

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI**

**COLLEGE OF ART AND SOCIAL SCIENCE**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**KNUST**

**TRIALS OF MOTHERHOOD: AMMA DARKO'S PORTRAYAL OF CONFLICTS IN  
MOTHER-DAUGHTER BONDS IN HER NOVELS: *BEYOND THE HORIZON, THE  
HOUSEMAID, FACELESS AND NOT WITHOUT FLOWERS.***

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

**BY**

**PHILOMENA YEBOAH (MRS.)**

**AUGUST, 2012**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the PhD. and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

KNUST

.....

.....

**DATE**

**PHILOMENA YEBOAH (MRS.)**

.....

.....

**DATE**

**DR. MRS. FREDRIKA DADSON**

**(SUPERVISOR)**

.....

.....

**DATE**

**PROF. ALBERT OWUSU-SARPONG**

**(SECOND INTERNAL EXAMINER)**

.....

.....

**DATE**

**EXAMINER**

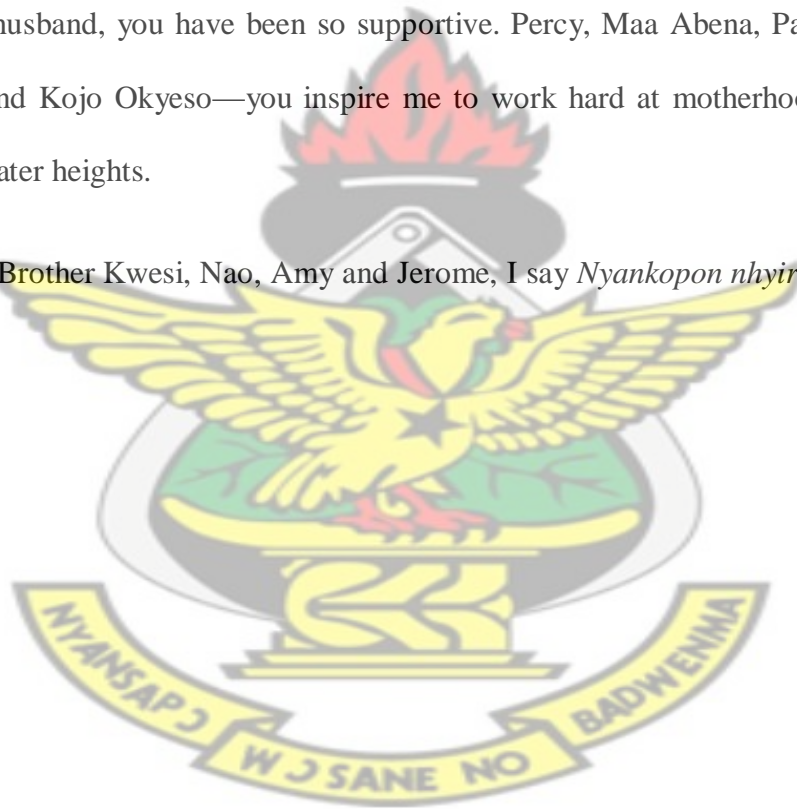
## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the all-knowing and all-merciful God! I cannot comprehend the stretch of your love and mercies towards me.

To my mother, who prays and taught me how to mother my children irrespective of the trials and adversities. To my father for your prayers and persistent questions about the progress of this work, this is to make you happy.

To Stephen, my husband, you have been so supportive. Percy, Maa Abena, Paa Kwesi, Maame Ama Nyameye and Kojo Okyeso—you inspire me to work hard at motherhood. Let this work inspire you to greater heights.

To my siblings—Brother Kwesi, Nao, Amy and Jerome, I say *Nyankopon nhyira hon.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Almighty God, thank you for all the Good people you brought my way. This study has taught me important lessons in perseverance.

I also want to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Mrs. Fredrika Dadson, my supervisor and ‘mother’. You have taught me to care well for my husband and children. You never held back anything from me. You accommodated the ‘pressure’ and taught me what it means to be a ‘kind’ supervisor.

I also acknowledge the immense contribution of my Second Internal Examiner, Professor Owusu-Sarpong of the Department of Modern Languages. You willingly accepted to help. You did not only offer insightful criticism, you also taught me some French, Latin, Greek and even Science. I will never forget that day when you called me back just when I was leaving your office and insisted I offer the full meaning of the acronym D.N.A! If there is one lesson you impart too well, it is, that it behoves on every good teacher, to impart knowledge wholeheartedly.

To the late Professor S.K.Okleme, I say thank you for your support and for believing in me. I will never forget you. You started it all, really.

Rev. Edusei Acheampong and Sofo Maame Beatrice, thanks for your prayers. You have been my spiritual pillars. God bless you all.

My appreciation also goes to my friend, Mrs Theresa Baah Enummh of the Planning Department (KNUST). You literally held me by the hand to our hide-outs where we researched,

studied, wrote and encouraged each other. On the day that I had Kojo at KNUST hospital, you stood by the theatre door praying for me to come out strong and continue with my writing. Please find in here the expression of my thanks and gratitude.

Jonathan, my former Teaching Assistant, you have been a huge pillar of support. You graciously offered to type and edit this work. You made me understand why Buchi Emecheta says “Good Men are the Salt of the Earth”. Thank you Sister Lucy; you accompanied me to Ankafu and made it possible for me to interview Dr. Armahlou and Dr. Sagoe. You have always been helpful.

I appreciate Auntie Amma Darko, Dr. Armahlou and Dr. Sagoe of Ankafu Psychiatric Hospital for allowing me to interview them. Your insightful responses helped a lot!

Professor Kofi Anyidoho, thank you. At a time when it was difficult to get a copy of Amma Darko’s *The Housemaid*, you brought me your own copy, all the way from Legon. Thanks so much.

Professor Karen Haire of the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Thank you for your support and prayers.

Finally to Medical Doctors: Sarbeng, Wusu Ansah, Addison Boateng, Sarfo, Bonku and Nsiah. Thanks so much. God bless you all.

Philomena Ama Okyeso Abakah (Ms.)  
18th September, 2012.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>DEDICATION .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
PROBLEM STATEMENT .....	7
OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY .....	11
METHODOLOGY .....	13
<b>CHAPTER ONE .....</b>	<b>18</b>
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	18
1.1 THEORIES ON MOTHERHOOD .....	18
1.2. SELECTED THEORIES ON THE CHALLENGES OF MOTHERHOOD .....	36
1.3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK.....	51
1.4. SURVEY OF FEMALE WRITERS OF AFRICA .....	76
<b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>	<b>96</b>
MERCHANDISING THE FEMALE BODY: A MOTHER’S STRATEGY AT DEALING WITH THE TRIALS OF MOTHERHOOD IN BEYOND THE HORIZON. ....	96
<b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>EXPLOITING THE EXPLOITER: WOMEN’S STRATEGY AT SURVIVING SOCIO – ECONOMIC CHALLENGES. ....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR .....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>A DAUGHTER’S REVOLT AGAINST HER MOTHER AND SOCIETY: A CRITICAL READING OF <i>FACELESS</i>. ....</b>	<b>183</b>



<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>PARASITES AND SUFFERERS: A MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN’S STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE TRIALS OF MOTHERHOOD IN <i>NOT WITHOUT FLOWERS</i>. ...</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
1.1. MOOD DISORDERS IN MOTHERS/WOMEN – CAUSES, SIGNS/EFFECTS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF ANKAFUL MENTAL HOSPITAL. ....	viii
1.2. MOOD DISORDERS IN MOTHERS/WIVES WHOSE HUSBANDS NEGLECT THEM FOR YOUNGER WOMEN: EFFECTS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.....	xiv
1.3. INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR (AMMA DARKO).....	xix



## ABSTRACT

This study has addressed the question of the lack of in-depth analysis of the trials of motherhood in Africa and in Ghana specifically. The study is an attempt to fill this lacuna. It traces the nature of the trials of motherhood and analyzes the causes and effects of the trials of motherhood on mothers and daughters.

How can daughters appreciate their mothers when they consider the latter as failed mothers not worth emulating? The study argues that the trials of motherhood, if not eliminated, will result in daughters electing not to bear children rather than becoming mothers in a system that circumscribes mothers even when this same system seeks to honour them.

Four novels of Amma Darko have been selected to investigate Darko's portrayal of her mother figures. There is seen in these four novels a fictionalization of the myriads of trials that mothers battle with in a changing Ghanaian society. Reality is carried on exaggerative wings to reveal Darko's keen understanding of the trials of motherhood. There is also seen in these novels a relentless march towards addressing not only the trials of motherhood but also the triumph that unrelenting mothers achieve even in the face of trials. The life-styles of these mother figures indicate that mothers have regenerative as well as destructive potentials. It takes mothers whose desire it is to churn out good daughters to tap into their regenerative potentials and train daughters well.

This study also highlights the strategies used by those mothers who are able to train good daughters irrespective of the challenges they face as mothers. These mothers inject hope into a society where women's ability to mother daughters well is gradually turning out to be a mirage.



The lessons gleaned from this study throw light on how women can mother daughters well. It also provokes a discourse on the importance of fellow feelings among mothers who want their daughters to step into their shoes.

Accordingly, this work adduces unmistakable evidence that women can carve out dignified images of themselves, also through motherhood.

# KNUST



## INTRODUCTION

Mother-daughter relationship is probably one of the most important and enduring of all familial relationships. This thesis focuses on the trials of motherhood as they are played out in mother-daughter bonds. The focus of this thesis is to examine the causes of the trials of motherhood as they relate to conflicts in mother-daughter bonds and to suggest measures of eliminating those disturbances enveloping mother-daughter bonds. Bungaro argues that “Fiction in one way or the other reflects the tensions and preoccupations at work in society.”<sup>1</sup> Bungaro’s argument suggests that creative writing follows trends in real life. Kari Dako and her co-authors have also attested that Amma Darko’s novels explore subjects that have tremendous fascination for Ghanaians. Dako and her co-authors assert:

Her [Darko] writing reflects the angst in contemporary Ghanaian society—the themes she chooses to echo are the stories that we read daily in the Ghanaian press. The headlines scream of abandoned babies, brutalized and murdered women: wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, girlfriends, of ritual executions, of incest and rape, of sale of children, of child labour and of a general degeneration of society into one of oppression and violence.<sup>2</sup>

A discernible trend in Amma Darko’s novels is precisely this preoccupation with the presentation of conflicts in mother-daughter bonds. The effects of these conflicts are portrayed in the daily headlines we read as attested to by Dako and co-authors. In all four of her novels—*Beyond the Horizon*, *The Housemaid*, *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers*, Darko sets the record

---

<sup>1</sup> Bungaro, Monica. “Mothering Daughters and the Other Side of the Story in Amma Darko, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nozipo Maraire.” In *New Directions in African Literature*, Vol. 25. Ernest Emenyonu Ed. Trenton, N.J., African World Press, 2006, p. 67

<sup>2</sup> Dako, Denkabe and Yitah. “Pawns and Players: The Women in Amma Darko’s Novels” in *Sex and Gender in an Era of Aids: Ghana At The Turn Of The Millennium*, eds. Christine Oppong, M. Yaa, P.A. Oppong and Irene K. Odotei. Accra, Ghana, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006, p. 283

straight by presenting experiences of mothers who are in conflicting relationships with their daughters. These relationships are disturbing since most of them border on the repercussions of financial crises and irresponsible fathers on mothers and their daughters. As daughters realize that their mothers cannot fulfill their expectations, they become disappointed and disillusioned and so vent their frustrations on their mothers who, they consider, have failed or betrayed them.

It is this resultant conflict that characterizes daughters' feeling of being betrayed by mothers which has become for Amma Darko something of a leitmotif, demanding critical attention. It is the desire to liberate African women, through exposure, change in consciousness and the recreation of a positive self-perception which makes Darko add her voice to the volume of ongoing literary works by female writers of Africa. Darko's message is that mothers need to strategize to change the status quo if they desire to surmount the trials of motherhood.

Kolawole has observed that recent writings by female writers of Africa are characterized by this same obsession to change the woman's status in the society; and this, according to Kolawole, is done through the creation of characters who challenge the status quo in their bid to gain for themselves self-respect. Kolawole asserts:

Change is a major factor shaping women's lives and writers cannot pretend that it does not exist, as some feminist do; social change is a reality in Africa, and the woman's adaptation to it is no longer a myth but a reality. So, women writers have debunked the claim of silence and invisibility. They are acting in line with a Yoruba proverb, *owo are enila fi ntun iwa ara eni se*—'You must be prepared to redefine your self-respect yourself.' There is, therefore, a shift from the kind of stereotypes being created by African women writers in their early works. They have become more overt, more convinced, even more revolutionary in their depiction of women.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Kolawole, Mary E.M. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton, N.J, African World Press Inc., 1997, p.164

Obviously, Kolawole's assertion above reveals that realism plays a major role in recent works by female writers of Africa, and Amma Darko's works are no exception.

Monica Bungaro has argued that recent writing by African women is characterized by a rather frank attack on those beliefs of maternal love and mother-daughter relationship since such beliefs continually fail to prove potent in a challenging world. She says:

The tension between generations and between opposing systems are played out in the conflict between mothers and daughters. One of the new directions African women's writing is taking today is in fact visible in a more blunt attack on the traditional foundations of society in its myths and beliefs about maternal love and mother-daughter relationships. (p.67)

Women writers of Africa desire to portray the reality of the African woman in order to convey to their readership the constituents of proximate reality for the African woman. Thus, the concern of these contemporary female writers of Africa is to portray reality from a female point of view—a reality calculated to establish a motive and bring about corrective measures and progress. African women writers and theorist have, in their works, given space to writing which ensures the demystification of certain myths that give wrong pictures of the African woman. Molefi Asante has emphasized the productive force of myth as follows: “. . . myth becomes an explanation for the human condition and an answer to the problem of psychological existence in a recent society.”<sup>4</sup> Although this observation seeks to explicate the value of myths to Africans, it also speaks to any group which derives values from myths.

Asante's assertion above corroborates Helen Chuckwuma's analysis of the role of Igbo myth. According to Chuckwuma, the Igbo's understand myth as: “a stabilizer of social systems, a means of recreating past history or as a psychoanalytic insight into human behaviour

---

<sup>4</sup> Asante, Kete Molefi. *The Afro-centric Idea*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1987, p. 98

motivation.”<sup>5</sup> Chuckwuma and Asante’s analyses of the value of myth reveal that any group of persons who will believe in the productive force of myth adds value to myth since it has the power to shape people’s self-perception and to order ethical and moral consciousness as well as explain hitherto incomprehensible occurrences. It is not surprising then that in African societies, myth has established maternal love as automatic and even programmed it into the female psyche.

However, in a changing world where urbanization and encroaching modern values interact violently with hitherto established myths, mythological allusions to maternal love are radically giving way to realistic portrayals of motherhood. As mothers come to terms with burdens such as patriarchy, tradition, modernization and maternal neglect, they rebel, calling into question the mythological presentation of mothers as being imbued with maternal love and a naturally strong sense of maternal responsibility.

In all four of Amma Darko’s novels under study, there is the portrayal of mothers who “fail” to exhibit maternal love especially in their relationship with their daughters. The conflicts bedeviling mother-daughter relationships in these four novels and the refusal of these daughters to learn from their mothers reveal that the myth of indestructible maternal love is over, as daughters show new strengths in resisting their mothers’ voice and behaviour.

Women writers of Africa have not sufficiently focused on the trials of motherhood as played out in mother-daughter bonds. Mary Kolawole sums up the preoccupation of women writers of Africa thus:

---

<sup>5</sup> Chuckwuma, Helen. “Igbo Mythic Schema” in *Critical Theory and African Literature*. Ed. Ernest Emeyonu. Ibadan, Heinemann, 1987, p.100



In tracing the growth in awareness revealed in African women's literature, therefore, one cannot fail to see a parallel between social changes and individual consciousness in a gradual way. In each phase, the African woman is searching for meaning, a new identity, and reintegration; she is crying for just treatment. Her identification of femininity is not depicted by the erosion of female roles or the invisibility in the public sphere. Her quest is more fundamental and profound. She tries to deconstruct tradition by recreating new models and new yardsticks. (p.88)

Evidence from Kolawole's analysis reveals that there is so far a literary silence hanging over the mother-daughter relationship in Africa. It is this silence that Amma Darko dares to break by bringing to the fore the rather frightening and disturbing revelation that automatic maternal love no longer exists and that mothers and their daughters are in a battle. The battle is not aimed by daughters at fighting their mothers but at disgracing them for failing to live up to their reputation.

The writer of this thesis considers this break (in the silence hanging over mother-daughter relationship) as an innovation. The implication is that African women's writing has come of age in this bold confrontation of the new trend in mother-daughter relationships in Ghana (and in Africa, as new trends characterize the writing of women in Africa).

The question then is: why does Amma Darko, in relating issues that border on women, assume such a frank and frightening perspective? Why this frankness in the telling of a disturbing relationship such as that engulfing mothers and daughters? This question is important especially when consideration is given to Foucault's assertion that 'Motherhood is a biological—moral—responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education.'<sup>6</sup>

Foucault's statement above is corroborated by Monica Bungaro's claim that: "Motherhood has always been idealized and commonly represented as a full-time occupation. In most African

---

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990, p.104



societies, women are still defined by their ability to procreate and maternity is supposed to occupy a woman's perpetual interest"(p.68). In Bungaro's analysis of the relevance of motherhood to African women, the words "idealized" and "supposed" suggest that there is a paradigm shift in recent times, bringing to the fore the question of automatic maternal love.

The 1990's and 2000's saw Amma Darko exploring in her four novels the question of maternal love, the trials of motherhood as played out in mother-daughter bonds as well as suggesting measures that could restore to mothers their lost voices and dignity and also qualify them as role models worth emulating by their daughters.

The author of this thesis is convinced that the analysis of Amma Darko's four novels will not only expose the trials of motherhood but will also contribute significantly to eliminating these trials such that daughters will respect and cherish their mothers. Thus, it is hoped, this investigation would constitute a significant contribution to knowledge since it exposes a disturbing reality and also suggests alternatives aimed at remedying these problems. The contribution of this thesis to current knowledge then is its quest to subvert the stereotypical images of the African woman as eternal nurturer and protector of life. It unearths current scenarios of mothers on trial by their daughters. The topic 'The trials of motherhood' has subsumed the role of the needle as it weaves the four novels together, giving them a unique bind irrespective of the fact that each one of these novels has its own subject matter and thematic concern. Indeed, in all these novels, Amma Darko seeks to reconceptualize motherhood by pointing out both its destructive and its regenerative potential for mothers themselves and their daughters.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Africa as in Ghana, procreation is the most common expectation governing marriage. A woman's ability to secure her marriage rests on her ability to give birth. The primacy of motherhood to African women has been elucidated by Oduyoye thus:

Motherhood is a highly valued role open only to women but desired by both men and women as well as the society as a whole; it is the channel by which men reproduce themselves and continue the family name and it is the channel by which women actualize their psycho-religious need to be the source of life. Often, procreation is described as if women are simply "Objects of genetic and social transmission."<sup>7</sup>

Oduyoye's analysis of the primacy of motherhood to African women reveals some attempt at a comparative analysis as per the importance of childbirth to men and women. Whereas for men procreation constitutes a duty call since it is the channel by which men continue with the family name, for women, childbirth goes beyond ensuring survival of the human race. Women see in it their ability to procreate, their very essence—it is fulfilling since the birth of a child supposedly fills a vacuum in a woman's life. It does not bring only physical joy to the woman; it assures her that her ability to procreate makes her acceptable before God and man.

Ann Oakley has argued that being a mother is held out as the primary feminine goal. She writes:

Motherhood settles women down and provides a focus for feelings of feminine responsibility. It is fulfilling – both of the social expectation and of the personal desire – though its capacity to satisfy the latter is not so great in reality as in anticipation (when babies are clothed in a mystique that red and squalling infants do not have) . . . More than this, the very sentimentalization of motherhood is a

---

<sup>7</sup> Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: Africa Women and Patriarchy*. New York, Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 141/142

problem for women in becoming and being mothers, since it poses the insoluble dilemma of tracing perfection in imperfect circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

As an important marker of female identity, motherhood to most Africans and especially most African women is considered the major role of the female. According to Sarpong, motherhood “is the principal if not ultimate end of marriage.”<sup>9</sup>

John Gills has also added his voice to the ongoing discourse. In his view, motherhood is the sovereign means of female identity formation. Gills (1996:174) asserts, “giving birth ceased to be something that happens to a woman and became the ultimate source of adult female identity formation.”<sup>10</sup>

Gills’s assertion points to a rather disturbing generalization which considers procreation as a duty for every woman. The woman who refuses to procreate or who, for one biological reason or the other, cannot procreate automatically comes under severe criticism for interrupting nature’s original plan. Sarpong (1974:69) says: “The greatest calamity to befall a Ghanaian woman is to be barren.”

The idea that mothers occupy important spaces in society cannot be overemphasized. According to Naana Horne, “Matrilineal kinship recognizes woman as the very source of intergenerational connectedness.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Darko’s descent from a matrilineage explains partly the space she gives to motherhood in her novels. The attendant challenges mothers face in the political and the

---

<sup>8</sup> Oakley, Ann. “Subject Women: Where Women Stand Today – Politically, Economically, Socially and Emotionally.” Great Britain, Martin Robertson Company Ltd., 1981, p.86

<sup>9</sup> Sarpong, Peter Akwasi. *Ghana in Retrospect*. Tema, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p.69

<sup>10</sup> Gills, John. *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual and the Quest for Family Values*. New York, Basic Books, 1996, p.174

<sup>11</sup> Horne, Banyiwaa Naana. ‘The Politics of Mothering: Multiple subjectivity and Gendered Discourse in Aidoo’s plays.’ In *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*, Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Gay Wilentz eds., Trenton, New Jersey, African World Press, 1999, p. 303-331

socio-economic domains of the woman nurturing the matrilineal kinship system of the Akans(in Ghana) also find representation in all four of the novels. Economic hardships, patriarchal and cultural demands, woman-on-woman violence, as well as the irresponsible behaviour of some men have rendered many mothers voiceless to the extent that mothers cannot mentor their children, especially not their daughters, to become mothers or to make their views heard in public.

Motherhood, in Africa, is fraught with a myriad of problems and these problems have made motherhood a paradox—that which brings joy and reward whilst at the same time reducing the woman/mother to the level of an object conditioned to suffer shame and abuse. The received view that all mothers have automatic love for their children has been radically interrogated by world changing situations as well as African women writers. Monica Bungaro<sup>12</sup> has captured the major preoccupation of African women writers in recent times. In a paper published in the twenty-fifth volume of *The New Directions in African Literature*, she states: “African women writers today are not only showing that perfect motherhood does not exist in women’s novels because it does not exist in real life but are self-consciously rejecting proliferating images that suggest otherwise.”(p.68)

Bungaro’s assertion radically interrogates the received view that all mothers partake in automatic maternal love towards their children as gleaned from Darko’s novel understudy, some mothers elect to seek other sources of fulfillment even when these sources are inimical to their children’s welfare.

