Ama Ata Aidoo, who belongs to the older generation, has clearly distinguished herself as a good writer who is committed to her gender. Among other gender issues, she has worked tirelessly to expose the patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian society. She has helped to bring to public attention, through her works especially those discussed in this thesis, the challenges of women, especially the modern day working woman, in a society that is predominantly run on masculine ideologies and standards. Evidence from the discussions advanced in this thesis clearly show that Aidoo is a radical feminist who is out to challenge the dictatorial tendencies of patriarchy.

Despite this penchant for tackling female issues, discussions in this thesis have equally shown that Aidoo has demonstrated ample commitment to the broader society. Her works (those prose works used in this thesis) have raised very serious issues such as the negative effects of colonialism, neocolonialism, the self-exile syndrome of Ghanaians, unemployment, ethnicity, among others, that deserve commendation by all. These issues, contemporary and real as they are, showcase the commitment of the female writer to the development of the wider society.

With the appearance of Amma Darko onto the literary scene, the above assertion is further strengthened as Amma Darko breaks away from the radical feminist attitude of her older compatriot, Ama Ata Aidoo. Amma Darko should never be misconstrued for a radical feminist, although her major characters so far have been females. In all her five novels, she uses her female protagonists as symbols of the oppressed and the marginalised in society. In this regard, Amma Darko serves as a voice for these voiceless people, of whom women are a part. Among other issues, the street child problem discussed in her Faceless, the domestic violence problem discussed in Beyond the Horizon, the corruption and exploitation of the down-trodden in The Housemaid, and the stigmatisation of mental and AIDS patients by society in Not Without Flowers, are clear indications of the fact that Amma Darko has risen above mere gender issues to discuss broader issues aimed at effecting changes in the Ghanaian society.

With regard to the sort of relationship that exists between the works of Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko, therefore, discussions in this thesis have clearly demonstrated that there is a link in the issues Aidoo and Darko discuss in their works. However, unlike Aidoo, Amma Darko has broken free from the rather radical feminist attitude of Aidoo and other African feminists like

Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Zulu Sofola. Undeniably, Darko dispassionately presents the problems of women, children, the poor and the marginalised, with the hope of drawing the attention of policy makers, governments, non governmental organisations and the public to such neglected problems.

Thus, although there is a link between the works of Aidoo and Darko in terms of the issues they discuss, it must be emphasised that their attitudes towards these issues and their artistic skills draw a thin line between them. Though like Ama Ata Aidoo Amma Darko continues to discuss gender and other pertinent issues of relevance to the wider society, her objective and critical tone indicates a slight breakaway from Aidoo.

In a nutshell, therefore, though Aidoo and Darko are both Ghanaian female writers, their attitudes to their subject matter and their styles of writing put them slightly apart. Despite the fact that both of them have demonstrated ample commitment to their gender and society, Ama Ata Aidoo is more feminist in her attitude than Amma Darko. But it must be pointed out that in terms of artistic competence in employing diction, setting, plot organisation and other narrative techniques to effectively discuss these issues, both have demonstrated their independent levels of artistic competence. In short, the relationship between the works of these two writers can best be described as a link, with a slight breakaway by Amma Darko with regard to her attitude and her artistic creativity.

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1. Underlining is mine. Quoted from Ezekiel Mphahlele's Introduction to Ama Ata Aidoo's No Sweetness Here and Other Stories.
2. Ivor Agyeman-Duah. "Home at Last." West Africa 29 Apr. - 5 May 2002: 35.
3. Eldred Jones, and Jones Marjorie, eds. Exile and African Literature. Oxford: James Currey Limited, 2000. 65.
4. Gareth Griffiths. African Literatures in English: East and West. Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000. 281. Addition in brackets is mine.
5. Aduke Adebayo, ed. Feminism and Black Women's Creative Writing: Theory, Practice and Criticism. Ibadan: AMD Publishers, 1996. 12.
6. Ibid., 1996. 12.
7. Lynne Rienner, ed. World Literature and Literary Criticism: New Books and Selected Backlist. 1800 30th Street, Suite Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008-2009: 19.
8. Desmond Davies, ed. West Africa magazine, April 29- May 5, 2002. 35.
9. Quoted from James M. Ivory's article featured in Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. Trenton, NJ: African World Press Inc., 2003. 250.
10. Underlining in the extract is mine. It is intended to draw attention to the author's deliberate attempt at using these words to establish this incident as a marital rape.

11. Underlining is mine. It seeks to draw attention to Duayaw's patriarchal tone.
12. Lynne Rienner, ed. World Literature and Literary Criticism: New Books and Selected Booklist. 1800 30th Street, Suite Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008-2009: 19.
Underlining is mine. That is the exact attribute Aidoo seeks to give to the female.
13. Ibid., 22.
14. See the Holy Bible, Ruth 1:20, where Naomi tells the people of Bethlehem, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt bitterly with me."
15. Underlining is mine. The underlined portion sounds much like the colonialists' attitude promoted in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.
16. Pa is Ma's husband.
17. Refer to Chinua Achebe. Things Fall Apart. London: Heinemann, 1958 for details on Okonkwo's suicide and its implications.
18. Robert Di Yanni. Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essay. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1990. 27.

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