Most people would casually want to concede that the ‘new’ preoccupation of African women writers (that is their portrayal of the challenges of motherhood) is a reaction against the idealized portrayal of motherhood by the early luminaries of African literature—who were mostly men.



One must, of necessity, caution here that literature in most cases is judged in relation to its social function and indeed, the better the function, the better the literature. In fact, the portrayal of the challenges engulfing and overwhelming motherhood in Africa is not just an answer to the hitherto over-romanticisation of motherhood, but a true reflection of the happenings of our times where harsh conditions are forcing mothers to renege on their duties.

The challenges of motherhood brought about by harsh economic and cultural conditions had been explored in the 1980's and onwards by Anglophone as well as Francophone writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Bâ and Tsitsi Dangaremba (in her novel *Nervous Conditions*). In all the works of these writers, however, the common emerging points are found in mothers' inability to dutifully mother owing to changing situations and the harsh burdens of patriarchal culture. None of these texts calls for a reassessment of the image of the traditional bonding between mother and daughter. There is a near omerta or code of silence hanging over the mother-daughter relationship. Although the works of these literary writers cited above look at challenges of motherhood, these writers investigate these challenges through economic, cultural, socio-political and sometimes spiritual lenses. There is a rather myopic portrayal of the anger, frustration and tensions which are fueled also by 'mother-on-daughter' violence.

The present study offers a paradigm shift as it undertakes an analysis of four novels written by a Ghanaian female writer whose purpose is to reconceptualise motherhood, pointing out both its regenerative and destructive potential for both mothers and daughters.

<sup>12</sup> A teacher of African literature and culture at the University of Birmingham

Amma Darko's four novels: *Beyond The Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998), *Faceless* (2003), and *Not Without Flowers* (2006) represent a female novelist's determination to set the reality of Ghanaian mothers' lives before a world that is perhaps only waking up to the realization that there is nothing like perfect motherhood. In a very bold manner of writing, Darko reveals in all four novels that mothers are on trial. These trials of motherhood are played out in mother-daughter bonds. The conflicting nature of these bonds as evidenced in the four novels reveals a paradox; that in mother-daughter relationships anger can co-exist with connection. These daughters who show anger at their mother's inability to give them proper lessons exhibit their anger in various ways. While some get physical (bandying words with their mothers), others are indifferent, they put up a cold attitude in their resolve not to heed to their mother's advice because they consider such an advice as irrelevant. Yet in all these relationships, the various shadows of anger do not in any way erase the bond. Daughters may be angry with their mothers, however, they still consider them as their mothers. There is a kind of inner bonding that can only be understood in terms of nature—once a mother to a daughter, always a mother to a daughter.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

All four of Amma Darko's novels investigate the trials of motherhood. Irrespective of the fact that each novel has its own subject matter and thematic concerns, the trials of motherhood as evidenced by the rumblings in mother-daughter bonds bind the four novels together like quadruplets surviving on the breast of one mother.

Perhaps, it is Amma Darko's desire to use literature to teach mothers how to evade the trials of motherhood or to overcome these trials that motivates her to write. Perhaps, it is her obsession to



recreate mothers with positive self-perception and good mentoring skills which make her assume that frank and sometimes frightening stance in the telling of the stories.

In Amma Darko's four novels, we encounter mothers who accept the women's plight, teach it to their daughters and even suffer these daughters to become partners in the suffering. As the mothers patronize the "suffering syndrome," their daughters evolve from passive awareness. These daughters become rebellious, assertive and question the status quo.

It is however refreshing to note here that it is not all mothers in Darko's four novels who patronize the "suffering Syndrome". A few of the mothers, we realize, have evolved from a rather passive awareness of their social space and have brought out the regenerative potential of motherhood. We are called upon to learn from these few women how to mother well and how not to mother badly. It is these lessons that this thesis seeks to impart.

The objective of this thesis is to unravel the dark side of motherhood using Amma Darko's novels as illustrative text. These four novels paint the darker side of women's victimization which hinges on mother-daughter relationship. By her portrayal of the trials of motherhood in the four novels, Amma Darko has shed light on an area that has been side-stepped. Mother-daughter conflict is not a popular subject area that female writers write on. Amma Darko obviously has ventured into a troublesome area. Increasingly in this fast changing world of Ghana, where economic challenges, upsurge in the number of irresponsible fathers, increasing rate of prostitution et cetera has brought untold hardships on single mothers there is the need to shine light on the realities of these women.

## METHODOLOGY

The point of view of this thesis is to present Amma Darko's portrayal of the trials of motherhood as played out in mother-daughter bonds, and with a view to suggest alternatives aimed at eliminating the causes of these trials and ultimately ensuring a healthier bond between mothers and their daughters.

Amma Darko's four novels—*Beyond The Horizon*, *The Housemaid*, *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers*, will constitute our primary texts. All four novels explore the traumas characterizing mother-daughter bonds with a view to reconceptualising motherhood by pointing out both its regenerative and destructive potential.

Motherhood as an experience and as an institution has received a lot of attention from theorists and critics. It is of utmost relevance then to present an overview of theories and critiques on motherhood in order to properly situate the focus of this thesis. Thus a literature review comprising theories on motherhood will be discussed and analyzed. An examination of cultural norms that contribute to the helplessness of mothers and make them vulnerable (to trials) will be cited and discussed. Patriarchal culture, proverbs, and folktales, among others, will be analyzed to find out the extent to which they burden mothers.

Fluctuating economic fortunes, socio-political challenges, rural-urban migration and maternal neglect have significantly impacted on the lives of Ghanaian mothers and their children. These crises have, to a large extent, affected the lives of mothers as seen in the four novels. The decline in moral discipline in the midst of these challenges take their toll on mother-daughter relationships resulting in excruciating poverty and loss of self-worth especially in the case of others. Hence, there will also be a discussion of the above change in fortune with special emphasis on how they contribute to the trials of mothers.

We have been particularly privileged to have had the rare opportunity of exchanging ideas with Amma Darko, who, irrespective of her heavy schedules, granted us an interview in her office (at the Internal Revenue Service, Kaneshie branch). Indeed, Amma Darko's views and ideas about her novels and about the trials of motherhood are an eye-opener, for they indicate that literature is really a reflection of life. Our meeting with this dynamic woman writer of Africa is of tremendous importance to this thesis as she also suggested insightful ways through which the trials can be eliminated. Copious quotations from our interview with Amma Darko (see appendix) will be cited at various sections of the work to buttress points and ideas.

The study then will be carried out with the following sections—there will first be an Introduction which will discuss the topic, its relevance and how it contributes to current knowledge. This will be followed by the Literature Review which seeks, among other things, to show knowledge which already exists on motherhood and the trials associated with it. The literature review will also expose some of the shortcomings of those theories on motherhood and reveal how this study will resolve those shortcomings. Closely following the Literature Review will be a discussion of certain theories that would support our discussions. Here, theories on feminism and womanism will be discussed and some aspects of these theories that support the concerns of this thesis will be looked at. However, this thesis's discussions lean on the concept of Womanism as popularized by Mary E. Modupe Kolawole.<sup>13</sup> She defines the essence of the theory on womanism thus: “womanism is the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways” (p.204). This will constitute the theoretical framework of this study. Amma Darko's four novels under study here can be read from a womanist point of view

---

<sup>13</sup> A Senior Lecturer in literature and women's studies at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and editor-in-chief of the journal—*Gender and Development in Africa*

since they all seek to reconceptualize motherhood by pointing out ways through which women but especially mothers can achieve total feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways.

After the Introduction, the Literature Review and discussion of the theories that support the thesis, there will be a survey which will review earlier novels by female writers to find out the major preoccupation of these female writers and the reason for the long silence hanging over mother-daughter relationships. Having finished with the discussions above, there will be a detailed look at the four novels (the primary texts) themselves. This will be done in four chapters.

Chapter one then begins with the trials of the Ghanaian mother as portrayed in *Beyond The Horizon* with the sub-title, 'Merchandising the female body—Mara's attempt at arresting the trials of motherhood.' Since the word 'trial' is the key not only in this chapter's sub-title but to the whole thesis topic, there will be a brief discussion of the word 'trial'. Here, the constituents of trials will be discussed as well. This chapter presents the trials of motherhood in a rather frightening and pathetic manner.

Since this thesis is analysis-oriented, chapter two continues to explore conflicts bedeviling mother-daughter bonds in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* coming under the sub-title, 'Exploiting the Exploiter – a Mother's Strategy at Surviving Socio-economic Challenges'. This chapter investigates the strategies used by Tika's mother, Sekyiwa, and Efia's grandmother and mother to survive. Here, sex, fertility and subservience are used as exploitative strategies. However, whatever gains made by these exploiters are nullified as they come face to face with the trials of motherhood. Once again, mothers are made to take part of the blame, a strategy



aimed at ensuring corrective behaviour. Indeed, society is not left out of the blame game as Darko criticizes society's neglect and abuse of old women. The practice on the part of the young to label old women as witches is criticized. This practice in itself constitutes a trial on motherhood.

Chapter three continues with the analysis of the primary texts. *Faceless*, like its predecessor, *The Housemaid*, portrays the major mother characters as heartless, cold and exploitative but overall weak. The failure on the part of their daughters to understand that there are social systems operating at the expense of their mothers adds up to the trials of these mothers. Thus, this chapter is sub-titled, 'A Daughter's Revolt against the Mother and Society: A critical reading of *Faceless*.' There are hints of unrestricted sexual activities and possible infections of HIV/AIDS which are the consequences of bad mothering.

Darko's fourth novel, *Not Without Flowers*, illustrates the trials of motherhood as we witness the telling effect of neglect on Ma, mother of Cora and Randa. Why would a father/husband prefer a younger flirt of a woman to his faithful wife? Why do Ma's children send their psychologically traumatized mother to a spiritual church where inmates, oozing stale urine, are whipped to exorcise the demons responsible for madness? How come Ma's last born is infected with HIV/AIDS when she sets out to fight her mother's number one enemy? These rather mind-boggling questions will be answered. Chapter four with its sub-heading, 'Parasites and Sufferers: Daughter's and Mother's strategy at dealing with the trials of Motherhood', reveals that unfaithful husbands constitute a major burden or trials on motherhood.

The fifth chapter which concludes this thesis draws a road map which redirects mothers' attention to contemporary trials on motherhood, strategies aimed at overcoming those trials and creating a healthy bond between themselves and their daughters.

This fifth chapter comes under the title, 'Mothers/Women working to carve out dignified images for themselves.' The trend analysis carried out in all four of Amma Darko's novels reveal that although mothers in Africa and, specifically in Ghana, are undergoing trials of various proportions, there are mothers who are weaving new patterns of living from their boundless human creativity. Such mothers are role models—they create strategies and tutor younger minds with the view of enabling them assess and critically appropriate various aspects of their cultures to speak positively to their needs. This fifth chapter will situate Amma Darko's four novels within the African womanism theory since all four novels aim at feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways. As mothers search for strategies to overcome the trials of motherhood, there is the need for them to identify and apply themselves to those values that should enable them to reconstruct more accurate and decent images. This chapter then examines how mothers' resourcefulness, intelligence, solidarity and collaboration with men can enable them overcome the trials of motherhood.

Beneficial lessons can be gleaned from the portrayal of characters like Kabria, Dina, Miss Kamame, Sylv Po whose struggle for liberation from patriarchal structures as well as political, social and economic challenges elevates them as role models or iconic apotheoses.



## CHAPTER ONE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1.1 THEORIES ON MOTHERHOOD

According to Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee<sup>14</sup>, the primary association between women and mothering has brought joys and opportunities for empowerment as well as problems and hardships. In addition, it has caused pain for women who are not able to have children as well as for those who have chosen not to have any.

We can use Shaw and Lee's assertion to understand two major concerns about motherhood. Firstly, that motherhood as an institution is a contested terrain since it holds both the potential of bringing up opportunities and also of creating 'problems' and 'hardships'. Secondly, motherhood, as per Shaw and Lee's assertion is an expectation which behoves on women to fulfill. This preamble then raises the concern as to how women can negotiate their space in such a way as to either reap the benefits of motherhood or avoid the 'problems' and 'hardships' that come with motherhood and mothering.

Feminist literature also corroborates the view that it is societal expectation that impels women to give birth (at all cost). Societal expectation of an all-encompassing motherhood/mothering is really problematic. Blaming ideologies of all-encompassing motherhood as a result of social construct, Evelyn Nakano Glenn first leans on Alison Jagger's definition as a working definition for the term mothering. She suggests, "I propose looking at mothering as a historically and

---

<sup>14</sup> Shaw, Susan M. and Lee, Janet, ed. *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001, pp.278-279

culturally variable relationship in which one individual nurtures and cares for another.”<sup>15</sup> That this definition attempts to share the burden of motherhood and mothering among men and women is clearly seen in this definition’s strategic silence over which sex is conditioned to mother. After all the emphasis is not on who must mother, but what constitutes motherhood/mothering. The expectation of automatic motherhood and mothering as the sole preserve of women is viewed by Evelyn Nakano Glenn as occurring within specific social and historical contexts. She asserts:

Mothering occurs within specific social contexts that vary in terms of material and cultural resources and constraints . . . Mothering is constructed through men’s and women’s actions within specific historical circumstances. Thus agency is so central to an understanding of mothering as a social, rather than biological construct.<sup>16</sup>

Glenn’s view clearly challenges notions of automatic motherhood for women. Glenn’s view implies then, that it is possible also for men to mother and that in so far as there are no materials or cultural constraints, men as well as women can all engage in motherhood and mothering.

Indeed the explication of the term gender is linked with the societal construct of automatic motherhood for women. Glenn observes: Gender is ‘used to refer to socially constructed relationships and practices organized around perceived differences between the sexes.’ Thus once the differences between the biological make-up of the sexes are brought to fore, then the next in line is to assign, though carelessly, responsibilities to each sex based on their biology. Glenn agrees with R.W. Connell’s notes which implies that it is the explication of the term ‘gender’ that brings about the categorization of the sexes and the division of responsibility between the sexes. Glenn says, “As R. W. Connell notes, social relations of gender are

<sup>15</sup> Jagger, Alison M., *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983. p.256

<sup>16</sup> Glenn, N. Evelyn. *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency*. New York, Routledge, 1994, p.13

fundamentally organized in terms of, or in relation to, the reproductive division of people into male and female.”<sup>17</sup>

In a similar direction, Ann Oakley (1974:186), has described the contemporary myth of motherhood as resting on the three beliefs: “that all women need to be mothers, that all mothers need their children and that all children need their mothers.”

These beliefs are held by societies which pigeon-hole women to give birth at all cost. Oakley reviews evidence that showcases each of these beliefs as false and calculated only to service some oppressive purpose. Oakley’s review reveal two disturbing results based on these beliefs: that women who might otherwise not have children do so, and that women who would be happier sharing child care responsibilities nonetheless make motherhood an all-absorbing job in order not to appear abnormal or selfish.

Also influential in theorizing about automatic motherhood for women by resorting to natural or biological explanations is Peter Akwasi Sarpong’s attempt to account for the ultimate aim of marriage in Africa and especially in Ghana. Sarpong (1974:69) opines that in Africa and especially in Ghana (the major setting of Amma Darko’s four novels understudy) “Motherhood is the principle if not the ultimate end of marriage.” Sarpong further establishes his opinion with the claim that: “the contempt in which a childless woman (whether married or not) is held in Africa explains the importance attached to motherhood.” That Sarpong’s argument stretches the essence of automatic motherhood for women is seen in his assertion that a childless woman is held in contempt by the society. This assertion corroborates, even more, societal construct of all-

---

<sup>17</sup> Connell R. W., “Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics.” Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987, p.140

encompassing motherhood as the sole preserve of women. The fear of being seen as a failure alone will compel women to give birth even when they are not adequately prepared for that service. This perhaps is the most frightening perspective of societal construct of automatic motherhood for women—a very disturbing expectation that has been analysed in Darko’s novels especially *Beyond The Horizon*, *The Housemaid* and *Faceless*. Critic John Gills (1996) also captures the essence of childbirth for the African woman thus: “giving birth ceased to be something that happens to a woman and became the ultimate source of adult female identity.”

Gills’ assertion here not only corroborates Sarpong’s view but even more subtly condemns this situation; that women have no authority over their reproductive abilities unless nature wills the occurrence of pregnancy is inferred from Gills’ assertion. Even more disturbing here is the narrowing of the woman’s identity formation to only her child bearing capabilities. Suffice it to say that even though Gills’ assertion corroborates Sarpong’s assertion, it also displays an attempt at criticizing this view of motherhood as the being ultimate end of marriage. This societal expectation that impels women to give birth albeit automatically has provoked discourse in many a feminist circle.

The French existentialist, Simone de Beauvoir, (1908-1986) is an important figure in the feminist movement. Her seminal book, *The Second Sex*, enquires into the social construction of “femininity”. De Beauvoir’s viewpoint is that “*On ne naît pas femme; on le devient*” which translates into English as “One is not just given birth to as a woman, one becomes a woman.” Beauvoir’s view also acknowledges the fact that automatic maternity for women is, after all, a social construct and that for women to be liberated from patriarchal oppression, there is the need to abstract the notion of woman from woman’s body.



Shulamite Firestone<sup>18</sup> and Friedan<sup>19</sup> have also opined that the only way women will realize liberation is when the notion of woman is abstracted from the notion of woman's body.

In Africa, the pursuit of motherhood is portrayed as the sovereign means for female identity formation. This observation can be gleaned from the work of an important psychoanalysis theorist, Nancy Chodorow. Chodorow's treatment of the subject of the essence of motherhood to society enables us to understand why child care has become the exclusive domain of biological mothers and why total responsibility for children is still the preserve of women. In the introductory essay to her work, Chodorow asserts:

In our society, as in most societies, women do not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility of infant care, spend more time with infants and children than men, and sustain primary emotional ties with women . . . Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour.<sup>20</sup>

There is indeed something very peculiar about Chodorow's assertion in that it suggests strongly that mothers are to be blamed should a child(ren) fail to meet the expectations of society. The fact that the mother is the child's primary parent and is expected to sustain emotional ties with the child exonerates fathers, especially the irresponsible ones, from blame should anything go wrong with the upbringing of the child(ren). Chodorow notes with interest that:

Because of the seemingly natural connection between women's childbearing and lactation capacities and their responsibility of childcare and because humans need extended care in childhood, women's mothering has been taken for granted. It has been assumed to be inevitable by social scientists, by many feminists and certainly by those opposed to feminism. (p.3)

<sup>18</sup> Firestone, Shulamite. *The Dialectic of Sex*. New York: Bantam, 1971

<sup>19</sup> Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Dell, New York: W. W. Norton. 1983

<sup>20</sup> Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Reproduction of Gender*. U.S.A., University of California Press, 1978, p. 3

The result of this bias, according to Chodorow, is that, “As a result, although women’s mothering is of profound importance for family structure, for relations between the sexes, for ideology of labour and sexual inequality both inside the family and in the nonfamily world, it is rarely analyzed” (p.3). To help us analyze women’s perception of childbirth, we elect to use the psychoanalytic theory as popularized by Nancy Chodorow.

In her analysis of why women mother, Chodorow leans on psychoanalytic theory for explanations. She opines:

The psychoanalytic account shows not only how men came to grow away from their families and to participate in the public sphere. It shows also how women grow up to have both generalized relational capacities and needs and how women and men come to create the kinds of interpersonal relationships which make it likely that women will remain in the domestic sphere – in the sphere of reproduction – and will mother the next generations. Women’s mothering as an institutionalized feature of family life produces cyclically. In the process, it contributes to the reproduction of those aspects of the sexual sociology of adult life which grow out of and relate to the fact that women mother. (p.38)

Firstly, Chodorow agrees with feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir<sup>21</sup> and Shulamite Firestone that automatic maternity for women is, after all, a social construct and that for women to be liberated from patriarchal oppression, there is the need to abstract the notion of woman from woman’s body. However, Sheila Ruth disagrees with Firestone and De Beauvoir. De Beauvoir’s viewpoint is that “*On ne naît pas femme; on le devient*” which translates into English as “One is not just given birth to as a woman, one becomes a woman.” Beauvoir explains that the stereotypical roles assigned to women are as a result of societal prejudice. Beauvoir and Firestone opine that the concept of woman must be divorced from a woman’s body. Ruth argues, “Flesh-loathing is part of the well-entrenched beliefs, habits, and

---

<sup>21</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. H. M. Parshley. Ed. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953



practices epitomized in the treatment of pregnancy as a disease. But we need not experience our flesh, our body as loathsome.”<sup>22</sup>

Considering that De Beauvoir and Firestone are all well acclaimed feminists, one cannot help but criticize their divergent views on women’s mothering and fault them as well. For how can such a theory flourish on African soil which, according to Kolawole (1997:197), “... endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood and motherhood with no apologia.” In Africa, childbirth is recognized as a woman’s number one duty. Any attempt on the part of a woman to subvert this can result in clashes as amply evidenced in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Dilemma of a Ghost*, where Ato and his mother suggest to Eulalie, Ato’s wife, that there is the need to wash her womb so as to clear any obstacles impeding conception. Indeed the view of these feminists is reason enough for the apparent lack of interest on the part of many female writers of Africa when it comes to identifying with feminism.

Chodorow’s account, which asserts also that “Mothering is an institutional feature of family life,” authenticates this researcher’s view that motherhood itself is an institution and since it is an institution, there are principles governing it—principles that can be modified or changed for the benefit of the members of that institution—a cause to which writers like Amma Darko have applied themselves to through their works.

Theorizing about motherhood, Nancy Chodorow resorts to psychoanalytic object relations theory to illustrate that women do mother because they are mothered by women. Psychoanalytic object relations theory emphasizes the basic importance of sexuality and agrees with other psychoanalytic perspectives that sexuality is organized during the early years of the child. A

---

<sup>22</sup> Ruth, Sheila. *Issues in Feminism*. California, Mayfield Publishing Company, 1995, p. 32

major argument popularized by the object relations theorist is that “The child’s **social relational experience** from earliest infancy is determining for psychological growth and personality development.” (p.47)

Relating her argument about motherhood to the psychoanalytic object theory, Chodorow asserts that the only reason why women mother is that society has conditioned that a woman must mother. She argues:

Beyond the possible hormonal components of a woman’s early mothering of her new born (and even these do not operate independently), there is nothing in parturient women’s physiology which makes them particularly suited to later child care, nor is there any instinctual reason when they should be able to perform it. Nor is there anything biological or hormonal to differentiate a male “substitute mother” from a female one. The biological argument for women’s mothering is based on facts that derive, not from our biological knowledge, but from our definition of the natural situation as this grows out of our participation in certain social arrangements. That women have the extensive and nearly exclusive mothering role they have is a product of a social and cultural translation of their childbearing and lactation capacities. It is not guaranteed or entailed by these capacities themselves. (p.30)

There is a point of departure in African womanist’s theory and that of De Beauvoir as it transpires in *The Second Sex*.

Chodorow argues that:

An orientation toward nurturance and care becomes part of women’s personality because the process of identity formation in girls takes place through continuous attachment to and identification with the mother. In contrast, boys develop a sense of self as independent and distinct from others because they construct a male identity by a process of separation from and contrasting with the mother. (p.30)

A particular controversy over the issue of motherhood as producing itself cyclically (that is from mother to daughter to mother to daughter) is sparked by Chodorow’s argument. Chodorow herself is a feminist writer who has attempted to develop theories

which, like De Beauvoir's, reveal that women mother because society rather than their biological make-up conditions that women mother. She asserts: "To begin with, women's mothering does not exist in isolation. It is a fundamental constituting feature of the sexual division of labour." Such an argument from Chodorow tends to link, albeit subtly, mothers to the problems of unruly daughters—for if a mother is said to be conditioned by society to nurture and train her girls, then the problem of unruly daughters will be laid at her doorstep. For this thesis then, it would mean that feminist theorists like Chodorow authenticate the trials of motherhood and even agree that yes, mothers ought to be on trial whereas their aim, paradoxically, is the liberation of women.

Also influential in theorizing about motherhood is Sarah Ruddick. Ruddick does not resort to natural or biological explanations. Ruddick (1980:342-367) opines that mothers' nurturance involves higher philosophical thought and that mothers derive their focus of protecting, preserving and fostering growth from maternal practice.

However, both theorists—Chodorow and Ruddick—have been attacked by Evelyn Nakono Glenn as being ironic. Glenn contends:

. . . both Chodorow and Ruddick decry the negative outcome of saddling mothers with primary responsibility for mothering (for example, boys becoming sexist in the process of distancing themselves from what is feminine), and they catalogue major benefits of men and others sharing in mothering (for example, men becoming more concerned with preserving life). Yet the message that many readers seem to take away is that the arrangement of "biological mother as sole and exclusive caretaker" is universal and that the issues that all mothers face are identical. The problems for those attuned to the concerns of non-dominant groups is that the analyses do not sufficiently "decenter" the dominant model.<sup>23</sup>

Glenn's problem with Chodorow and Ruddick is that in trying to build a general or "universal" theory, their focuses remain centered on a single normative pattern, with variations relegated to the margins.

---

<sup>23</sup> Glenn, N. Evelyn. *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency*. New York, Routledge, 1994, p.5

To emphasize the social base of mothering, one needs to attend to the variable rather than search for the universal. This is what Mary E.M. Kolawole achieves in *Womanism and African Consciousness*. With her African womanist orientation, Kolawole has documented the different historical realities and experiences of different African women, and therefore the differing cultural contexts and material conditions under which mothering has been carried out. Thus unlike Ruddick's analysis, Kolawole's analysis emphasizes variations. Indeed variations are shifted into the center rather than the margins. According to Kolawole, recognizing diversity in motherhood and the trials confronting motherhood from the various cultural backgrounds will in turn encourage African women, especially mothers, to come together, rally behind their single aim of overcoming their numerous trials by seeking channels of self-definition in a changing society. Kolawole shows through the Swahili concept of togetherness, *Umoja*, that there can be harmony in diversity in so far as African women's experiences are concerned.

*Umoja*, the Swahili concept of togetherness, unity, or coalition, is appropriate and relevant to the current quest for an authentic and acceptable African womanist theory. This idea of *Umoja* enhances the accommodation of diverse attitudes to the woman's question without undermining one's African identity. It underscores harmony in diversity and underlies our theory that African women's consciousness is a mosaic. (p.194)

Josephine Donovan also argues in favour of diversity of women's experiences and is of the view that unity is possible within these diverse experiences. "I believe that there are common denominators that unify women's experiences... but we must be aware of the diversity in our theory."<sup>24</sup>

In his dialogic theory, Mikhail Bakhtin, like Donovan, advocates for the interlocutory trend and maintains that it is more valid. According to Bakhtin's dialogic theory, any discourse worth

---

<sup>24</sup> Donovan, Josephine. "Towards a Women's Poetics", in S. Benstock, ed., *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 99



critical attention needs to be located within a dialogic framework. A dialogic framework accommodates differences while at the same time identifying areas of convergence within the differences. This approach has a two-pronged implication; it first recognizes and respects individual differences whilst at the same time recognizing that all different perspectives to the problem also bears some relevance to the solution. The dialogic approach does not survive on arguments or tension rather it sources its strength from the fact that diverse approaches can co-exist from the mutual benefits of all stakeholders. Kolawole asserts that “African women’s self-definition focuses on positive collectivity as opposed to individuality. Kolawole contends that what the African woman and, for our purpose, the African mother needs is self-definition. She says:

Her struggles are closely intertwined with other levels of self-assertion and she needs self-definition for a total personal and group emancipation. Consequently, after self-knowledge, she attempts to identify with the group’s needs. Womanism is therefore inclusive and the positions of African woman bear similarities globally. (p.168)

A foremost feminist theorist, Evelyn Nakono Glenn asserts that in the 1920s and 1930s psychoanalytic theory posited that “normal” women desire a child and that those who reject motherhood are rejecting femininity. Glenn further asserts that in the 1960s, child development researchers “discovered” maternal bonding. According to Glenn (1994:9), “the concept was used to argue that the infant needed a single caretaking figure, preferably the biological mother, to develop a healthy sense of self and an ability to relate with others.” Faulting these beliefs, Ann Oakley (1974:186), observed that such beliefs have been popularized because they serve some oppressive purpose.



Women Studies tutor, Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee have contributed to the ongoing discourse on motherhood and the ambivalence associated with mothering. In *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions*, Shaw and Lee argue that:

Although the meaning and practice of motherhood is culturally constructed, it tends to be conflated with notions of innate, biological, programmed behaviour and expectation of unconditional love and nurturance. In other words, even though the meanings associated with motherhood vary historically and culturally, women are expected to take primary responsibility for the nurturing of children. Unlike the assumptions associated with "to father", "to mother" implies nurturing, comforting and care taking . . . This primary association between women and mothering has brought joys and opportunities for empowerment as well as problems and hardship. (p.278)

Shaw and Lee's argument reveals that mothers' interests are subordinated to that of the children and that it is difficult for women to affirm their personhood outside the home and motherhood. Such limiting roles assigned women who are mothers create problems for those mothers who desire to carve out unique identities for themselves outside the boundaries of home and motherhood.

Christian examines the effects of ideologies of all-encompassing mothering on women. Christian spells out two of these destructive effects wrought on women by the ideology of all-encompassing motherhood. Women who embrace this ideology and practice it, according to Christian's argument, first and foremost deny their own cherished life, as we see Nnu Ego in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*<sup>25</sup> sacrificing her very being to ensure the well-being of her children. The second effect of embracing all-encompassing motherhood, according to Christian's argument, is that such mothers cannot contribute their quota towards struggles for freedom because they do not value their own lives.

---

<sup>25</sup> Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood*. London, Heinemann, 1979.

It is in Barbara Katz Rothman's essay, *Beyond Mothers and Fathers: Ideology in a Patriarchal Society*, that an attempt is made to expose the source of this ideology which prescribes all-encompassing motherhood.

According to Rothman, ideologies of mothering exist not in isolation but are fused with other complex ideologies that enhance male dominance (patriarchy), the economic system of exploitation (capitalism), and the privileging of mind over body (technology). Obviously, such ideology calls for some disinfecting since it portrays women as conditioned to take full responsibility of children, thereby excusing men and the society from responsibility or blame.

In Africa, the concept of motherhood is of central importance to the philosophies of African peoples. Critic Andrea Brenton Rushing (1979:19) reminds us of this Yoruba proverb "Mother is gold" and argues that "portraits of black women in African poetry seem to radiate from that hub."

Mercy Amba Oduyoye<sup>26</sup> tells us that the one most important factor governing and ensuring the survival of marriages is procreation. Oduyoye (2004:141) shares a personal experience she encountered at a naming ceremony thus: "I once heard a new father wax eloquent on how lucky his wife was: 'it is only a foolish woman who stays in a childless marriage'." Oduyoye alludes to Kofi Antobam's assertion in his book entitled *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*, that "the ability to produce a child is a necessary factor for the continuance of marriage" (Antobam, 1963:23). Oduyoye's reaction both to her personal experience and Antobam's assertion is that; "there is the tendency to turn a blind eye to infidelity, especially by matrikin, if the goal is procreation" (2004:141).

---

<sup>26</sup> A Ghanaian lecturer of Theology at Princeton University.

Motherhood, according to Oduyoye, “is a highly valued role open only to women but desired by both men and women as well as society as a whole; it’s a channel by which men reproduce themselves and continue the family name and it is the channel by which women actualize their psycho-religious need to be the source of life.” In a chapter in *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, entitled, “The Language of Proverbs”, Oduyoye questions the validity of certain proverbs that do not serve to enrich the circumstances of women. Two of such proverbs are cited:

The cock does not know how to look after chicks but only knows how to feed itself.

When you catch the mother hen, the chicks become easy prey. (2004:30)

According to Oduyoye, Akan societies view women in the same way as other female animals: fulfilling biological roles as mothers, caring for their children, feeding, training and disciplining, but never destroying. In Akan daily conversation, “woman” and “mother” are almost synonymous; as in nature, the obvious primary role of the female is parturition and nurturing the species. The aura of life and “livingness” that surrounds the woman is assumed to be faithfully motherly (Oduyoye, 2004:59-60). The language used in this extract reveals that it is rather careless to assume that all mothers automatically care for their children.

Outside this sphere of biological functioning, the character of women is painted in colours that suggest an image of disharmony and sinister motivations. A woman who chooses to step out of line by refusing to marry, or if married and not bearing children, suffers continually on all fronts. It seems that society confines a woman to a specific place. If this is so, a woman is not even equal to a mother hen; instead, she becomes a breed hen for a poultry farmer (Oduyoye, 2004:60). Oduyoye’s argument here exposes the male-bias in most African societies. She sees a

conscious effort on the part of men at evading responsibility, especially where childbearing and childcare are concerned; and according to Oduyoye, this bias is buttressed by proverbs, the likes of those two cited earlier.

The second harm that proverbs such as these wreak on motherhood is that these proverbs limit mothers' participation in matters that fall outside the boundaries of the home. Since society has conditioned a woman only to procreate and nourish, mothers are burdened to fulfill this societal expectation even when there is the genuine desire to carve out other images for herself outside the mother image. This stratification of motherhood is validated in most of the novels of the early luminaries of African literature whose narratives portray challenges or difficulties.

Sarpong (1974:69) opines that in Africa and especially in Ghana, "Motherhood is the principle if not the ultimate end of marriage." Critic John Gills (1996:20) captures the essence of childbirth for the African woman thus: "giving birth ceased to be something that happens to a woman and became the ultimate source of adult female identity." Gills' assertion here corroborates Sarpong's view that "the contempt" in which a childless woman (whether married or not) is held in Africa explains the importance attached to motherhood.

The mother-figure in African communities is greatly respected because the African mother is seen as a spiritual anchor. John Mbiti (1969:896), an African anthropologist, tells that an African's spiritual existence is nullified when there are no descendants. This is because in Africa a person's immortality depends on his progeny and his descendant who remembers him.



In an article entitled “Images of African Women on Stamps” authored by Agbenyega Adedze<sup>27</sup>, the images of the African woman on stamps is criticized. According to Adedze;

From the colonial era to the post-independence period, portrayal of African women on stamps has not changed from ‘fixed patterns of stereotypical representations characterized as sexual objects, field hands, porters, mothers, cooks and traders . . . Even where, during the colonial period, they did present a different perspective of the African woman on stamps, she ended up as a victim needing to be saved by the patronizing European Colonialist. These stamps invariably depict the African woman in her helplessness with a sick baby being attended to by a European nurse. This depiction again reinforces the African women’s portrayal as resigned to the status of caregivers with insufficient knowledge or complete lack of health care.<sup>28</sup>

Adedze’s statement reveals that for the most part, the African woman has been circumscribed only by her positions as mother and wife. Indeed, all the nine portraits of the African woman on the showcase stamps in Adedze’s article depict with near-laser intensity the breasts of these women, highlighting that the primacy of motherhood for the African woman is a value cherished in African societies. Barbara Christian’s view is relevant here. The high regard for mothers in African society has both positive and negative effects for women, circumscribing them even as it honours them.

Cheikh Anta Diop (1987:33), a renowned Senegalese anthropologist/egyptologist, has observed that “Thanks to the matriarchal system, our ancestors, and prior to any foreign influence, had given women a choice place. They saw her not as a sex object but as a mother.” The obvious question which comes to mind is this: is motherhood the only choice place for women? To this question, Kolawole would reply “One needs to see African woman’s experience objectively and not

emphasize one role at the expense of others. The place of women in matriarchal African societies

---

<sup>27</sup> An Associate Professor of African History at Illinois State University

<sup>28</sup> “African Agenda”, Issue vol. 9. No. 4. 2006. Ed. Yao Graham, Cornelius Adedze et al. Africa: Third World Network. [www.twnafrica.org](http://www.twnafrica.org)



transcended the mother image, as we see formidable roles of women in public spheres as well”(1997:51). Kolawole’s reply to Cheikh Anta Diop is validated by examples of such women as Amina of Zazau and Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana who, apart from being mothers themselves, led bands of men to revolt against oppressive rule.

In Africa, proverbs are central when it comes to the inculcation of values, and several African proverbs do portray positive images of women. Kolawole (1997:62) has observed that: “Matricentric proverbs usually exalt the women’s role, as mother, both literally and symbolically, especially along the coast of West Africa.” Kolawole reiterates this point that African proverbs depict mothers as symbols of honour by illustrating various proverbs that reflect the value Africans place on mothers and motherhood. She says:

Among the Yorubas, the mother is an artifact of respect, almost to be worshipped: ‘*Iya ni wura*’ – mother is gold . . . Among the Akan people in Ghana, the concept of good woman, ‘*Obeapa*’ is an important philosophy. Positive concepts and proverbs include:

*Enapa ye* – A mother is precious

*Onyame Baatanpa* – A mother is god/divine

*Asaase Yaa* – Mother Earth. (p.87)

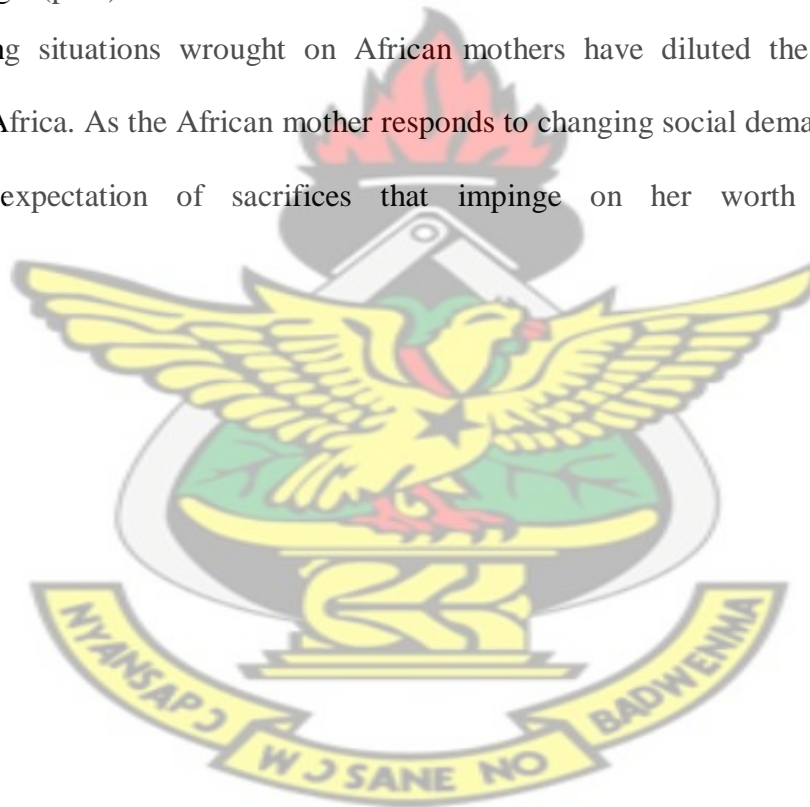
In Zimbabwe, the centrality of women as mothers is heightened through the proverb, ‘*Musha Mukadzi*’ which translates as “Behind the successful family there is a woman.” Kolawole’s illustrative examples above also agree with the Ghanaian practice of referring to a benevolent man as *Obaatanpa*. Here the self-sacrificing attribute of women is superimposed on that man who showed generosity towards the needy.

Though in Africa the mother figure is greatly respected, patriarchy, poverty, irresponsible fathers and loss of opportunities for women due to lack of education, have made of motherhood an

increasingly challenging notion of responsibility. Kolawole foregrounds the situations that marginalize mothers and make mothering a challenging engagement. She says:

Many women are still contending with a situation in which many place a high premium on boys' education and when the resource cannot stretch to all the children, the girls are denied education. In many rural places, the ratio of literate adult females to males is 1:5. Elsewhere, poverty levels have increased due to internal economic monitoring and the responsibility to feed the family rests heavily on women as families are dislocated. Many employment sectors still discriminate against women. But these are often highlighted without documenting attendant efforts to resist the feminization of poverty. One needs to avoid over-romanticization of African women's power that can jeopardize true self-knowledge. (p.52)

Such challenging situations wrought on African mothers have diluted the honour accorded motherhood in Africa. As the African mother responds to changing social demands, she calls into question this expectation of sacrifices that impinge on her worth and fulfillment.



## 1.2. SELECTED THEORIES ON THE CHALLENGES OF MOTHERHOOD

The parent-adult child relationship has been described as one of complexity (Sprenkle, 2005:211-230), intergenerational ambivalence (Luescher and Pillemer, 1998:413-425) and worry (Hay et al., 2007:605-622). These descriptions are sourced from the various relationship norms that guide the parent-adult child bond. These norms invariably affect how parents and their adult children understand one another, communicate with one another and negotiate their relationship. (Bojczyk et al. 2011:452) In recent times, mother-daughter relationship has emerged as an important area of study due to changes that border on demography, history, sociology etc. Mothers and daughters may bring different perceptions to their relationships by virtue of their role status especially where past roles seem to have far reaching implications on present roles. Economic challenges, the exigencies of patriarchal unfairness on mothers and the diminishing dependency on mothers as daughters grow into adulthood, might create tensions between mothers and their daughters. The resulting challenges created by the above mentioned situations influence albeit negatively mother-daughter relationships. This view is clearly enunciated by the outcomes of various researches on mother-daughter relationship. These researches suggest that as children mature to adulthood and their mothers become older, their relationship becomes the object of reflection and meaning making both for mothers and daughters. (Brentherton and Munholland, 1999:89-111; Henwood, 1997:255-263)

Lewis (1997) views constructions of the past, rather than the past itself as the catalyst that influences the future. According to Lewis' view, mothers and their daughters may draw their present relationship from their assessment about the past and present. Lewis' view is consistent with the cause of all mother-daughter conflicts in Amma Darko's novels under study here. In

each of these novels, the reflection of past and present influence the future of the mother-daughter relationship. This is especially seen in cases where adult daughters evaluate their childhood experiences and come to an understanding of how these experiences have fuelled the mother-daughter conflicts.

The function of the woman/mother in a patriarchal society is that of the woman as an anti-man.

In *Issues in Feminism*, Shiela Ruth (1995) asserts that:

Women serve this important function in patriarchy. As the negative of man, his complement, she is the receptacle of the traits he cannot accept in himself, he cannot, as a human being, live without. The image woman contains that element of humanity ripped from Man—an element she keeps for him, still in the world, available when and where needed, but sufficiently distant to avoid interfering with business . . . The outcome of this arrangement for man is ambivalence. He is both drawn to and repelled by patriarchal woman. Although she represents love, tenderness, compassion, nurture, passion, beauty, and pleasure, she is also, fashioned by him, the composite of all the reasons why these traits are banned for men: she is weak, emotional, dependent, imprudent, incompetent, timid, and undependable . . . Adored and reviled, worshipped and enslaved, the image of the woman as well as her “place” in patriarchy is the natural outcome of masculinist values needs. More than a convenience (which it is), the subordination of women is a necessity in patriarchy. Economically, politically, biologically and psychologically, it is the foundation on which the entire structure rests. (p.62)

The above expostulation by Sheila Ruth absolves God from patriarchal blame since Ruth in her argument claims that “patriarchy is the natural outcome of masculinist values and needs.” This implies that once it originates from man, man (here woman included) can pull it down. However, the likelihood that men will not pull it down is because patriarchy serves their interest well. Men practising patriarchy can elect to be irresponsible and renege on their duties towards the upbringing of children. In such situations, the mother is doubly burdened as she is expected to care single-handedly for the children while the man walks free. However, for the purpose of this study, Ruth’s position reveals that in any society where patriarchy is upheld, the attainment



of perfect motherhood will only be an illusion since patriarchy operates not only in conjugal relationships but in the economic, political, biological and psychological spheres.

To buttress her belief that patriarchy is a system designed from time immemorial by men to rid women of self-worth, Sheila Ruth quotes sayings by great men that castigate women as inferior beings of whom nothing good must be expected. Since the ambition of this thesis is to expose the causes of the trials of motherhood and disturbances in mother-daughter bonds, it might be expedient to refer to all these quotes as a means of validating the authors' view that the myth of female inferiority in itself constitutes one if not the major cause of the trials of motherhood; for, if mothers and daughters are females and are considered inferior and evil, then patriarchy in itself acts as a major cause of the trials of motherhood because all efforts to create self-worth come to naught in situations where women are considered destructive. Sheila Ruth writes:

That women are morally inferior to the point of being positively evil as a well-known theme that comes down to us today from antiquity. Woman is a pitfall—a pitfall, a hole, a ditch. Woman is a sharp iron dagger that cuts a man's throat.

**Mesopotamian poem**

Man who trusts womankind trusts deceivers

**Hesiod**

The beauty of woman is the greatest snare.

**St. John Chrysostom**

You are the evil's gateway . . . the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert – that is, death – even the Son of God had to die.

**Tertullian**

I have not left any calamity more detrimental to mankind than woman.

**Islamic saying**

Art thou not formed of foul slime? Art thou not full of uncleanness?

**Rule for Anchoresses**

God made Adam master over all creatures to rule over all living things, but when Eve persuaded him that he was Lord Even over God, she spoiled everything . . . With tricks and cunning women deceive men.

**Sigmund Freud**



He however has a question for all these men who castigate women: The question to all these men who assume to have succinctly exposed the evils inherent in women is . . . who mothered you?

In Africa as in other continents, motherhood has always been presented as a cherished institution. However in recent times, there have been rumblings as African women writers today call for a radical change in the presentation of ideal motherhood. Monica Bungaro has opined that recent writing by African women is replete with a two dimensional portrayal of motherhood—the one dimension that is traceable to the early portrayal of mothers as keepers of life and the other dimension which portrays mothers as destroyers of life. She contends: “the questioning of norms of femininity and maternity are at the centre of African women’s agenda. Women writers today are putting their cards on the table as they are reconceptualising motherhood, pointing out its regenerative and destructive potential, not just for the mother, but also, for the daughter” (2006:69).

Bungaro’s contention here reveals a conscious effort in shifting the paradigm from that which upholds the idealization of motherhood in Africa to that which exposes the inherent struggles of mothers in Africa. Bungaro continues:

Stereotypical images of the mother (and grandmother) figure as carrier of life and eternal nurturer are subverted, and cultural practices are often viewed as abusive. By challenging constructions of motherhood and daughterhood, new areas of generational conflict have opened up in modern society. (p.69)

Elizabeth Debold and colleagues (1993:5) share their thoughts on the challenges of motherhood especially when it has to do with mothering females. They assert: “Suddenly, through birthing a daughter, a woman finds herself face to face not only with an infant, a little girl, a woman-to-be, but also with her own unresolved conflicts from the past and her hopes and dreams for the future.” It is the constituent of these unresolved conflicts, as Debold et al. put it that builds up as

trials for mothers and create conflicts in mother-daughter bonds. Debold and her colleagues, attempt to trace the source of the conflicts that bedevil mother-daughter bonds. They opine:

Because motherhood is such a consuming responsibility, women can find themselves overwhelmed by caring for daughters that they lose sight of them as young people in their own right. In fact it can seem that learning from daughters and exercising authority in mother-daughter relationship are somehow at odds. Mothers are supposed to have all the answers to keep our daughters safe and happy . . . We often forget that our daughters know us perhaps better than we know ourselves. While their knowledge is often articulate, they know where we have stopped short, where we feel bad about ourselves, and where we have disconnected from ourselves, our voices, our desires and dreams. These opinions are backed by evidence from research carried out by Debold; . . . In often uncanny ways, daughters carry their mother's unresolved conflicts with them. At least a half dozen of the women we have spoken to have told us how, in their early twenties, they accidentally put pregnancy outside of marriage, and were consumed with pain and guilt. Later they found out that one of the biggest secrets of their mothers' lives had to do with a child either aborted or born outside of marriage. Perhaps girls are so uncanny because they sense that in these places where their mothers have silenced themselves, they will have the freedom to explore and to figure out something for themselves . . . The things that make women crazy are girls' actions that evoke women's fears, anger, betrayal, or grief. These are usually the places where women have suffered loss and disconnection. (pp.100-101)

Poverty and the need to apply one's self to survival strategies have also caused disturbances in the mother-daughter bonds. In Africa, women are increasingly forced to take on economic responsibilities due to irresponsible behaviour from husbands or fathers of their children or loose kinship ties.

As White and co-authors argue:

On the one hand, many women find themselves forced to take on economic responsibilities alone that would be more easily met with husbands or stronger kinship ties. At the same time, some of these women have been forced to turn to lovers for economic support, even though there exists few culturally sanctioned, organized roles for these lovers to play in supporting women and children. In towns, isolation from family and kinship ties often deprives women of the lineage support that would have existed in the past. Thus, for example, women find it

more difficult to share childcare responsibilities with family members and co-wives. On the other hand, many women clearly choose the independence that comes with flexible heterosexual bonds and loosening kinship ties. Many of the responsibilities in decision making now accrue to women and are welcomed even if these new responsibilities signify increased economic burdens. Much of the contemporary literature and popular wisdom on African women has revealed a discomfort with the loosening of conjugal and kinship bonds. (1999:121)

White's two-pronged analysis here reveals that irresponsible parenting on the part of husbands or men who father children, and migration with its negative effects on kinship ties, result in the woman having to shoulder the economic burdens of the family. This obsession to single-handedly struggle out there and provide for the needs and sensibilities of her children can in itself constitute trials for the mother.

White also identifies the escalating instances of divorce in West and West-Central Africa as a source of the cause of disturbances in mother-daughter bonds. She says:

Moreover, divorce seems to be fairly common throughout West and West-Central Africa. Relationships formed with men after a divorce often represent a break with customary or western-style marriage. Instead—divorce women may or maynot choose what the Asante call a lover, marriage; they enter long-term relationships with men without the formality of a marriage ceremony.

Not all women choose to form such relationships as the evidence of a growing number of households headed by women would suggest. The disappearance of marriage ceremonies, however, has resulted from declining control of parents over their daughters in the face of labour migration and increased school attendance.

White's observation reveals also that labour migration and increased school attendance are the cause of decline in control that parents have over their daughters. It becomes very difficult for mothers to control their daughters under such circumstance.

Perhaps the greatest cause of the trials of motherhood and disturbances in mother-daughter bonds is patriarchy. Rosemary Agonita explains that it is in marriage that patriarchy operates. She asserts: “By nature, dominion is maternal for two reasons—the identity of a child’s mother alone is certain, and power over a child is initially in the hands of the mother who nourishes and trains it . . . Marriage is the contract which brings about patriarchy” (1997:97). Agonita’s assertion is significant in that it lays the blame of a mother’s loss of control over her child on patriarchy. This means that but for marriage, a mother would have remained powerful since the child’s nourishment and training is her sole preserve. What then is patriarchy? Oduyoye (2004:48) has succinctly defined patriarchy: “Patriarchy exists wherever one finds systemic and normative inequalities and subordination.”

Oduyoye’s definition of patriarchy portends that it is in marriage that patriarchy works to rob the woman of her self-worth. Patriarchy cheats women and reduces them to second-fiddle status. It is a system which seeks, above all, the welfare of the man even when these exigencies demand the oppression of women. *The Encarta Dictionary’s* definition of patriarchy as a system that unfairly elevates men above women is significant here as it reflects Oduyoye’s claim that patriarchy breeds inequality and subordination. What is frightening about patriarchy as Oduyoye defines it, is that it is systemic, namely that it is a practice rooted in a particular community or society and made to flourish by individuals in that community. In such a situation, the woman who bears the brunt of this practice is not expected to complain as suggested by the Akan proverb: *Afisem nye ntomago na yasi ahata abonten*, to wit, “domestic affairs are not rags to be washed and hung outside.” In such an instance the prescribed rule is for the woman to allow herself to be subdued and suffer in silence. Oduyoye illustrates the plight of the Akan woman in marriage:



Marriage simply transfers the Akan woman from one suzerain (her maternal uncle) to another (her husband) in order that she might serve the interests of both kin groups: she provides children to the one (her matrilineal family) and physical service to the other. Whereas marriage confers full responsibility and a measure of autonomy on a man as a member of the community, the woman remains a “subject”. (2004:135)

While in most African societies a woman is required to marry and, more importantly, to procreate to perpetuate the family name of the lineage, this very demand also belittles her and makes her a “subject”. Whereas childbearing continues to be the sole focus of marriage, the woman or the mother cannot escape the marginalization and subjugation brought to bear on her by the dictates of patriarchy. It becomes evident then that a mother in a patriarchal society is under a double-yoke—she loses her worth in her husband’s opinion and in her daughter’s opinion as well. The trials of motherhood and conflictual rapport in mother-daughter bonds are traceable largely to patriarchy. A daughter who opines that her mother has wittingly allowed herself to be subjugated by patriarchy will have to confront the same walls of patriarchy if she wants to experience a sense of freedom that comes with rubbishing patriarchy.

Patriarchy as a practice can affect mothers of all social climes—the rural, the urban, and the elite woman all have to contend with patriarchy. There is this obsession in patriarchal culture to set up images of the ideal woman which only a few can emulate. The failure of most women to mirror the ideal woman’s image brings about the feeling of disappointment which trickles down to her daughter who would not take time to understand that the framework of patriarchy is constructed on many pillars which require scrutiny in order to bring on the necessary insight and strength to tear those pillars down.

Patriarchy demeans women and their endeavour to carve out dignifying images for themselves. Modernization, urbanization, immigration and globalization have combined to break the threads



of tradition resulting not only in the loss of native identities but perhaps, more importantly, the loss of morals which requires from the youth appropriate behavioral standards. In an Introductory Essay to *Sex and Gender in an Era of AIDS: Ghana at The Turn of The Millennium*, Christine Oppong posits that:

. . . traditional customs shaping sexual behaviour, in particular, those beliefs, sanctions and rules compelling sexual restraint and supporting abstention are breaking down and new contraceptive practices are being tried and advocated. The result has been that sexual behaviour is becoming more a matter of individual opportunity and choice for some; possibly involving partner discussion and sometimes including bargaining while for many it is being subtly and brazenly influenced by unequal power relations and resources between women and men. (2006:1)

From this excerpt of Oppong's Introductory Essay can be gleaned the regret in the breakdown of traditional authority which supervised correct behaviour. Indeed, the breakdown of rules such as those which compel sexual restraint or support abstinence has, in most cases, resulted in some mothers seeking their sexual interests above the welfare of their children, and children entering into sexual negotiations with adults as a means to have access to the money needed to cater for their needs since their mothers are not in the position to provide them with these essentials.

Challenging economic situations have adversely impacted on women. Still taking a cue from Oppong's Introductory Essay, she opines that harsh economic realities have forced people to migrate in search of often elusive and mainly insecure and poorly-paid employment. Interestingly, Oppong argues that the upsurge of irresponsible lifestyles is a result of this situation:

The relationships and pathways of influence of labour migration on gender roles include effects upon age and sex composition of populations and the erosion of kin and community sanctions on familial and sexual behaviour. Both of these

types of changes bring people together in new contexts in which both innovation and deviance are possible and observed.

Evidence from studies on sexual behaviour and networking, suggest that the relationship between increased human mobility, urbanization and sexual behaviour are multiple. (2006:16)

There are implications of the escalating rates of migration and the subsequent dilution of traditional supervision on morals. In the wake of this break-down in the traditional supervision of morals, we witness a loosening of kinship ties and an army of mothers burdened with childcare since there are no immediate/available kinsmen to turn to for support.

Migration and breakdown of traditional institutions which supervise corrective behaviour are seen as fuelling and facilitating the trials of motherhood and also creating gaps in mother-daughter bonds. The trials of motherhood are made even more pronounced in situations where there is a paradigmatic shift in the enforcement of morality and behaviour. The more society compromises on acceptable sexual standards, the more accommodating, if not lax, sexual behaviour permeates our societies. In such situations, sex becomes merchandized, bereft of any moral and/or spiritual significance. Promiscuous youth, greedy for pleasure and money, befriend adult men who may be husbands/fathers of faithful wives/mothers and visit untold hardships and pain on such mothers. The inference is made once again that the break-up of traditional supervision on behavioral patterns pertaining to sex and the concomitant popularity of transactional sex constitute a major component in the trials of motherhood. In some cases, mothers are forced by challenging situations to enter into sexual bargain with men in order to cater for the needs of their children. Such mothers ultimately find it difficult to propose acceptable behavioral patterns to their children. For such mothers, the dilemma they face may be

one of choosing between economic survival and acceptable behavioral standards—a Hobson’s choice<sup>29</sup>, indeed!

The rising numbers of women who are single mothers due to divorce and unfaithful husbands indicate increasing female autonomy which translates into mothers alone taking full responsibility for children. According to a research by Lloyd et al. on households headed by women, nearly one in three households was female-headed. Analyzing the implications of this escalating phenomenon on such women, Lloyd et al. conclude that the increase in the proportions of Ghanaian women ‘heading’ households implied “their increasing primary economic responsibility and their growing vulnerability” (in Oppong, 2006:13).

Another cause of the trials of motherhood can be gleaned from the following situation. The single mother in such a situation who struggles to feed herself and her children will also have to battle with a feeling of inadequacy since it is difficult to provide for all the needs of her children. Whereas the physical needs can be met in most cases, the emotional needs are not met. In such instances, children dare their mothers and look elsewhere for emotional balance; and in the case of daughters, it is usually to boys and men they turn to for balance—a situation which in itself creates tensions between mothers and daughters.

Superstitious beliefs in most Ghanaian societies pinpoint old women as witches. This also is one of the causative elements of trials for mothers. Mercy Amba Oduyoye argues that:

Many African folktales describe old women as demons. Often they have the power of metamorphosis to alternate between human and non-human forms. Women, especially when they are old, constitute a mysterious—if not sinister—

---

<sup>29</sup> After Thomas Hobson (1544-1561) of Cambridge, England, who rented horses and gave his customer only one choice – that of the horse nearest the stable door.

phenomenon. However, since respect for old age prevents openly ridiculing or admonishing them in real life . . . Folktales are used to play openly with this repressed assessment . . . Few men, according to the Akan, practise witchcraft. (2004:41)

Oduyoye's argument is corroborated by Susan Drucker-Brown in her article entitled "Mamprusi Witchcraft, Subversion and Changing Gender Relations". Drucker Brown argues that in Mamprusi (a traditional kingdom in north-eastern Ghana), "women are accused of witchcraft because of their aggressive natures and because their influential men depend on female hierarchy and also because of the increasing autonomy of women in the sexual division of labour and loss of control by Mamprusi men of the local economy" (in Oppong, 2006:234). From Drucker-Brown's argument, it is clear that whereas Oduyoye leans on superstitious beliefs and folktale imaging of old women as witches to explain the reason behind the labeling of Akan old women as witches, Drucker-Brown holds a rather different view as she asserts in the opening lines of her conclusion that "Mamprusi witchcraft accusations appear to be significant attempts to control the behaviour of women" (in Oppong, 2006:250). Drucker-Brown argues further that condemning women to suffer due to witchcraft is in line with the patriarchal character of Mamprusi men. In an introductory review of Drucker-Brown's article entitled, "Mamprusi Witchcraft, Supervision and Changing Gender Relations", Christine Oppong argues that in Mamprusi, economically empowered women are castigated as witches by men:

Women are traditionally expected to be submissive and subservient to men and to senior women, but because of economic pressures, they farm, travel and trade in order to provide for their families. She sees their growing autonomy, paralleled by increasing male frustrations and fear of witchcraft, as an indicator of the importance of the normally hidden female hierarchy. Belief in the increased frequency and virulence of witchcraft, as well as new ways of dealing with witches, are viewed not so much as mirroring a change in the nature of female power as a loss of control by Mamprusi men over their own economic and political environment. Men now need women's economic support. Women have



the chance to be increasingly autonomous yet ideally, traditionally should be controlled by men. (2006:29)

It is to patriarchy that Drucker-Brown turns for explanation for the escalating number of women labeled as witches in Mamprusi.

Perhaps Drucker-Brown's analysis above helps to explain why in most African societies, the witch is an old woman. Is it also not because the old woman, (a mother and grandmother) considered the repository of wisdom to whom men are supposed to turn for advice in dicey situations, must be made to feel unimportant after all, hence her being labeled a witch? The labeling of women, especially mothers and grandmothers as witches, constitutes a huge trial for motherhood. The mother/grandmother who is accused as a witch automatically loses control over her children. She is considered a *persona non-grata* and so is either chased out of the home or ignored by the very children she had suffered to nurture. The causes of the trials of motherhood as enumerated and explained clearly explain why in all four of Amma Darko's novels, the trials of motherhood are illustrated. Indeed all the issues explored have found space in all of Amma Darko's works under study.

Psychotherapist, Paula Caplan, in her book entitled, *Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship* advises her female clients and students to interview their mothers and learn about their mothers' background since such information will yield some understanding as to why mothers fail to mother effectively. To Caplan, the cause of the guilt, anger and fear that have gripped mother-daughter relationship can be sourced from what she terms the culture of 'mother blaming'—a culture which is traceable to patriarchy. She asserts: "I have found that nearly all women are filled with a mixture of anger, guilt, fear and uncertainty about many aspects of their relationships with their mothers and/or daughters." Caplan's assertion is

referenced by Debold et al. in her book entitled, *Mother-Daughter Revolution: From Betrayal to Power* (1993:5). Debold and her colleagues (1993:103) contend that “The double binds in which mothers find themselves in patriarchal culture are as hurtful as the binds that cut into girls at early adolescence. By escaping those binds, adult daughters build new relationships with their own mothers.” Debold and her colleagues are thus blaming patriarchy as the reason why daughters blame their mothers for not mothering well. Thus the constricting nature of patriarchal culture impinges on mothers’ ability to mentor daughters and would-be mothers. No wonder Debold and her co-writers call on adult daughters to escape from those binds imposed on motherhood by patriarchal culture in order to build healthier relationships.

Adrienne Riche contributes to the ongoing discussions on the constricting nature of patriarchy on mothers. Riche explores the variety of ways in which mothers have been betrayed by patriarchy’s institution of motherhood with its rippling effect as mothers betray their own daughters. She argues:

But if a mother had deserted us, by dying, or putting us up for adoption, or because life had driven her into alcohol or drugs, chronic depression or madness, if she had been forced to leave us with indifferent, uncaring strangers in order to earn, our good mother, . . . worrying, puritanical keeper of our virginity; or if she simply left us because she needed to live without a child—whatever our rational forgiveness, whatever the individual mother’s love and strength, the child in us, the small female who grew up in a male-controlled world, still feels, at moments, wildly unmothered. (1976:95)

Riche’s argument thus lays mother-blaming on patriarchal culture. Debold and co-authors contend that “These feelings of being “wildly unmothered” are a legacy of patriarchy and the psychological hook that pulls girls and women into the culture of romance”.

This literature review signifies that motherhood and the trials confronting this institution is not only real but also deserves critical attention. Amma Darko's novels under study clearly reveal that literature can be a reflection of reality—"All is true" says Balzac about the novel—in the sense that, all the theories analyzed in the literature review find representation in all four of Darko's novels under study. Amma Darko accordingly rises up to the fictionalization of reality as proven by the theories analyzed in the literature review and the trials of motherhood as portrayed in the four novels.



### 1.3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In analyzing the trials of motherhood in Amma Darko's novels we are interested in the shift of emphasis from feminism to womanism. Appropriately we need to trace the beginnings of feminism and various shades of feminism. Feminism emerged as a result of the gendered division of power which severely restricted women's participation in world politics. There was the need to disrupt feminine stereotypes which were usually linked to women's biological roles such as giving birth, nurturing, homemaking etc. It was the need to change the status quo that influenced women to advocate for change.

Feminists do not agree among themselves on an all-inclusive and universally accepted definition, perhaps this is due to the rather sensitive nature of the topic. Generally, however, feminism may be defined as a collective term of systems of beliefs and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. The term feminism tends to be used for women's right movements which began in the late eighteenth century and continues to advocate for complete political, social and economic equality between men and women.

There are diverse shades of feminisms; our focus however is to give a brief survey of the major varieties of feminism based mainly the characterizations. V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan have asserted in their book entitled, *Global Gender Issues* that;

Throughout history, women—individually, collectively and sometimes with men—have struggle against direct and indirect barriers to their self-development and their full social, political and economic participation. In a modern era, they have often done so through organizing women's movements that have addressed many issues and, thus taken many forms. (1993:116)



Perterson and Runyan's assertion above proves that from time immemorial women have struggled for recognition, equality and acceptance. It is no doubt that an adherence to a system where women's interests were subordinated to the interests of men gave rise to women struggling to change that system.

Feminism as a term came into English usage around the 1890s. However, women's struggle for recognition and equality goes further back. Indeed, the rise of feminism is traceable to women's opposing reaction to the essentialist ideology which among other things popularized the distinctions between the sexes. In their (Essentialists) categorization, men were seen as possessing abilities to think logically, abstractly and analytically, whereas women were viewed as emotional, compassionate and ever faithful when it comes to nurturing.

For centuries certain essentialist ideas and myths had influenced western thought. Indeed some luminaries of literature had early on contributed to the ongoing discourse. Their myths and biases constitute an inimical back lash to the lived realities of women. A few would be cited. Virgil (70-19 BC) is quoted as saying that "woman is fickle and always changing." The great Roman writer, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) is credited with the words; "Woman an imperfect man." William Shakespeare (1564-1616) in his play, Hamlet exclaims; "Frailty, Thy name is woman!"

All these pronouncements coupled with unfairness and equality against women sparked anger in many women especially in Europe and the Americas. In a chapter she contributed in the book Women's voices, Feminist visions; Sheila Ruth proposes an easier way of tracing feminist activism. She contends:

A way of looking at women's movement more accurately is simply that of women moving toward greater strength and freedom both in their awareness and in their

socio-political position. This has been happening through the centuries, often for individuals sometimes collectively. It has progressed and it has receded; it has sometimes been subterranean, and it crests into waves of activism. It has expressed itself in many ways in poetry, in marches on courthouses, or in the quiet but sturdy resistance of women in their households. It has been expressed in various contexts—political, economic, psychological, or even physical—and it is not easily confined to one model. From this perspective, no discernible “beginning” to the women’s movement exists . . . (2001:25)

Ruth’s suggestive approach cited above is very revealing in that it attests first to the universality of women’s issues. Secondly, it proves right the claims by many a feminist that feminist issues, values, goals and challenges have been characterized by a continuous struggle aimed at challenging the status quo. Thirdly, this approach affords us a context within which we can evaluate challenges to feminist goals and challenges to the very legitimacy of feminism as a world movement.

In its entirety, Ruth’s approach authenticates the fact that each wave of activism (which characterized the feminist’s movement) is an integral part of a progressive development (p.25).

The earliest feminist activity happened between 1550-1700. During this period women in Europe and the Americas had no formal rights and were also not represented in the law. The rule of the father undermined the voice of the woman and the woman’s body was her husband’s property who also had legal rights as the guardian of the children.

Cathia Jenainati and Judy Groves in their book entitled Introducing Feminism, trace the early feminist activity to 1558. According to Jenainati and Groves the early feminist activities were aimed at challenging the prevailing view that women are weak and irrational creatures who should be controlled by men. The efforts of these early feminists were given a boost also by Queen Elizabeth I’s ascension to the throne in 1558. Her long and successful reign as a single

female raised questions about the supremacy of male rule and the subsequent demonstration that it was after all possible to challenge patriarchal rule.

In 1642, impoverished working women in England collectively rebelled as they marched into London to petition the House of Lords and Commons to enact laws that will bring recognition to women whilst improving their conditions.

In 1652, the Society of Friends was founded by the Quakers. They had as their binding principle the disarmament of any form of hierarchy between people. This principle held so much appeal to women that in the 19 century about 40 percent of female abolitionist, 19 percent of feminists born before 1830, and 15 percent of suffragists born before 1830 were Quaker women.

The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed the legacy of the age of Enlightenment. It was at this time that the writings of some notable female figures openly popularized the use of reason and made it stand at opposite ends with faith. Women were encouraged to use reasoning to discover the truth about their existence. Individual thinking was privileged over unquestioned adherence to traditional stipulations. This led to the Enlightenment's practice of Free Enquiry.

The Enlightenment's emphasis on the rational informed the impulse towards social planning. Frances Wright (1795-1852) attempted to use the social planning model to set up an experimental community called Nashoba which is dedicated to ensuring the emancipation of slaves. At this time schooling for women was privileged over church going. However, Wright's ambitious experiment failed because of the selective nature of their membership. Their membership belonged to the working class. The ideas of Enlightenment however translated into the rise of individualism.

By the 1920's Britain and U.S. witnessed a rise in the members of individualist feminists due mainly to activities of educated and financially independent single women who argued strongly for a non-fairly-based existence. At this same time, married women's participation in the labour force took on a political nature as did the fall in birth rates. The individualist perspective held the view that the individual is the basic unit of society and that gender should not be used to define our social roles.

The second half of the 19th century witnessed the organization of feminist activity in Britain and the USA. This organized movement was influenced by the various independent and sporadic activities of the 18th century feminists. It is this first attempt at feminist organization which is recorded in history as First Wave Feminism. The First Wave Feminism which evolved in Britain and the USA in the second half of the nineteenth century (1860-1920) has been defined as the first organized feminist movement with definite and specific aims. The major characteristic feature of this movement was the advocacy for political and legal equality. The focus was also channeled towards the realization of aims such as female suffrage and women's access to educational and employment opportunities. The movement also campaigned against double standards or an equal attitude to female and male sexual behaviour.

American First Wave Feminism comprises a wide range of women. They were sub-groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union headed by Frances Willard, National Women's Party, and National League of Women Voters among others. There was the general contention that women are considered second class citizens; and that necessitated the fight for representation in the legislature and public governmental bodies.



Primarily these feminists (First Wave Feminism) were concerned with exposing the injustices they had experienced on a personal basis. They did not label themselves as feminist (a term coined in 1895). Key among their achievements were: the opening of higher education to women and the enactment of the Married Women's Property Act, 1870. Some of the female luminaries of this period warned against the dangers in perpetuating social and legal discrimination against women. The works of a selected few will be looked at. Abigail Adams (1744-1818) was the wife of John Adams, the second president of USA. A very influential woman, Abigail Adams urged her husband to "remember to think about the ladies" while drafting the Declaration of Independence.

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published her book entitled, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. In this book, Wollstonecraft condemned the unfair use of masculine power and equated this unfairness with political tyranny. She advocated that women be allowed to participate in the rights and duties of citizenship and be given equal opportunities in education.

Angelina Grimke (1805-1879) and her sister Sarah Grimke (1792-1873) urged women to make their voices heard through their writing. They encouraged women to take up the task of writing petitions to congress. The Grimke sisters made a number of public speeches where they affirmed their claim that women and men were created equal and argued that women must enjoy the same social and civil privileges that had been the sole preserve of men. Even though their activities created public uproar due to the conservative nature of their society, these Grimke sisters nevertheless pursued their course.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is among the best known of feminist writers, she questioned women's limited contribution to social and political life. Together with her husband Leonard

Woolf, they founded the Hogarth Press which published relatively unknown writers such as Katherine Mansfield, T. S. Eliot and E. M. Foster. She is credited with the use of stream of consciousness, Virginia Woolf says “I use stream of consciousness because I want to describe the atoms as they fall upon the mind. It is the order in which she put the stream of consciousness which enabled her to create a form of female self-expression.” In 1929, Hogarth Press published a compilation of the series of lectures Virginia Woolf delivered at Newham and Girton, then, the only two colleges for women at Cambridge University. In this book, Virginia Woolf explored the cultural and economic constraints that militate against female creativity. She also pondered over the political and historical obstacles that have militated against the establishment of a female literary tradition.

She is remembered for her best known assertion that in order for a woman to be creative, she needs a steady income of £500 a year and a room of her own. It was her ideas for establishing a female literary tradition which was later taken up by the gynocritics.

In 1948 Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex was published. This seminal book ushered in the theoretical discussions of the second wave feminism due to the new understanding it injected into social relations between men and women. In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir contends that one is not born a woman but becomes a woman due only to social constructs which pigeon-hole women to mother. She clamoured for individual freedom and claimed that the solution to female subjugation lies in women achieving complete economic and social equality since this will enable an inner metamorphosis to take place. Between 1960 and 1994, the second wave of feminism flourished with significant progress made in the area of seeking equality for both males and females. 1960 saw the American scientists develop and approve the use of oral contraceptive. This signal a kind of freedom since women now have control over childbirth. John

F. Kennedy in 1963 set up the commission of the status of women which was tasked to expose discrimination against women in employment. The same 1963 witnessed the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique which among others highlighted those traditional roles of women which she considers as being stumbling blocks to women's progress since she sees these roles as a means of keeping women subordinated to men. Betty Friedan, in The Feminine Mystique also encouraged women to strive towards the fulfillment of their own femininity. She maintained that the only way out for women to find time and energy to engage in professional careers is for them to learn how to juggle their serious domestic duties. It must be stated here that Betty Friedan's arguments had some knotty areas in that she did not seek to identify the source of women's oppression nor did she emphasize the need for society itself to change in order to accommodate women's changing lives. As an activist, Betty Friedan was responsible for founding the National Organization for Women (1966), for organizing The National Women's Political Caucus in 1971 and the International Feminist Congress in 1973. She also started the First Women's Bank in 1973.

Second Wave Feminism witnessed also the writings of Germaine Greer who advocated for sexual liberation (lesbianism) in her book entitled The Female Eunuch. In 1984 she published a controversial book entitled Sex and Destiny. The controversy is recognized in her emphasis that chastity is the best form of contraception. This is considered very inappropriate because in a way it signals an end to procreation.

In 1970, Shulamite Firestone also wrote The Dialectic of Sex whilst Sexual Politics was written by Kate Millet. In 1974, Ann Oakley's Women's Work was published in which she challenged the myth of biological motherhood. In 1981, Oakley published Subject Women, in which she suggested, albeit provocatively, that women have conspired against themselves. She advocated

for a more engagement of feminists in the sociological aspects of women's lives. In 1976, Andrienne Riche's Of Women Born was published. In this book she contradicted the analyses of Firestone and Oakley when she made a case for biological motherhood, advocating its potential in making women love their babies, their spirits and the institution of motherhood. As a feminist she identifies as a lesbian and expanded, to the dismay of some lesbians, the definition of lesbianism to include close ties of friendship and support among women.

In 1978, Mary Dale and Nancy Chodorow's Gyn/Ecology and The Reproduction of Motherhood respectively were published. Daly lays the problem of patriarchy on the doorsteps of God (God the Father) and rejected all together the term "God", asserting that the function of God in all religion is to "act as a legitimate paradigm for the institution of patriarchy."

Chodorow however concerned herself with investigations that will probe into the reasons behind women's mothering (why women decide to mother). Chodorow made two important discoveries; firstly, that the only way to ensure the minimization of asymmetries is for mothers and fathers to participate fully in parenting. Secondly, Chodorow's girls under such situations can learn from their fathers to control their empathy and boys will learn to strike a balance between their autonomy and emotional expression.

Alice Walker (1944) has published several essays on the expression of black American women. She ranks very high among black American female writers and is heavily involved in the civil rights movement. Her writings generated controversial reactions among black critics for their depiction of black men as sexist and violent husbands. Her defense to her critics who accuse her of complexity with white stereotypes of black men is that her fiction attempts to showcase



problems which hitherto were considered taboo. Thus in her writings, Walker assumes a frank, often daring perspective in her casting of blackmen as capable of brutal actions.

In 1983, Walker published a collection of essays under the title In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose. This book ushered in an era of black gynocriticism and is a major influence on feminist thinkers across the world. Walker sees herself as a womanist and she defines "womanist" as a "woman of colour who is committed to the wholeness of the entire people, male or female." It's an alternative term for "feminist" since feminism does not address the holistic consent of the African woman.

The third wave feminism is actually a continuation of second-wave feminism and it starts from the 1980s to the 2000s. Women's rights are continually being advanced. Many well-attended and well-informed conferences have been held. These conferences that have brought women together from all over the world provides considerable opportunities for advancing women's rights whilst cautioning against the tendency to apply principles universally. Notably among these conferences are the Copenhagen Conference of 1980 and the Nairobi Conference of 1985. The Nairobi Conference upheld the notion that feminism is not monolithic but constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds. Even though the Nairobi Conference emphasized the diversified nature of feminists issues, it nonetheless emphasized that this diversity builds on a common opposition to gender oppression and hierarchy since this constitutes the first step in articulating and acting on a political agenda.

The Beijing Platform for Action was signed at the Beijing Conference in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action included among others a commitment to achieve "gender equality and the

empowerment of women.” Participants at this conference identified “gender mainstreaming” as the main strategy to achieve “gender equality and empowerment of women.” Women and men were encouraged to engage in such a way as to “experience equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and have the opportunity to contribute and benefit from national, political, economic, social and cultural development.”<sup>30</sup>

Thirty years down the line women especially those in the third world still suffer different shades of oppression. In an illustrated chapter entitled Feminism and the Developing World, Cathia Jenainati, exposes a dicey problem with the discourse of western feminism: “Oppressed women exist in many countries around the world. However, the discourse of western feminism often relegate them to a marginal position, using universal labels such as “Women in Third World” to denote a rich variety of cultural, racial, and class categories” (p.166). Janainati observes that the categorization of the history of feminism into “Waves” which are delineated by American and European events and personalities does not apply, nor does it reflect our (African) condition.

It is this marginalization, which according to Janainati, results in the third world’s apparent lack of interest in issues concerning feminism. She argues:

“Feminist activists in developing countries resist social injustice against them in ways that often do not coincide with the feminist efforts that the West has witnessed. This sometimes leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their struggle, their aims and goals.” (p.166)

Another feminist theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty has also attacked the ways in which so-called “First World” feminist represent women in the “Third World”. Mohanty explains the distinction thus:

---

<sup>30</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_feminism)

. . . Western women are often depicted as strong, assertive individuals who are decisive and in control of their fate and bodies. Whereas women in developing countries are invariably portrayed as victims of a patriarchal order which robs them of their voice, dictates their fate, and forces them into financial dependence.

This careless depiction of women in developing countries as sexually constrained, ignorant, and helpless has been condemned by Mohanty.

Gayatri Spivak has also denounced the tendency on the part of western feminism to speak for non-western women. According to Spivak in her conception of the “subaltern” this tendency to speak for non-western women robs them of a political voice. According to Spivak the only potential of this practice is that it marginalizes non-western women and ignores their own efforts at countering social and political injustice. Spivak argues that “When non-western women speak or write from within western culture they shatter the myth of unity which western feminists have long celebrated” (p.168).

Spivak’s advice to western feminists is that they should rather incorporate the discourse of otherness and allow it to enrich the “imagined community of women” which Mohanty has identified. Admittedly, African women who advocate for freedom and recognition for women have had to search for an acceptable form of “ism” that truly reflects the African woman’s situation.

Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) has added her voice to the ongoing search for an acceptable form of “ism” for African women. Her book entitled *Africana Womanism* sees the need for self-naming to reflect African culture whilst assessing the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women to be able to respond to each need better even though there is a common agenda to liberate and empower African women. Hudson-Weems spells out the focus of

Africana Womanism by first stating what it is not and then emphasizing what it is supposed to do. Hudson Weems's Africana Womanism recognizes that any ideology that will fulfill the African woman's needs must be grounded in African culture. She argues:

Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black Feminism, or Walker's womanism that some African women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women. (p.22)

The recognition of difference in Africa women's experiences is an important step since these differences enhance self-identity which is a catalyst for cultural self-retrieval. Cultural self-retrieval can only be achieved when African women investigate their different cultures to identify those aspects of culture which invest women with power and bring them respect and recognition. Kolawole (1997:27) has argued that before colonialism and imperialism, the African culture invested African women with positive qualities which resulted in "self-enhancement, self-esteem and freedom within African cultural context.

Feminism to an extent is relevant to the African woman's situation since our attempt at analysing the socio-historical background to modern feminism reveals that liberation and empowerment of all women is core to the feminist ideal. Indeed it is this importance that the African woman sees in the family system that also makes her acknowledge the positive impact of male-female collaboration. Even though patriarchy constitutes a major barrier in the African woman's quest for self-retrieval, it nonetheless does not constitute a major ground for the castigation of all men as enemies of women's progress. The proponent of African Womanism, Mary M. Kolawole spells out some aspects of African reality which make it



imperative for African women to align themselves to an ideology that addresses their peculiar challenges. She maintains:

African world-view is predominantly family-oriented and this is an aspect of the positive legacy that Blacks in the Diaspora have sustained vigorously and self-consciously. Some radical feminist further advocate an overturn of patriarchy and patriarchal symbols. Many African women recognize the way patriarchy has been manipulated to put them down and they are struggling against these forms of subjugation and intimidation wherever they exist . . . But at the same time, many also recognize the need to unite with men in a concerted effort to reject racist and imperialist subjugation. (p.27)

Even though patriarchal role exist in some parts of Africa, it must be noted that there are some African men who have collaborated with African women to achieve progress. This is evidenced also in some literary works from Africa. In Amma Darko's novels for example, we identify some men whose support of women speeds up the process of development. Thus, to castigate all men as evil because patriarchal role exists in certain quarters of Africa is biased indeed. A preferred choice to feminism is *womanism*.

In *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Kolawole recognises the relevance of motherhood in the African culture. Her recognition also directs us to our choice of African womanism as our major theoretical framework. Kolawole explains:

An important area of contention is the different attitude to the private-public sphere dichotomy. Western feminists' emphasis on the women's space and sphere of influence mainly in terms of public participation is problematic to many African women. This accentuates the distortion of the criteria of judgement of women's freedom and empowerment. The African woman cherishes her role as a home maker as well as her status as a mother or a potential mother. She does not necessarily see these roles as liabilities. (pp.31-32)

Motherhood is central to Amma Darko's narratives. Whilst addressing the importance of mothers in Africa, Amma Darko's novels also expose the challenges bedeviling mothers and daughters not as a way of condemning motherhood but as a way of disinfecting all the "bacteria" that create hardships for mothers. It is to retrieve for mothers their lost dignity that makes Darko concentrate so much on those problems that steal away the dignity of mothers. The needs of women in general and mothers in particular are given a lot of space in Darko's narratives. Womanism also addresses the particular needs of African women and provide alternative solutions. Womanism, unlike feminism, exalts marriage, childbirth, and family values, and the beneficial results of collaboration between men and women. Kolawole has argued that the African women source their pride in motherhood and believes in family values. She contents:

African women's self-definition focuses on positive collectivity as opposed to individuality. It also endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood and motherhood with no apologia. Consequently, the average African woman's exultation of marriage and family values and assertion of feminine outlook are important canons of African womanhood. Nonetheless, these women are crying out for justice where these values and traditions are abused or when the ideals of African culture are perverted in the patriarchal structure. (1997:197)

The African woman's belief in family values and the pride they take in the performance of their motherly roles suggests strongly that African women consider men as partners in the realization of their common goals. The fight is not against men but against those men who manipulate the laxities of the patriarchal structure to suppress women. The view that African women consider their men as partners in their story is shared by Kolawole: "To many, female bonding therefore consist of bringing out and enhancing common and positive African values, as opposed to building a wall around women in exclusion of men." Okey Ndibe (1991:3) agrees with Kolawole's view and adds that made-in-the-West feminism appeared to have declared a war

against the family. For her (African woman), a cohesive family life could never pose a threat or constitute a contradiction.”

The views of Kolawole and Ndebi as expressed above confirms our argument that feminism which sees the family as a threat to the progress of women and which among other things considers the woman’s attachment to the making of a family a threat to her progress constitute a major contradiction to the values of African women.

Darko’s novels explore this importance and recognize the family as the source of social development. It is this importance which she gives the family that endears her to us. In all four of Darko’s novels under study, we find a breakdown of the family unit and Darko points to us the fact that it is the breakdown of the family system that has resulted in moral decadence, under-development, exploitation, and the subjugation of women. The abundance of broken families in Darko’s works ironically points to her view that the problems in our society are linked to the break-down of the family system. It becomes challenging for single mothers (whether divorced or neglected by the fathers of their children) to dutifully fulfill the needs of their children.

Poverty and the desire to supply the needs of their children force most single mothers into the hands of unscrupulous men. The inability of the mothers to meet their daughters’ expectations make them failures in the eyes of their daughters. If these fathers contribute to the upbringing of children, the family system would work as the burden of childcare would be shared by both parents. It is because most single mothers find it difficult to fulfill the needs of their children, that brings them into conflicts with their own daughters. In Africa, the family system which works properly ensures the healthy upbringing of children. Darko views the family as the most important unit when it comes to proper upbringing of children.

Kolawole agrees with Darko's view. Expressing her opinions on the importance of the family system in Africa, Kolawole contends that the family system is never an anathema:

The centrality of the family is important to Africans, male and female. Women in particular see the family as the nucleus of social development, growth, moral sustenance as well as cultural continuity. They do not see the family as an anathema. They cannot adopt the Western feminists' attitude such as the position of Zilla Einstein who contends that the family is a tool for entrenching capitalist oppression and individualism. African family set-up is derived from the communal ethos . . . Many African womanists are happily married without any overt hindrance to their career or occupation. (p.32)

Apart from the fact that Western feminism overlooks the importance of the family system to development, it is also faulted for its associations with racism, colonialism and sexism. In tracing the African woman's rejection of feminism, Kolawole argues:

Since the colonial era, African women have continued to experience such a close link between racism and sexism and this informs their rejection of any claim by feminists to fight their cause. African women are struggling against multiple disadvantages; some of these are caused by tradition, and patriarchal set-up. In some specific ways, colonialism did not remove the gender inequality but widened it as education created new forms of inequality to crown the existing ones . . . But external eye-view cannot fully address the African woman's problem. Introspection and individuality characterize feminism but African thought is largely collective and this entails respecting several approaches to the problem. (p.34)

In rejecting feminism as the right term to reflect the occupation of African women, Kolawole further observes:

Many see feminism as imperialistic while others are comfortable with it as they seek to locate themselves in global feminist agenda. Those who reject feminism are looking for alternative terminologies that are relevant to their specific cultural experience. The most dominant concept acceptable to those rejecting feminism as a term of reference is womanism (or African womanism). Womanism does not deny the natural biological God-given traits and characteristics but rejects the manipulation of such traits to hold women down. It seeks to enhance women's strength in positive wholesome ways by highlighting and not effacing femaleness. (p.196)



Womanism expresses three fundamental ideas. Firstly, womanism acknowledges that African women and men must work towards ensuring a family system geared towards the growth of its members. It is this family system that forms the nucleus of social development.

Secondly, womanism recognizes the paramount importance of motherhood in African culture. Thus womanism considers motherhood as an avenue through which women can carve out dignified images for themselves and ensure the proper upbringing of children.

Thirdly, African womanism attaches importance to African culture though these womanists are aware of some imbalances in the cultural stipulations that contribute to women's marginalization. The call is on women to re-evaluate the cultural limitations and preserve the good in their culture. Kolawole explains:

African women can still remain themselves in a changing cultural and socio-historical setting. African women can take whatever is positive in the encroaching modern values and simultaneously retain the essence by preserving what is good in their culture and establishing it. Indeed, in manifesting cultural exteriority and maintaining their feminine selves, they sustain their alterity in a way . . . African womanist configuration derives from this culturally wholesome self-expression and not any polemics that are extraneous to the consciousness of the majority of Africans. (p.204)

Darko's novels share these views espoused by Kolawole in her seminal book entitled, *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Kolawole's definition of who a womanist is immediately show-cases Darko as a womanist. She writes: "Any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self-retrieval of the African woman is an African or Africana Womanist" (1997:34).

Kolawole herself acknowledges the renowned Nigerian playwright and critic Zulu Sofola, as a precursor of African womanism. She also confirms that most of her (Kolawole's) views and

ideas on womanism were also shaped by her interaction with scholars like Clenora Hudson-Weems, Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, Gloria Braxton and Obioma Nnaemeka among others.

Kolawole's ideas are also sourced from her frustrations with the lack of interest that western feminism attaches to the family system and motherhood. She considers their lack of interest in motherhood and the family as inimical to African culture. Kolawole's desire to speak to the particular needs of African women is also linked to her view that there is a problem in universalising the theory of feminism. She locates her discourse within the Igbo philosophy that claims that "There is no absolute way to anything". This philosophy, according to Kolawole, is also shared by Obioma Nnaemeka. Their contention is that "Counter discourse is a healthy approach in women's search for acceptable feminine aesthetics".<sup>31</sup> This implies that discussions on African women need to be carried out on a dialogic basis. Adeola quotes Leslie to demonstrate that there is no one "African aesthetic", according to Ogundipe Leslie (1990:61). Dialogism, according to Kolawole, focuses on divergence and complementarity.

According to Kolawole, other theorists who, like Maikhail Bakhtin, uphold the dialogic approach are Audre Lorde and Josephine Dovan. Kolawole also confirms the popularity of the dialogic approach in Africa. This is the position of many African critics including Ropo Sekoni and Obioma Nnaemeka. Kolawole explains her reason for locating her Womanism theory within a dialogic framework:

I have located this discourse within a dialogic framework in positing African Womanist theories because the underlying principle is one of accommodating different but relevant approaches to African women's self-definition. Dogmatism and relativism are inadequate in giving expression to the pluralistic African

---

<sup>31</sup>Kolawole's meeting with Obioma Nnaemeka during the African Literature Association Conference held in Columbus, Ohio in 1995.

setting . . . It is important for African women to explore common fronts of struggle in the existent dichotomized world . . . Many African women still celebrate conventional family values and they believe that the breakdown of the family system and its replacement with other “politically correct” and acceptable set-ups is responsible for the rate of crimes, drug use, alcoholism, suicide, and many perversions that are the hallmark of modernized societies today. Feminism celebrates many of these values that Africans consider problematic and this explains the attitude of non-conformist African scholars. (p.197)

African Womanism is a friendly theory for African women. Where womanism differs from feminism is in the former’s adoration of the family system and motherhood. Whereas feminism mostly castigates men and blames them for inferiorizing the position of the woman in society (patriarchy), womanism contends that not all men look down on women. A mutual understanding between the sexes is seen as the key to development. Kolawole explains:

The average African woman is not a hater of men; nor does she seek to build a wall around her gender across which she throws ideological missiles. She desires self-respect, an active role, dynamic participation in all areas of social development, and dignity alongside the men. This necessitates a dialogic stance, a mutual understanding and not a dogmatic or diachronic ideological posture. (p.36)

African women are searching for dignity and this search is also linked to their struggle to reject neo-colonialism. Kolawole aptly explains the reason behind the acceptance of womanism: “The African woman’s quest is to eliminate externalised colonialism in all its forms, subtle or overt. African woman’s need is, therefore, first a rejection of neo-colonial strings that retard Africa as a whole, and the woman in particular.” Womanism thus seeks the freedom and development of all genders.

The doyenne of African Womanism, Mary Modupe Kolawole’s defence of womanism underscores the focus of African women/mothers who are looking for an ideology that speaks to their peculiar needs.

Womanism, like feminism emphasizes liberation for women; however, womanism acknowledges the positive role of men in the liberation struggle and also believes in motherhood and family system. Kolawole has thus constructed a model of feminist theory that enhances the African woman's understanding of marriage, family values, culture and participation in the public sphere.

African womanism is the immediate paradigm that focuses on the peculiar needs of African women. In arguing for a new ideology which speaks to the peculiar challenges of African women, Kolawole first asks this question: "Are the fears of African women who reject feminism justified and what are the alternatives being proposed?"(p.8) According to Kolawole the answer to this question is sourced from personal discussions with several African sisters. She concedes that even though these African sisters recognize the huge role feminism has played in the liberation struggle for women, there is the need to create a new form of 'ism' or ideology that will generate a positive feeling of self-esteem in the African woman. Her answer to her own question also reveals that most African women find it difficult to totally align themselves to western feminism since they are castigated with negatives for their refusal to join the feminism band:

From personal discussions with several African sisters, they are not rejecting the process of fighting for women's self-definition and self-assertion, but they have problems with the definitions and conceptualization of feminism as it is transmitted from the West with the presumption that this perception of women's issues is universal and relevant to all women globally. Others feel sufficiently comfortable with feminism as a concept. This is not always understood when such women are called backward, retrogressive, ignorant or cowards for denying western feminism. These women insist that there are other ways of eliciting women's positive self-esteem without the tag, feminism. (p.8)



What is/are these “other” ways? This question brings us to those special challenges of African women that demand a new concept that specifically addresses their needs. According to Kolawole, the African woman has five major pillars from which she sources her strength. These pillars are her culture, her motherhood status, her attachment to the family, her strong belief in male-female collaboration, and a call for justice in situations where traditional or cultural ideals and values are manipulated and abused to foster patriarchal interests. Any concept relevant to the African woman must respect these pillars and work with them. It is the search for a concept that respects these pillars that makes most ‘African sisters’ reject feminism, Kolawole contends:

Those who reject feminism are looking for alternative terminologies that are relevant to their specific cultural experience. The most dominant concept acceptable to those rejecting feminism as a term of reference is womanism (or African Womanism). Womanism does not deny the natural biological God-given traits and characteristics, but rejects the manipulation of such traits to hold women down. It seeks to enhance women’s strength in positive, wholesome ways by highlighting and not effacing femaleness . . . African womanist aesthetics seek to make a unique contribution to existing scholarship by re-inscribing positive women’s bonding, mobilization, and self-definition that cuts across gender, racial, and class lines. (p.196)

Kolawole’s contention above seeks primarily to address the particular needs of African women which cannot be subsumed under a global feminist agenda due to the African woman’s peculiar challenges. Womanism reflects what most African women aspire to in their bid to experience self-definition and self-assertion. Kolawole goes further to reiterate the main focus of African women’s self-definition:

African woman’s self-definition focuses on positive collectivity as opposed to individuality. It endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood with no apologia. Consequently, the average African woman’s exaltation of marriage and family values and assertion of feminine outlook are important canons of African womanhood. Nonetheless, these women are crying out for justice where these values and traditions are abused or where the ideals of African culture are perverted in the patriarchal structure. To many, female bonding therefore consists

of bringing out and enhancing common and positive African values, as opposed to building a wall around women in exclusion of men. Womanism then articulates certain unarticulated premises that appear to be outside dominant discursive systems in Western Academia. (pp.197-198)

It is Kolawole's desire that African women, find wholeness and integration both in the private and in the public sphere that influenced her to propound this theory she refers to as African Womanism. Indeed it is our understanding of the tenants of African womanism that has informed our choice of this theory as the single most appropriate theory that illuminates our understanding of Amma Darko's four novels. What these novels seek to do is clearly to use literature as a vehicle to transport values aimed at helping the African woman to experience self-retrieval, self-definition and self-assertion in positive cultural ways. By linking Amma Darko's works to the womanist ideals, we also believe that we can provoke discourse in this area—that of assessing Darko as an African womanist.

Helen Yitah<sup>32</sup> (2008:15-17) reiterates the import of Amma Darko's novels thus: "In all her novels, she implicitly laments the loss of the institutions of family and marriages as places where loyalty, loving kindness, trust and compassion are nurtured for the good of all." Kolawole had earlier on spelt out the repercussions of the breakdown of the family system in Africa. She contends that the breakdown of the family and its subsequent replacement with other modes has spelt only doom. She observes:

Many Africans still celebrate conventional family values and they believe that the breakdown of the family system and its replacement with other "politically correct" and acceptable set-ups is responsible for the rate of crimes, drug use, alcoholism, suicide, and many perversions that are the hallmark of modernized societies. (p.197)

---

<sup>32</sup> She is a lecturer in the Department of English, University of Ghana and currently the Head of Department.

There is the need for a restoration and this is what womanism and Amma Darko's four novels seek to achieve. This explains why we have elected to apply womanism as a theoretical framework to the study of the novels because it helps illuminate our understanding of African women's concerns that are current and demand urgent critical attention. A family system that works effectively obviously injects orderly behaviour into the larger society. The causes of societal-ills which compel Helen Yitah and her colleague to do a comparative analysis of Darko's novels with that of Charles Dickens' is simply found in the breakdown of the family. This is the outcome of her comparison:

Both writers portray helpless children exposed to and exploited by unscrupulous adults; brutal daily battles for survival or control in a society where human beings and relationships are commodified and law and order almost completely broken down; a mechanical march towards 'progress' that crushes underfoot any perceived obstacle, human, non-human; and a resultant general feeling of hopelessness, even despair. The stories the two writers tell may be fictional, but they are realistic images of the times in 19<sup>th</sup> century England and in contemporary Ghana. (p.17)

We glean from this comparative analysis that the importance of the family, especially its potential of ensuring order in our societies, cuts across space and times. If Dickens' 19<sup>th</sup> century England can come so close to contemporary Ghana, then Kolawole's womanism which, among other things, calls for an effective family system is not only appropriate but timeless!

Amma Darko's novels truly reflect womanism ideology. The consciousness-raising nature of her novels reflects also the concerns of African womanists. The themes in Darko's novels are designed to re-inscribe African motherhood as a means towards the African woman's self-actualization and self-esteem. These works aim at exposing all the problems that rob mothers of their dignity so that mothers can work towards proper self-retrieval. In this vein, Darko provides readers with mother figures (though few) who achieve proper self-actualization as role models.

These women/mothers figures who have become our role models like their foils are bedevilled with trials of all shades; yet their determination not to allow these trials to cower them into senseless submission teaches readers that African mothers can retrieve their dignity and experience self-actualization through an overt manifestation of motherhood. Darko's novels are defined by a call for change as these works interrogate patriarchy, some aspects of western feminism, woman-on-woman-violence and passivity in women. In Darko's novels, instances of African womanism ideologies are abundant and this links any discussions of her novels automatically to Kolawole's womanism theory.





#### 1.4. SURVEY OF FEMALE WRITERS OF AFRICA

The female writers of Africa whose works constitute the superstructure of this survey are Flora Nwapa, Efua T. Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchie Emecheta, Mariama Bâ, Zulu Sofola, Sonye Tess Onwueme, Bessie Head, Grace Ogot, Nawal el Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga.

Obviously, this selection can be criticized as being narrow, since there are more female writers of Africa than the number cited above. Yet it is important to trace what obtains in select writings by African women whom we have lined up for mention. This review across the genres (prose and drama) is to illustrate that new directions are opening up in the different genres of Literature. As women writers of Africa concern themselves with foregrounding the various challenges that women encounter.

An appraisal of selected literature by female writers of Africa who wrote prior to the last decade or two reveals that their preoccupation was, in the words of Kolawole (1997:88), “. . . to deconstruct tradition by recreating new models and new yardsticks.” In this vein, any cultural prescription or norm which seeks to unfairly elevate men above women or prevent women from achieving their full potential comes up for attack, overtly or covertly. In most cases, their female characters are invested with determination and insight—critical traits which enable them to take radical actions to move out of oppression and carve out dignified images for themselves,—images which quite differ from that which tradition suggests.

The Nigerian writer, Flora Nwapa, is on record to be the first woman to write prose in Africa. Her insightful novel *Efuru* captures efficiently the struggles that women go through in traditional settings. *Efuru*'s worth is linked to her ability to mother her own children. *Efuru*'s economic

prosperity, her beauty and her generous nature all fail woefully to guarantee her a long-lasting marriage. Her two attempts at marriage fail because she could not make a “child live”. Adizua, her first husband, runs away with a prostitute and is not even present at the time of the burial of Efuru’s first and only child. Gilbert, the second husband, could not make much of a husband—he accuses his wife of infidelity because of a rumour he has heard.

Efuru’s determination to remain single can be seen as a woman’s radical move to ridicule unfair cultural expectations. She elects to worship the goddess of the lake. Ironically, Uhmari, the goddess, has wealth, beauty and numerous women worshippers, but she has no child. Nwapa’s rhetorical question “. . . why then did women worship her?” asked at the end of the novel reveals that women can carve out dignified images for themselves apart from marriage and childbirth.

Efuru’s refusal to tie her satisfaction to the apron-strings of traditional expectations also reveals that women can choose between oppression and freedom. Her quest to follow her dream brings her self-fulfillment as she tells readers that she sleeps peacefully at night, and that she dreams about the beautiful goddess and her generosity. Kolawole (1997:83) aptly sums up the Efuru story thus: “Efuru is a typical example of several early women’s novels, depicting the plight of women in a traditional society where self-realization seems to elude the outgoing woman.”

By opening to Efuru an alternative route to self-fulfillment, Nwapa suggests alternative routes to self-fulfillment to her readership. It must be stated here that Nwapa’s philosophical preference is not for women to shun marriage and childbirth but rather to look for other alternatives in the event that they find no fulfillment in marriage or childbirth. In an interview with Adeola James, Nwapa dissipates the confusion:

I think the message is, and it has always been, that whatever happens, in a woman's life . . . marriage is not the end of their world, childlessness is not the end of everything. You must survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and one other things to make you happy apart from marriage and children.(1990:114)

*Efuru* portrays a rather strong woman who confronts unfair traditional expectations of women. However, the same silence that hangs over conflicts bedeviling mother-daughter bonds is evident in *Efuru*. Efuru's mother dies when Efuru is a child. Ajanukpu, her aunt, is like a mother to her. However, we realize no conflict disturbing their relationship. Efuru's daughter and only child dies before she could walk.

The joys of motherhood which elude Efuru and which render her worthless in the eyes of her people is realized albeit ironically by Adah in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. This novel by one of Nigeria's most acclaimed female writers is described by Kolawole (1997:86) as an "ironic portrait of the artist as the conscience of her society."

The artist is supposed to articulate the conscience of her society. However in this novel, Emecheta lashes out at a woman who measures her fulfillment with her ability to cling to marriage and continuous childbearing in the face of abject poverty and the irresponsible lifestyle of her husband. In fact, there is no joy in motherhood for Nnu Egu, for the proud mother of many children perpetually lives a life of want and misery and ends up dying by the roadside with no child to hold her hand.

Nnu Egu, who but for the intervention of a kinsman would have drowned herself in a river because her first child had died earlier, eventually has many children. With her motherhood status comes her resolve to invest her resources and energy into ensuring that her sons are well-

educated. She applies herself to this duty with religiosity. Her two sons sojourn in Europe but they forget entirely about their mother, only to return to give her an expensive burial.

Nnu Egu's end is tragic for she never experiences the "joys" of motherhood she so much dreamt of. Even though her female children take care of her, they cannot bring her much fulfillment because she rather expects her sons to bring her fulfillment. Like Nwapa's *Efuru*, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* re-assess their society's perception of women vis-à-vis their roles as mothers.

Mariama Bâ is one of Senegal's renowned writers. Her epistolary novel, translated from French as *So Long a Letter* (1981) exposes the trials of women in patriarchal and in polygamous societies. Using the epistolary form, Ramatoulaye recounts her personal problems to her close friend and confidante Aissatou. Aissatou and Ramatoulaye share in the dual misfortune of betrayal handed them by their husbands. When Aissatou's mother-in-law finds her son a co-wife, Aissatou swiftly responds to this betrayal by packing off her four sons to Europe. Ramatoulaye, however, responds to her husband's betrayal by staying on even when her husband abandons her and her twelve children and moves into a new house with a much younger girl. There are three other marriages in the novel which end badly. In all these marriages, the husbands 'are free' to misbehave because of patriarchal and religious latitudes which seem to afford them the right to discard their wives for younger women.

The emphasis in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is that women need to seek alternative means of self-fulfillment rather than tie their joys to the apron-strings of a marriage that, by all accounts, has gone sour. In so far as society explicitly or implicitly condones infidelity on the part of husbands, women need to come up with measures to deal with such situations.



The juxtaposition of the two major marriages in the novel, especially with regard to the two women's varied reactions to each husband's betrayal, reveals then that Mariama Bâ's thrust in this novel is that women need to get out of destructive marriages and carve out dignified images for themselves and even their children.

Ramatoulaye's relationship with her daughters is important in lending some credibility to this work in that Bâ also devotes some attention to mother-daughter conflicts in *So Long A Letter*. This conflict is played out in Ramatoulaye's daughters' refusal to live up to 'expectation'—Aissatou becomes pregnant for a man who had not married her. Her (Ramatoulaye) other daughter smokes—a habit which Ramatoulaye considers anti-feminine. The icing on the cake is her boys whose obsession for play makes them fall in love with the streets.

Although there are problems within Ramatoulaye's relationship with her daughter, Aissatou, especially when the latter's pregnancy becomes evident, one realizes that the same feeling of powerlessness is transferred to Aissatou's situation. The series of rhetorical questions asked by Ramatoulaye reveal that this mother considers her daughter to be vulnerable. "Who was behind this theft, for there has been a theft? Who is behind this injury, for injury it is. Who has dared? Who? Who?" (p.82)

The repetition of the relative pronoun, "who", is consistent with Ramatoulaye's belief that Aissatou's boyfriend had overstepped his bounds.

When she finds out about her other daughter's smoking habit, her reaction also reveals that young women need to maintain habits that endear them to men: "A woman's mouth exhaling the

acrid smell of tobacco instead of being fragrant. A woman's teeth blackened with tobacco instead of sparkling with whiteness." (p.76)

Ramatoulaye is consciously moulding her daughters to gain attraction from the same 'men' whom she knows can dump a woman like "worn out boubous". Indeed her belief that Aissatou's marriage to the latter's boyfriend, Ibrahim Sall, will make up for the mistake reveals an act of pure forgiveness where evidence is clearer and noble.

Is Ramatoulaye leading her daughters to suffer the same fate she has suffered? These daughters have their mother's experience as a weapon to fight against abuse. This is clearly seen in Daba's relationship with her husband whom she considers a companion. Indeed, Daba's view of marriage is consistent with her empowered status because to her a husband and wife are there for only one thing—to hold each other up and make life easier for both.

The Ghanaian playwright and originator of the Pan African Arts Festival (PANAFEST), Efua T. Sutherland, has endeared herself to readers with such plays as *Edufa*, *The Marriage of Anansewa* and *Foriwa* among others. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Sutherland uses literature as a vehicle for transporting cultural truths. Using the ancient Ananse folktale format, Sutherland comments on human passions, foibles and follies especially those influenced by greed—*cupiditatis radix malorum est* (Greed is the root of all evil) said the ancient Graeco-Romans.

Ananse parades about with his daughter's picture with the aim of finding a rich, loving chief as a suitor for his daughter. Ananse's actions can be interpreted as humane and inhumane in the sense that they reveal his concern for a bright future for his daughter. Yet it also reveals Ananse's own

greed, for he coaxes four chiefs to oil the wheels of custom so that the highest bidder can claim Anansewa as wife.

The objectification of Anansewaa, is seen in Ananse's elaborate use of the money received from the chiefs to better his lot. Anansewa's readiness to yield to her father's bold recourse to a mock-death scenario is not based on greed but her desire to secure for herself a gentleman of a husband whose love for her can stand the test of time. In so doing, Anansewa becomes a model to young women desirous of marriage. The moral here is for such women to use wisdom in analyzing true love once the question of a suitor comes up.

Anansewa's mother dies before Anansewa could even know how to talk. Her supposed step mother, Auntie Christy, is not really up to the task and had very little to do with Anansewa's upbringing. However, the fact that Anansewa seems to tolerate Auntie Christy reveals once again Sutherland's awareness that a would-be step-mother can appear to be mothering her rival's daughter while nurturing her plan of ensuring her marriage to the girl's father.

The Ghanaian playwright, poet, novelist and educationist, Ama Ata Aidoo, is ranked among the best female authors in the world. Her plays and, until recently, her novels explore the hindrances in traditional as well as in modern societies which serve as obstacles in the woman's way towards achieving self-fulfillment. Ama Ata Aidoo's women are usually determined and work hard towards achieving greatness; yet, they usually get crushed by unfair cultural and normative expectations.

Anowa in *Anowa* (1995) is one such example. Determined to marry a man after her own heart, Anowa rubbishes that aspect of culture which requires the maternal uncle of a young woman to

find a suitable husband for his niece. Anowa surprises everyone when she dramatically produces Ako, a weakling of a man, as a husband.

Through hard work and sheer ingenuity, Anowa elicits our respect for Ako and herself. Yet, joy eludes her as Ako literally deserts her because she is barren. Even though there is much in Ako's make-up to suggest that he is impotent and/or barren, the blame of childlessness is laid at Anowa's footsteps whilst Ako enjoys his trade in slaves and hides. A demented Anowa commits suicide and a few moments after, Ako follows suit. Anowa's pathetic end is thus as a result of her inability to fulfill that traditional expectation which requires a married woman to have children at all cost. Our interest in *Anowa* is due to Ama Atta Aidoo's handling of mother-daughter conflict. Anowa and her mother bandy words because Anowa considers her mother's earlier insistence that she marries an unnecessary interference. Her mother's rejection of Anowa's husband also creates tension and results in a string of curses from her mother who considers Kofi Ako an exploitative weakling. The mother-daughter conflict in *Anowa* assumes a tragic form as her mother's curse materializes with Kofi Ako neglecting Anowa whilst basking in the wealth created by Anowa. A dejected Anowa commits suicide rather than have her mother laugh at her.

Eulalie in Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) nearly suffers the same fate as her husband's people consider her presumed barrenness a result of her incessant smoking. Their insistence to wash Eulalie's stomach with herbs, coupled with Eulalie's refusal to learn to accept the ways of Ato's people, causes her to get addicted to the bottle. Intent on leaving a once happy marriage, Eulalie is directed back to her husband by Ato's grandmother. But the question still looms as to



whether she will ever accept their ways and allow Ato's mother and grandmother to mother her or whether they will rather grow to understand Eulalie?

In a much recent short story, *The Girl Who Can*, Aidoo, still continues with the discourse on the traditional expectations of women, vis-à-vis the 'modern' woman's view of such expectations. Adjoa's physique, according to her grandmother, is not in accordance with her expectation of a woman. Adjoa's spindly legs, according to her grandmother, do not have meat on them and cannot support the carrying of a baby on her back. Concerned as she is with the perpetuation of her family, she stops at nothing as she constantly draws the attention of her friends to what she considers as a missing link in her granddaughter's body. As Adjoa's legs cause anxiety and conflict between her grandmother and her mother, Adjoa's own determination earns her first position in a running competition. She collects a championship cup which surprisingly gains her recognition even in the eyes of her grandmother who characteristically carries the cup on her back like a mother does a baby. The grandmother's actions suggest that she has given up on limiting the value of her granddaughter to childbirth. Her insightful words reveal that for once, this grandmother has recognized that a woman can carve out dignified image(s) for herself outside childbirth. "Thin legs can also be useful . . . even though some legs don't have much meat on them to carry hips . . . they can run. Thin legs can run . . . Then who knows?" (in Yvonne, 1998:13)

Aidoo's adaptation of the point of view of the small child as narrator reveals a change of perception or of roles where a rather young child becomes the wise teacher of her grandmother. Once again the old woman's claim to be the repository of wisdom is challenged by a small girl who imparts to her grandmother lessons of wisdom, strength and dynamism. Adjoa's victory

signals that she is refusing to limit her role as a female to childbearing. The fact that Adjoa carves out a dignity for herself through athletics is a pointer to mother-daughter conflict. The conflict here resides in a young girl's determination to prove wrong the expectation of her grandmother and her voiceless mother. Adjoa's victory and her grandmother's reaction to it reveal a radical shift—a shift that condemns the tendency of the older generation to limit female roles to only childbearing and nurturing.

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1991) explores the complexities involved in achieving female emancipation. Esi Sekyi's determination not to allow either marriage or her maternal instincts to restrict her ambition to experience self-actualization and self-determination demands of her a price. A typical middle-class woman (a statistics consultant) she divorces her husband because of a crime she calls marital rape. Her involvement with the handsome Ali Konde—a self-made man and husband of Fusena does not bring her much joy for polygamy and its demands on Ali Konde leaves Esi Sekyi thinking whether it is worthwhile to hop into Ali's arms. Having consummated his obsession to have Esi as his second wife, Esi realizes that Ali's commitment to his wife and children coupled with his flirtations with his new secretary is depriving her of Ali's total attention. She redefines her needs and decides to engage with Ali only when her sexual drives desires fulfillment. Our interest in this story has to do with Esi Sekyi's relationship with her only child, Ogyaanowa who has to be taken to her father's family house due to the annulment of his marriage to Esi. Esi involvement with Ali does not make it easier for Esi to bring her daughter home. Desiring to cash-on on the situation and 'punish' Esi for unfairly divorcing her son, Esi's mother-in-law over-indulges Ogyanowa making her more comfortable at the family house rather than her own mother's bungalow. Esi's frustration at the loss of her only child to her mother-in-

law reflects a kind of mother-daughter conflict where the daughter's action communicates an emotional detachment from her mother.

She was aware of a strong temptation to stop going to the house to forget about Ogyaanowa. But apart from the fact that her own mothering instincts revolted at the mere thought, she also knew her mother and grandmother would not let the child go to Oko's people. Besides, she had a secret fear that Oko and his family were working the child against her anyway. She would only make things worse for herself if she cut even her occasional visits to that house. Already, she had noticed that the child never showed any desire to go away with her. Of course Ogyaawona was always happy to see her; however, Esi thought she had dragged her feet a bit any time she had taken her to go spend the odd weekend at the bungalow.

In the end, Esi had had to agree to do without her daughter's company on the old well-beaten premise that there was no sense in taking a child from a house and neighbourhood full of children to the 'cemetery' that was where she lived. (p.171)

We encounter a kind of mother-daughter conflict here—a conflict seen in daughter's subtle refusal to stay with her mother due to her feeling that her mother has no time for her.

The works of the Kenyan female writer, Grace Ogot, mainly deal with the dilemma of women in marriage. Her short story entitled, "The Wayward Father" in *Island of Tears* (1980) deals with marriage. A career woman with western attitudes, Anastasia's sense of fulfillment does not derive from her status but rather her love for her husband, Mike. Mike's betrayal comes at a time when Anastasia has lost all the support of her traditional kinsmen to distance. Mike disregards his family and Anastasia's love by impregnating a girl half his age and moving on to marry her. Anastasia's reaction to this betrayal reveals that the issue of marital infidelity cuts across status.

Man was cursed by God, my child; even the most loved and most respectable husband will have no shame in dragging the family name in the sordid mud. It is the lot of all women, however dignified and you will learn soon enough when you are married. (p.19)

Obviously, Anastasia is indoctrinating her daughter to make her 'seasoned' in her married life when she is also faced with an adulterous husband. Anastasia's determination to stay in the

marriage is dictated by her love for her children whom she thinks will be miserable if she opts out of her married home. The fact that a mother's love for her children can condition her to endure an abusive marriage illustrates one of the causes of trials for mothers.

In this story then, a mother's love for her children, including a daughter(s) spurs her on to commit herself to a marriage whose ashes have long gone cold. Once again, the picture of the all-effacing image of the woman is recreated. However, it is Anastasia's over-dependence on her husband which truly explains her desire to stay—for her very survival is hooked to her man and neither her status nor wealth can open alternatives to her. Obviously, Anastasia's relationship with her daughter is less fraught with tensions. Evidently the mother-daughter relationship is enriched since Anastasia has confronted the reality of her situation in such a way as to enable her teach and caution her daughter to be wary of men.

This review ends with Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, first published in 1988 by the Women's Press. The choice of the novel as the one to draw the curtain on our review is informed both by the content of the novel and also by its year of publication. The novel was first published in 1988, about eight years before Amma Darko's first novel, *Beyond The Horizon*, was published. It is significant to observe that even though an appreciable number of literary works have been produced by female writers of Africa between 1988 and 1993, some aspects of the contents of *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *Beyond the Horizon* (1993) share so much resemblance that the gap between these novels in terms of years of publication can be overlooked. For it seems as though Darko takes the baton from Dangarembga and continues the discourse on mother-daughter conflicts which Dangarembga had explored (together with other themes) in *Nervous Conditions*.



In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, readers journey with the heroine narrator Tambudzai whose determination to shake off the shackles of poverty in her family makes her resolve to go through formal education regardless of the apparent bottlenecks. Tambudzai's determination to use her education to unlock the keys of prosperity and honour is driven by a lot of situations unfavourable to her. Her feeling of shame any time her father makes a fool of himself in front of her rich uncle Babamukuru is clearly illustrated in the novel. Her uncle's wife, with a Master's Degree and a good job, initially looks like a role model to Tambu; but later events rather reveal the dirt beneath the veneer. Her mother's sister, Lucia, who is described as strong-willed and promiscuous, teaches Tambu that, after all, there are benefits to be derived when one decides to remain focused and work towards a defined objective. From Nyasha, her reckless, but kind-hearted cousin, Tambu learns that moderation and common sense are but values at the core of the realization of one's dreams.

However, of all these relations, it is Tambu's mother, Máshingayi, whose entrapment (which has rendered her fatalistic and self-giving), drives daughter and mother into rampant verbal exchanges with daughter insisting on change whilst mother hammers on indifference.

In *Nervous Conditions* then, the conflicts bedeviling mother-daughter relationships are given very critical attention. At the peak of their disagreement, Tambu realizes that the earlier she ignores her mother's disappointing doctrines, the faster she can work towards her emancipation and that of her family's.

All the novels reviewed in this section establish the notion that female writers of Africa are concerned with women's issues and are using literature as a vehicle to impart lessons geared towards liberating women from patriarchal structures. Whilst some propound the necessity for

women to carve out identities for themselves through education, others also call on women to re-examine existing cultural norms that denigrate women and insist on a revision of those unfair cultural prescriptions. Darko's novels continue with these debates and add to them this dimension: that of women carving out dignified images for themselves and their daughters by applying themselves to "corrective" mothering practices.

By offering reconstructive insight into the politics of mothering daughters, Darko has brought the challenges of motherhood into serious dialogue with other challenges that confront women and impede their progress. With an unflinching focus, Darko in these four novels shows that the roles of mothers make them prone to multiple transgressions. As these mothers negotiate their way through the traps that come with these transgressions, it is their daughters they disappoint—wittingly or unwittingly. In showcasing the trials of motherhood, Darko's aim does not only rest on her quest for exposure but more importantly she teaches mothers to see these trials as opportunities—opportunities energizing them to better nurture their daughters and retrieve for themselves their glorious position. The realities of our times make it necessary for these lessons to be taught and learnt so as to ensure a healthy mother-daughter bonds as well as lace the future with mothers who are well versed in the politics of mothering not only daughters but sons.

It is thus not surprising that in all four of Amma Darko's novels, realism is used. Kari Dako, Aloisius Denkabe and Helen Yitah have commented on Amma Darko's use of realism in her four novels:

In Amma Darko's novels there is no nostalgia for times gone past, the metaphorical stench from rotten entrails seeps into everything. She is generally concerned with a reality which she sets out to portray with fidelity and without idealization—the essence of every day 'normal' Ghanaian life, presented not in the classical realist sense of a quest for objective truth and accuracy but with some

exaggeration, even sensationalism, in order to establish a motif that then mediates the realistic concerns of the writings. (2006:274)

From the above lines, it is imperative that we do a background study on realism to help us understand its use in Amma Darko's novels since realism occupies a central position in these novels.

The 'Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms' traces the term 'realism' to "the effort of the novel in the nineteenth Century, particularly, in France, to establish itself as a major literary genre. The Dictionary's explication of the term realism, hinges on the realism of Balzac and the Goncourt brothers which portends that, "far from being escapist and unreal, the novel was uniquely capable of revealing the truth of contemporary life in society." This conforms to Balzac's statement that "*la société française allait être historienne. Je ne devais me faire que le secrétaire.*" Balzac's statement translates in English like this: "French (19<sup>th</sup> Century) society was becoming historical and realistic and all that one needed to do as a novelist was to be a scrupulous and faithful recorder." It is this quest for objective and truthful portrayal of life which became the yardstick for measuring "the unmistakably realistic concept of the novel." In 'A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms', there is no attempt at definition so far as the term 'realism' is concerned. The reason for this is clearly stated:

All theories of realism, however sophisticated, rest on the assumption that the novel imitates reality, and that reality is more or less stable and commonly accessible. But it is possible to conceive of the relationship between art and reality in terms of imaginative creation rather than imitation. The artist may be said to imagine, to invent a fictional world which is more than a copy of the real one. Such a shift in conceptual metaphors produces from those of the realist tradition. The emphasis moves from accuracy of representation to aspects of form—narrative structuring, symbolic pattern, linguistic complexity and so on . . . Of course all novels relate in some way to the general complex realism, but relatively few can be fully understood in the terms of the specific theory of realism . . .

So as a critical term 'realism' identifies some important characteristics of the novel form, but fails to define it . . . The art of the novel is rhetorical as well as representational; 'realism' gives us an account of only one of its dimensions.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, the important characteristic of a novel considered as 'realistic' is enumerated by Richard Chase. Chase also agrees with the conceptual positioning of 'A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms': "The art of the novel is rhetorical as well as representational and that realism gives an account of only one of its dimensions." According to Richard Chase, 'realism' has social, political, and artistic characteristics that set it apart from other genres. Among the salient characteristics that Chase makes about realism are that in a realist's novel, character takes precedence over plot. He asserts; "character is more important than action and plot . . . Characters appear in the real complexity of temperament and motive; they are in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past."

Chase also cites objective presentation as the other characteristic of the realistic novel. He asserts; "Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important. Overt authorial comments or intrusions diminish as the century progresses."<sup>34</sup>

In Wikipedia's free encyclopedia, there is an attempt at defining the term 'realism'. It is broadly defined as "the faithful representation of reality, and was focused on showing everyday quotidian

---

<sup>33</sup> Fowler, Roger. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973 pp. 155-157.

<sup>34</sup> Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Traditions*. Garden City, N.Y, Double day, 1957, [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), accessed on 25 November, 2011



activities and life, primarily among the middle or lower class society, without idealization or dramatization.”<sup>35</sup>

It must be highlighted at this point that in Amma Darko’s portrayal of the trials of motherhood as seen through mother-daughter conflicts, one finds some element of realism in her presentation.

In line with Chase’s choice of characterization as the most important characteristic of the realistic novel, Amma Darko’s novels are replete with characters who powerfully reflect the real experiences of mothers in Ghana—the dominant setting of Darko’s four novels under study. Indeed, the characters in Darko’s novels take precedence over the plot. These characters, for instance and in accordance with Chase’s prescription, appear in ‘the real complexity of temperament and motive.’ Take for example Mara, in *Beyond the Horizon* who, despite the painful and humiliating experience of prostitution and drug addiction, resolves to continue in these “killing practices” so as to gain financial independence and provide for the needs of her children and mother back home in Ghana. What about the presentation of Tika in *The Housemaid* who, despite the financial security offered her by her mother and her mother’s numerous pleas for forgiveness, blatantly refuses to forgive her mother and even carries her stubbornness to the point of refusing to let a fetus grow into a child so that her mother will never experience the joy of being a grandmother. And what can we say of Maa Tsuru in *Faceless* who resolves to continuously avail her body to be abused by irresponsible men, even though she is well aware of the fact that the children from these ‘unions’ end up on the street. Tsuru’s only reason for being ‘cheap’ is that she is a woman and needs to be wanted by a man!

---

<sup>35</sup> Wikipedia. Substantive Revision on ‘Realism’. April 16, 2010.

Then we have Ma in *Not Without Flowers* who ends up as a psychiatric case because of her beloved husband's relationship with a hot-blooded, gold-digger-of-a-girlfriend interestingly called Flower. Ma's resolve to ensure that Flower cries in repentance even after the death of Ma's husband makes the portrayal of this character a complex one in line with all the characters portrayed above.

In all four novels, there is no idealization or identification with her shared-gender. It would appear that Darko is following Chase's prescription of objective presentation as superseding idealized presentation. Amma Darko in all four novels, openly ridicules and blames members of her shared-gender who make the wrong choices and she makes them pay for their actions. In presenting objective reality, Darko feels no inhibition at all when talking about prostitution, pornography, arranged marriage, polygamy, marital rape, rebellious daughters and women's desire for sex! In all these, we see the reactions of ordinary African women who are negotiating their own space as they find themselves caught between long-cherished traditions and modern stifling oppression.

Darko's characters, like those Chase prescribes for the 'realistic' novel and like what belong to the middle or lower classes in society as they do in Balzac. Thus in *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara is from the lower class. Sekyiwa and Tika in *The Housemaid* are from the middle class just as Maa Tsuru and Fofo in *Faceless* are from the lower class. Ma and her children in *Not Without Flowers* are from the middle class. Yet all these characters are presented in line with the social expectations that go with their classes.

In terms of language, Chase points out that the language of the realistic novel needs not be heightened or poetic. He even says that novelistic diction is the natural vernacular and the tone

may be comic, satiric or matter-of-fact. Indeed, further discussions of Darko's language and tone will reveal that all of Chase's prescriptions are religiously adhered to.

The fact that Amma Darko's novels can be read as 'realistic' novels is also attested to by Kari Dako and her co-authors in their work entitled "Pawns and Players: The Women in Amma Darko's Novels." Dako and her co-authors also assert that in her presentation of her female protagonists, Amma Darko adheres to objective presentation rather than idealized presentation; 'The life stories of her female protagonists are told with no compassion and with scant show of female solidarity.'

Commenting on Darko's works as that of a realist, Dako and her co-authors observe that in Amma Darko's novels, realism does not only become a means of branding Darko's works but must be seen as an element of style, meant, as it were, to create awareness and bring about corrective behaviour:

'In Amma Darko's novels there is no nostalgia for times gone past, the metaphorical stench from rotten entrails seeps into everything. She is generally concerned with a reality she sets out to portray with fidelity and without idealization – the essence of everyday 'normal' Ghanaian life, presented not in classical realist sense of quest for objective truth and accuracy but with some exaggeration, even sensationalism, in order to establish concerns of the writings. In this respect, her 'realism' is reminiscent of that of her male compatriot Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, whose representation of Ghanaian reality is mediated through the metaphors of decay, filth and defecation; what Gikandi (1987:74) describes as confronting 'the rotten underbelly of society.' (p.283)

Dako and her co-authors' observations agree both with the explication of the term 'Realism' in 'A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms' and Chase's prescription of what characteristics a realistic novel should have.

In 'A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms', the explication of realism ends with an assertion that "The languages of the novel are too varied to be subsumed under the model of direct report."

It is true then for Dako and co-authors (2006:274) to assert that in Darko's novel "the essence of everyday 'normal' Ghanaian life" is not presented "in the classical realist sense of a quest for objective truth."

By conceding that there are instances of exaggeration and even sensationalism in Darko's novels, Dako and her co-authors agree with the 'Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms' argument;

But it is possible to conceive of the relationship between art and reality in terms of imaginative creation rather than imitation. The artist may be said to imagine, to invent a fictional world which is more than a copy of the real one. Such a shift in conceptual metaphors produces attitudes to the novel, and perhaps even novels with quite different priorities from those of the realist tradition. The emphasis – moves from accuracy of representation to aspects of form – narrative structuring, symbolic patterning, linguistic complexity and so on. (p.156)

Also Dako and co-authors' observation that in Darko's novels one finds objective portrayal, less idealization and ordinary characters (in lower and middle classes) which they refer to as 'normal Ghanaian life' is a reflection of Chase's prescription of some important characteristics of the realistic novel. The ultimate objective, inter alia, is to ensure that there is a healthy relationship between mothers and their daughters which translates into these daughters desiring to mentor their mothers whilst at the same time publicly appreciating their mothers.



## CHAPTER TWO

### MERCHANDISING THE FEMALE BODY: A MOTHER'S STRATEGY AT DEALING WITH THE TRIALS OF MOTHERHOOD IN BEYOND THE HORIZON.

In *Beyond The Horizon*, the first-person narrative point of view is employed. Through the use of the first-person point of view, readers are made to view circumstances and events through the eyes and perceptions of Mara. This injects objectivity, adds to reality and enables the thought processes of the reader to focus on the trials of motherhood. The constant use of personal pronouns such as 'I' and 'me' reinforces Mara's claim as the owner of her story. The sequence of the plot and events is also made to revolve around Mara such that the story literally moves with her. For instance when Mara travels to Germany, readers no more get to know of what goes on in the lives of Mara's children or even in the life of Mama Kiosk. The situation of the narrator—protagonist—right in the centre of the plot continually directs our attention to her ordeals first as a woman, then as a mother. Darko takes us through the life of Mara, a sweet, naïve village girl who goes through exploitation at the hands of her husband. Her ordeal transforms her from a hard-working wife to a consummate prostitute bent on trading her body to men in order to cater for the needs of her children and mother back home.

This pathetic story is told us by Mara the protagonist. A mother of two, Mara's marriage to her husband Akobi communicates to us the extent to which patriarchy can render women as beings conditioned only to suffer abuse and denigration. Sitting in a room at the outskirts of Munich, Germany, Mara tells us about her broken finger and the chilling cold that has gripped her soul because of the abusive manner to which her body is put to use by her male clients. We understand why Mara is more concerned about the cold that has gripped her soul than the cold

temperature in her room. This metaphorical cold has seeped into her soul and rendered her indifferent to the fact that she is dying because of prostitution and her strong addiction to cocaine.

However, Mara contradicts herself by confessing that “I’ve still got lots of feelings in me, though sometimes I’m not sure if they aren’t the wrong ones.”(p.1) A cold person does not show much emotion, yet Mara tells us that she cries at times. This kind of situational irony illustrates the confused mind of Mara whose status as a mother, a prostitute and neglected wife speaks volumes about the trials of motherhood. It is the coldness to which her soul has been rendered which binds this mother, making it difficult for her to make those informed choices that would have saved her life and make her mother her children well. It is only a cold person who can describe herself as “this bit of garbage”. She considers herself as so wasted that even when she has made enough money to go back home and see to her children she still chooses to whore her body because she is full of rot.

As Mara engages in this contradiction between self-pity and indifference, she goes back in time through the use of a flashback to recount how she metamorphosed from a naïve village girl to a prostitute in Germany.

This kind of plot holds an important place in feminine writings. *L’écriture féminine* is a strand of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the early 1970s. *L’écriture féminine* literally refers to women writing which emphasizes the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Chantal Chawaf, Cathérine Clément and Julia Kristeva are considered as the foundational theorists of *l’écriture féminine*.

The focus of these theorists had been on analyzing the ways in which meaning is produced by language. The conclusion for example of Russ C. Murfin, is that language, as we commonly think of it, is a decided male realm; consequently it only represents a world from the male point of view.

We particularly single out Hélène Cixous, one of the most versatile and radical voices in the contemporary French feminist for our discussion on *l'écriture féminine*. Hélène Cixous is acknowledged as the theorist who first coined *l'écriture féminine* in her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in 1975. In this essay, she maintains:

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and history—by her movement. (1998:1454)

Cixous sees the reaction of a body to her speech as being a threshold encapsulating both meaning and form. She argues:

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering (if she hasn't painfully lost her wind). She doesn't "speak", she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. (1998:1457)

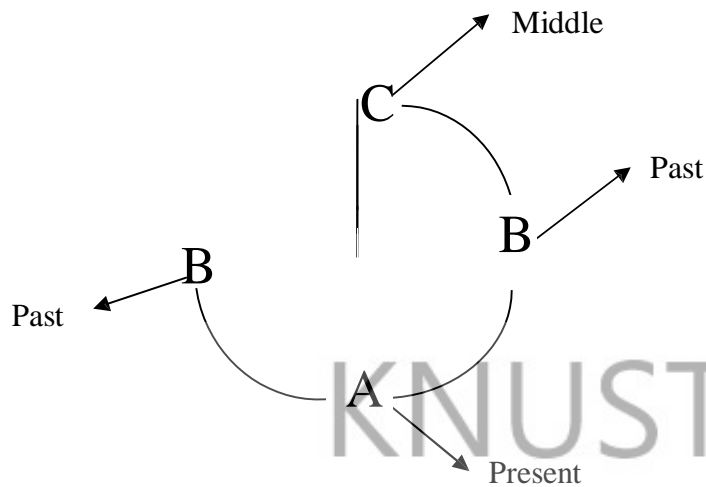
This manner of speaking reinforced by body gestures deviates from the linear form of writing. It injects complexities and distortions into the form of the speech and this form of speech, according to Cixous, need to be incorporated into women's writing. She explicates further:

In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech, even when "theoretical" or "political", is never simple or linear or "objectified", generalized: she draws her story into history. (1998:1457-1458)

The reader notices a shift in emphasis from the linear plot to the non-linear plot which places experience before language. *L'écriture féminine* thus places experience before language and privileges non-linear, cynical writing that evades, in the words of Eliane Showalter (1986:249), “the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric systems.” The linear plot obviously is unpopular with the theorists of *l'écriture féminine* since, according to the proponents of this theory, it only promotes the interest of men. This linear plot is what Aristotle prefers. In his *Poetics*, he points out that the episodic or circular plot (as we may put it) is the worst form of all plots: “Of the simple plots and actions, the episodic are the worst and what I mean by episodic plot is a plot in which the episode’s follow each other without regard for the laws of probability or necessity.” (Golden, 1968:45) Aristotle’s disregard for the episodic/circular plot is manifested in the nineteenth century criticism for works by writers such as Feilding, Defoe, Woolf.

The episodic cyclical plot is regarded as the antithesis of the linear plot. Contrary to this view, we believe that events need not be narrated in chronological form. The narrative can start in the middle, come back to the past and then to the present and also to past and finally to the middle as some Francophone African writers have attempted to do with their stylistic innovations and/or revolutions following Independence. This stylistic iconoclasm betrays the writers’ desire to “de-colonize” the French language by abandoning the notion of linearity in the novel for example. Graphically, we can have a story starting at C and then going back to B and then to A and then continuing and ending at C. This is how Darko’s plots look like:





*L'écriture féminine* privileges this kind of cyclical writing because it injects flexibility into women's writing. Peter Barry (2002:126) confirms the limited nature of linear writing: "the female writer is seen as suffering the handicap of having to use a medium (prose writing) which is essentially a male instrument fashioned for male purpose." *L'écriture féminine* thus, is an antithesis of masculine writing and functions as a medium through which women writers can escape the restrictions imposed on plot style by male writers.

Amma Darko's novels, to a very large extent, illustrate this kind of writing which privileges the non-linear or cyclical plot over the linear plot. This work's emphasis is though on the trials of motherhood, however a little discussion of Darko's use of the circular plot will help us understand that the form of the plot—its circular/non-linear nature, actually reflects the challenges of mothers and even daughters.

The narratives of Darko, as we have pointed out already, betray a penchant for the circular plot. The discursive and meandering plot is privileged above the linear plot. Her narratives moves between scenes present and past and this explains the abundant use of flashbacks in the novels.

The narrative of *Beyond The Horizon*, like its predecessors, slips into the circular/non-linear method. In the first chapter, there is a huge leap in the narrative. Mara, a sophisticated prostitute wasting away in far-off Germany, narrates her ordeal at the hands of her clients. After describing her ordeal at the hands of her “best payer”, the narrative makes a huge leap by recounting the events leading to her marriage to her abusive husband Akobi. Thus the present is interrupted and we are taken back into the past—the beginning of Mara’s life and her entry into a marriage that symbolizes her doom. From the last line of page three to the end of page one hundred and thirty-two (132), Mara recounts her past life in neatly packaged independent episodes each of which details the trials of Mara, the mother of two. The enumeration of details relevant or even irrelevant and the description of routine activities are all designed to reflect the trials of Mara. Indeed, this digression chunk of the novel helps us to understand and agree with Mara’s decision to employ the services of a private detective to burrow into Akobi’s life and supply her with information. From the later part of page one hundred and thirty-eight (138), Mara ushers us back into a “mini present” with a bold transition “that was a year ago now.” from here she narrates her ordeal at her new brothel which includes her having to sniff cocaine and the haunting fear that her activities might be exposed at Naka:

Moreover, I have this fear that haunts me day in and day out, that if I show my face there one day out of the blue that sex video Akobi made of me clandestinely will show up there, worse still, I am now to be seen on a couple more sex videos. Home will have to remain a distant place. (p.139)

This extract demarcates the story in that it explains why Mara resolves to stay at Oves’ brothel irrespective of men’s abuse and the fact of her imminent destruction by her addiction to cocaine. It symbolizes the closing of any attempt at redemption. Mara then redirects us into the present. She talks about the management strategy of Oves and ends her story with reminiscences about

home. The belief that her two children are comfortable and enjoying the video tapes. She sends them seem to console her even though these are illusive. Obviously the beginning of this story actually starts from its end.

The African view of time is more cyclic than linear. The trials of Mara are circulatory for there seems to be no stoppage to her trials. The circular plot of Darko's *Beyond The Horizon* and the other novels is a natural reflection of the African belief that past, present and future are woven in a continuous link. (Mbiti, 1969:21)

Readers see a thread weaving the events together. Each event demonstrates a strain of trial that confronts mothers. However, the fact that there are opportunities for escape even within each strain of trial reveals that Mara really has no excuses to accept her trials and even elect to allow these trials to kill her. We understand Darko's choice of the non-linear/circular plot, because with its use, Darko succeeds in portraying that the trials of motherhood are not time-bound, they are timeless—mothers have been on trial in the past, are on trial in the present and will be on trial in the future. The use of the non-linear plot only urge mothers to quicken themselves and refuse to be made to suffer these trials. The assertive mind need not fear embarrassment. A brush with an embarrassing past might be painful yet redemptive if such an embarrassment holds the key to mother's good health and freedom from patriarchal structures. Only mothers on trial can stop this cyclical trend of abuse. The non-linear plot method used by Darko helps readers to make sense of the jumbled sequence of events because they inform us about events that took place prior to the action of the novel.

Though it might appear that many people close to Mara have 'sinned' against Mara, the observant reader is cautious when the challenge has to do with absolving Mara of blame. Though

we cannot ignore the fact that Mara's parents, her husband, her male clients and prostitute friends, all contribute to Mara's tragedy, Mara could have 'escaped' the effects of their actions had she heeded the advice of Mama Kiosk, and even the warnings of her own conscience. Mara indulges in her own escapist proclivities. Escapism is probably the main stylistic feature adopted in the telling of the story. All the other stylistic features used by the author in telling the story is to highlight Mara's proclivity to blame her ordeals either on the gods of Naka, Akobi or her mother. These characters who contribute to Mara's downfall are there only to strengthen Darko's bold attempt at criticizing her protagonist for not exercising that kind of 'mind control' which would have enabled her to see through the schemes of her destroyers.

Mara's troubles begin when she is given in to marriage by her father. Akobi, Mara's husband, has other reasons for marrying Mara besides the satisfaction of his desires and the need for a help mate. Mara tells us that Akobi had a dream, and his marrying her is dictated by his belief that Mara would play the role she plays in that dream. She refuses to wake up to the reality of Akobi's cruelty despite the cautions from Mama Kiosk.

Unfortunately for Mara, she executes Akobi's dream so well that Akobi adds other roles to the original. Mara's refusal to resist the abuse of her husband becomes so predominant in the novel that it almost becomes a character flaw. This is Darko's strategy at arousing in her readers a feeling of scorn towards Mara—a measure calculated to make readers refrain from imitating Mara's life-style. The whole novel is an ironic portrait of a mother's seeming attempt at emancipating herself from her abusive husband. The irony of the situation however, is that, while she intends to blame Akobi for her present state of affairs, she forgets to consider that her own



role in her pathetic situation is probably far more than Akobi's role, and for that matter, the role of any single individual in her pathetic situation.

The sordid aspect of Mara's story is that even with money and a five-year visa that could enable her to visit her children in Africa, Mara still refuses to take her chances, she still elects to imbibe cocaine, whore her body to men for money and just excuses her behaviour with a trite explanation: "I am fast sinking into a place hotter than hell. But I know this. And that is why I have decided before I sink too deep I will make as much money as possible for my mother and sons back home." (p.139)

The short sentence by which Mara claims to have knowledge of her situation is really out of place. If she knows as she claims, why is she still bent on dying rather than going back home? The answer to this question leads us to the major thematic concern of this novel. Patriarchy thrives solely on the inability of some women to imagine a life without the controllership of men. When Akobi leaves for Germany, Mara becomes "horrified" at the thought of forgetting Akobi from whom she has tasted various shades and colours of abuse. She explains to us that the reason behind her desire for Akobi's presence:

'What was it going to be like living without Akobi's dominance, the very dominance I so feared and loathed? Was I capable of being a master even unto myself? I just was so used to being the servant. Ah, spirits of the land, I so feared this change; and this fear it was (I think) that made me want Akobi back, that made me wish and desire this presence. And that probably was why I cried so.' (p.44)

Mara's mental effort at understanding her need for Akobi is captured by the words in the parenthesis '(I think).' The fact that this part of Mara's thought process is captured in parenthesis even points to how wrong her thought is, for what is in the parenthesis is less important to the

rest of the sentence. The real reason for her desire is that Mara cannot live outside the sphere of men's control. This same fear explains why Mara continues to allow her male clients to continue with their abuse of her body. This consciousness that patriarchy can rid women of their self-will to escape abuse becomes the leitmotif in *Beyond The Horizon*.

Mara's fear of seeing herself without a 'lord' makes her turn herself in to Oves' brothel. Judging Mara's decision to move to Oves' brothel, Amma Darko makes Mara to describe her own move as being from "frying pan to fire"—from Scylla to Charybdis as it were! And even though Mara understands this burning metaphor, she still moves in because, for her, life without a male lord is unimaginable. At Oves' brothel, Mara's situation gets worse, even though she makes more money and none is sent to Akobi, she gets hooked up onto cocaine and cannot escape even when she experiences its burning effects; "... Oves gives us 'snow' to sniff to make us high. Now I can't go through a day without sniffing 'snow'. I am hooked on it. I am fast sinking into a place hotter than hell." (p.139)

The rather hyperbolic comparison of her deterioration to hell fire only emphasizes the wickedness of Oves yet Mara refuses to see that. This Oves who treats his snow-white Siamese cat with so much affection rather maltreats the females under his roof. All these prostitutes including Mara forgets that Oves' ability to make money is tied to their ability to please men in bed and that is why he gives them cocaine—to keep them in business. Mara considers her stay at Oves' brothel as a punishment; however, she refuses to see that it is more than a punishment; it is really a devaluation of her whole being in that a Siamese cat is even more important to Oves than Mara and her colleagues. While he strokes the cat 'delicately', he feeds them with cocaine and ensures the perpetual use of their bodies. Mara stays at Oves' brothel only reiterates Darko's

theme that Mara can only survive or thrive on the suffering from men. Once women decide never to allow themselves to be abused, patriarchy and all its ramifications will no longer hold sway.

Akobi, Mara's husband forces Mara into prostitution and exploits her. The matter is even more complicated because even though Mara is aware that selling her body to men and sniffing cocaine daily will hasten her death, she is still resolved to practise these vices just because of her obsession to earn a lot of money and also her desire to avenge the trials he has unleashed onto her. Interestingly, Mara's trials increase upon her arrival in Germany. Amma Darko seizes every opportunity in this novel to illustrate how corrupt and despicable a so-called 'developed' country can be. In Germany, precisely Hamburg, nude pictures are openly show-cased on billboards. Perhaps it is attractive to be a prostitute, a pornography-inspired girl or even a pimp. The situation is so appalling yet infectious that within a matter of a couple of months, a wife and a mother who even feels shy to know that another person is aware of her sexual experience with her husband, turns into an icon of a prostitute.

The result is a dramatic fall in morals which soon translates into addiction to cocaine and a resolve to die rich! Vivien, a once-naïve village girl and friend of Mara, is not ashamed to announce to Mara that she is so addicted to hashish that she is into prostitution just to make more money to buy more hashish for herself and her soldier husband, Marvin. Vivien, like Mara, sojourns in Germany with her husband. She, like Mara, is forced into prostitution by her husband, Osey. Meanwhile, all the money she makes goes into Osey's personal account which he uses to make life comfortable for his German wife. Vivien's knowledge of Osey's exploitative ways gives her the courage to get rid of Osey and move into serious prostitution business through which she meets Marvin. The question is: why are these women (Mara and

Vivien) reluctant to change their lives for the better after it had dawned on them that they are being cheated? Perhaps the answer lies somewhere between their desire to tie their apron-strings to the men who made their journey to Europe possible, or their greed, which influences them to acquire so much money, damning the consequences.

One of the trials of motherhood is seen in Mara's practice of prostitution. Mara tells us how she becomes a prostitute. As soon as she lands in Germany, she is made aware that her husband is married to a European woman and so, automatically, she has to play the role of a sister-in-law in the house of her own husband. Her trials continue when her job as a house help with a German family ends abruptly and her husband clandestinely introduces her to her next job, prostitution. Mara's moral deterioration takes only a short time. Within a month, she has become so used to her trade that at peak times she could engage in sex with as many as seven men in a day! When she gets to know that Akobi is using all the money she makes to pay for Comfort's rent and house-building for her at her hometown, Mara's skill at prostitution enables her to make enough money to hire the services of a private detective! With the information from the detective, Mara unleashes her fury at Akobi. The result is that Akobi is put into jail.

Though Mara could have returned to her village after taking her revenge on Akobi, she still resolves to practise prostitution because she feels that she is an embodiment of all that is degrading in a woman, and a mother. Instead of coming up with some strategies to end her predicament, she rather plunges herself into it, rationalizing that she is defeated by her trials.

Darko's *Beyond The Horizon* is interesting in the way it differentiates between the traditional way of life and the modern way of life of a wife and mother. Even though the inadequacies of both are revealed, the author invariably shows her preference for the traditional life. Take for



instance these two extracts, the first revealing the excesses in the traditional systems and the second revealing the excesses in the modern system. Even the language used reveals the author's preference!

Naka was a farming village and Akobi's father, like most men in the village, was a farmer too. But unlike most men in the village, he was also an undertaker. And people feared him because he was a man who seldom issued threats but pitilessly carried out those he issued. A man who once shocked the entire village and beyond when he threatened to give the dying chief's linguist a 'banana funeral' because the old man owed him eight shillings and six pence, and who, true to his word, presented the corpse on the funeral day wrapped in two large banana leaves. Unscrupulous though it was, it earned him great respect. (p.4)

Blasphemy, I thought . . . Then he issued some more directions to the driver who was still laughing and spraying saliva and he took another bend where we were suddenly confronted by a poster of a ravishingly beautiful white woman, a perfect blond, in a slip sitting on a stool with legs wide apart, eyes cunningly slanted, tongue calculatingly out and the tip upturned between snow-white teeth, just touching the upper scarlet lip seductively. Further down, the right forefinger just grazed her genitals. I turned my eyes away, so ashamed, so disgusted, so scared and so unsure. Osey, obviously enjoying my dilemma, said, 'This here is the Lord's own anointed street of Hamburg, Mara; His Most Revered Saint Pauli. Here are the cream of Germany's Mary Magdalenes, Mara. And when you receive blessings here, then fear no foe, for then there ain't no Messiah's feet in this whole wide world you cannot wash!' (pp.68/69)

These two extracts reveal how the author masters juxtaposition as a means to help readers glean meaning even from setting. By contra-distinguishing between life in the village of Naka and Germany, Darko reveals the apparent rot in Germany life. There is therefore no wonder that Mara, a naïve village girl, metastasizes into a prostitute-sophisticate in Germany. The extract on Naka village speaks only of vengeance; however, the extract on Hamburg, Germany, speaks of profanity and blasphemy. The use of juxtaposition here strongly suggests an association between moral denegeneracy and migration/environment. Indeed Mara's stay in Germany also influenced her resolve to continue to whore out her body. A country where profane pictures are boldly displayed, Mara felt no shame in her profession. This juxtaposition of two different geographical

settings subtly draws attention to the manner in which Africans' contact with the West, when not harnessed properly, can have negative effects on the morals of Africa's people.

The statement of the novel is clear. The laxity in morals, represented by the portrait of a prostitute on a poster, is more offensive than the wickedness of the Naka chief's linguist. Mara becomes an icon of a prostitute because in Germany, prostitution is more of a profession than a crime. The environment is so permissive that Mara easily throws away the morals she's been brought up on in Naka and becomes a prostitute who can even boast about her profession. She says; "Yes! I've used myself and have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer." (p.1)

Amma Darko's first novel is ominously entitled *Beyond The Horizon* as Darko immediately signals to her readers that there is something to be expected beyond 'this horizon'. The Collins Advanced Dictionary (2009) explains the non-count meaning of the word 'horizon' as "the limits of what you want to do or of what you are interested or involved in." Linked to Darko's title then, *Beyond The Horizon* symbolizes the antithesis of Mara's expectation of what she can get and achieve once she arrives in Germany. These include televisions, radios, fridges, carpets, cars, a home of their own in Naka, owner(s) of corn-grinding machines, dough-mixers, rice harvesters and the proprietor of a sewing school. For once Mara got to that 'horizon' (which is symbolized by Germany and all she expects to get), she realizes that not only is she not going to get those things, her very being is going to be reduced to nothing. Mara's last words tell us that really there is nothing *Beyond The Horizon*; "As for myself, there is nothing dignified and descent left of me to give them." (p.140)

Connected to larger issues, Mara's disillusionment once in Germany speaks to Africa's continued disillusionment in this era of globalization—indeed the more Africa expects to gain

from her so-called Development Partners, the more she realizes that these Development Partners are only interested in Africa because they can feed on her resources. Kolawole nails it on the right head:

As many nations acquire independence, post-colonial issues continue to mediate the reality of the African continent. Post-colonial Mr. Big is revealed with his hydra-head as multi-nationals, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, among other agencies that still control African socio-political and economic status. Women as a group have been more influenced by the impact of these agencies than has any other single group. (1997:194-195)

In fact recently in Ghana, an IMF loan given to Ghana forbade the government sector from employing new workers to the civil service for at least two years. The effect of this dictate on a nation battling unprecedented numbers of unemployed graduates is not far-fetched. The big question is why accept this loan in the first place? The answer to this question is that like Mara's fear that she cannot live without the control of men, so is the Ghana government's fear that her refusal to go in for IMF loans will translate into unfinished projects and cause a slow down in development. There is the need for a kind of self-assertion. What Mara and for that matter Ghana needs to do is to overthrow their fear and build capacity through a careful management of her/their own resources even if these are meager or paltry.

Readers, however, are disillusioned after hearing Mara's pathetic story on the opening page of the novel. In this novel which is divided into fifteen chapters, Darko, through a skillful interweaving of the first-person narrative, dialogue and other literary devices, dramatizes the loneliness, pain and total loss of control of a mother who opts to survive through prostitution. *Beyond The Horizon* is cast in the form of a flashback. The novel does not follow a chronological sequence. The events are presented as they tumble in and out of the narrator—protagonist's mind. Thus we have a kind of present time within which past events make strong representation.

Using the first-person narrative, Mara describes herself as a whore, sitting in front of her oval mirror and recounts her ordeal at the hands of her male clients who pay her well, but brutalize her body in the process of sexual intercourse.

The title then is appropriate because Mara's illegal emigration to Germany, her so called "horizon", turns out to be one hell of a nightmare in which a naïve wife and mother of two boys is 'forced' to become an icon of a prostitute and a girl of pornography.

Through the use of flashback, Mara recalls to her readers the history told her by her mother and her god-mother, Mama Kiosk. There is obviously nothing beyond this horizon. In fact, the word 'horizon' is suggestive of "actual peak", "apex", "best achievement" or better still "the climax". Usually, in literature, whatever comes after the climax is the anticlimax which is preceded by a falling or count-down action. It is no wonder then that Mara's predicament starts on arrival in Germany. Once in Germany, Osey, the African agent who brings Mara to Germany, invites Mara to watch a so-called 'action film' while waiting for the train that would take them to Hamburg where Mara's husband, Akobi, lives. However, this 'action film' turns out to be a pornographic film; and to Mara's shock and disgust, she sees her "own sisters" partake in this exercise:

This action film that I saw horrified me and left me sitting in my seat heated up with my mouth open. The people on the screen, they were . . . that is to say, they were several men and women, all together about fifteen or so; among them, black women, Africans, and they were doing it there . . . there on the screen! They were actually doing the thing plain plain on the screen before everybody. And there was no trace of shame or whatever on their faces. Not one bit. It was a shock for me, my first shock, my first horror. (p.6)

Mara's naiveté comes out clearly through her use of the pronoun 'it' to replace the antecedent "sex". Mara's apparent delay in pronouncing the word 'sex' and her subsequent replacement of 'sex' with 'it' reveals that she is actually not used to open display of sex on screen. Little does



Mara, mother and wife, know that she is being given her first lesson in prostitution and pornography.

Mara's uneasiness at naming the sexual act as pornography is not strange for, after all, the word pornography itself is not very easy to define. The Webster's Dictionary explains pornography as obscene literature, photographs, paintings, etc intended to cause sexual excitement.

Longino's definition of the term pornography, gives a further explication of the term. It states:

Pornography, then, is verbal or pictorial material which represents or describes sexual behaviour that is degrading or abusive to one or more of the participants in such a way as to endorse the degradation. Behaviour that is degrading or abusive, includes physical harm and abuse and physical or psychological coercion. (Lederer et al. 1980:40-54)

Longino's definition above reveals a situation in which power relations and degradation become bed fellows. It is therefore not surprising that Mara talks of being used and brutalized by men who, by dint of the fact that they have money, pay their way through her body and her soul and unleash in their practices all kinds of bodily aches and scars on her body. Bemoaning the scars on her body, Mara says:

What my mother back home in black Africa would say to these hideous traces of bites and scratches all over my neck, should she ever have the misfortune of seeing, I fear to imagine. They extend even far beyond the back of my ears, several bruises and scars left generously there by the sadistic hands of my best payers, my best spenders. (p.2)

This voluntary merchandizing and abuse of Mara's body constitute a trail on motherhood. Mara offers a rather pathetic yet bogus defense as to why she has allowed her body to be used so generously:

At Oves' brothel, I have plunged into my profession down to the marrow in my bones. There is no turning back for me now . . . I think a lot about my mother and

my two sons. Recently, I started getting so sad with the thought of them that I began pleasing my men less. And that nearly landed me in trouble with Oves, who is not as tolerant as Pompey and Kaye. And has no wife in whom I can find a trusted friend as I did in Kaye. He only has his Siamese cat. So when I am down when any of us is feeling down, Oves gives us 'snow' to sniff to make us high. Now I can't go through a day without sniffing 'snow'. I am hooked on it. I am fast sinking into a place hotter than hell. But I know this. And that is why I have decided that before I sink too deep I will make as much money as possible for my mother and sons back home. (p.139)

Mara's defense reveals a rather pathetic portrayal of the trials of motherhood, which is that for this woman called Mara, motherhood means becoming distracted from herself. Though Mara is a victim of male abuse, she is fully aware of her situation. Yet, her obsession to shower her children and mother with material things takes precedence over the need for Mara to put value on herself as a human being. Rather, she sees herself as an object reduced to function for the benefit of others.

By inserting in the narrative Mara's defense of her voluntary acceptance of abuse, Darko is not only demonstrating the trials of motherhood, she is also commenting on the destructive force inherent in self-effacing motherhood. Mara resigns herself to further abuse once she decides to engage in the sex videos. Her claim that "There is no turning back for me now"(p.139) communicates both her determination to continue making money through prostitution and the finality of her resolve to die in prostitution. This resolve conveys a mood of resignation which also agrees with Mara's tendencies to lean unto escapism anytime she has to confront her situation and make informed choices. Mara claims that she is doing all this for the sake of making enough money to sustain her children back home. Mara knows she is dying and so there is a limit to how far she can go when it comes to sustaining her children yet she is resolved and so she plunges deeper into prostitution and doping.

Amma Darko's novels are characterized by their blatant moralizing and *Beyond The Horizon* exemplifies this position. Even in a novel in which the first-person narrative voice is given prominence, Darko finds a way for Mara to moralize.

'I was an irony unto my own self. This towel I clutched intimately to myself had many a time caused the beatings, like when it stubbornly refused to dry up because the weather was damp during the night and in its wet state I offered it to Akobi in the morning. I got beaten as though it was me in control of the world's weather . . . And yet here was I clutching it to myself like a child would her favourite teddy bear. What precious wonder at all was Akobi to me that I should cry because he was gone? Didn't he make more a maid of me than a wife?' (p.44)

Mara's comparison of her behaviour to the behaviour of a child clutching a teddy bear tells us that like a child, Mara is immature and she knows it. It is this immaturity communicated to us so well by the use of this simile which Mara allows to control her to the extent of being a trial for her as a mother.

This summing-up by Mara, her pathetic story, is also the denouement of the narrative itself, it dovetails well into Mara's own reference to herself in the very first page of the story where she tells readers that the chill she feels does not have anything to do with winter or autumn but rather it is a kind of inner coldness which has gripped her soul: "it's deep inside of me that feels this chilliness, from the dejected soul my body harbours, a soul grown old from too much use of its shelter." (p.1)

It should be highlighted at this point that the 'cold' metaphor as used by Mara in the above extract speaks not only of the unfair treatment Mara experiences at the hands of men, but also of the brutal experiences she has to go through at the hands of her husband. In cold Germany, where to send goods and money home, she has to endure excruciating hardships, torture and disappointment. It must be noted that this inner feeling of cold, according to Mara, has gripped

her soul and she tells us why her soul suffers this cold: “. . . a soul grown old from too much use of its shelter.” By linking the suffering of the body to the soul, Mara expresses a basic metaphysical truth. All humans have a soul and it is this soul that, according to the Bible, lives on after death. For Mara to acknowledge that the wrong use of her body has affected her soul as to render it cold, also means that she is aware of the unfairness to which she has subjected her own soul. Importantly this ‘cold’ metaphor explains why Mara continues to whore her body to men even when she is aware of the pain, the scars and the cold dejection her soul experiences. Readers witness here a kind of “splitting-of-the-being” as Mara dichotomizes her body from her soul and talks about cold as it affects her soul not her body: “I am just in brief silky red underpants, so I’m virtually naked but that is not why I feel so cold because this coldness I feel does not grip my body so much as it does my soul.” (p.1)

Pain and indifference are what is at play here. Mara feels the pain of her used body but beyond the feeling of pain is the indifference which this pain has made of Mara. The Collins Dictionary (2009) also defines ‘soul’ as “the part of you that consists of your mind, character, thoughts and feelings.” This definition explains Mara’s refusal to take her chances when various opportunities presented themselves to her—either to go home, stop prostitution or even save herself from imminent destruction. Like her soul, her mind, her character, her thoughts and her feelings have all been rendered impermeable to suffering. We then understand why she affirms in the next line that: “Yes! I’ve used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer.” Evidence abounds here of a combination of both self-revelation and self-destruction, making Mara a realistic character in that her life mirrors the many conflicts we all go through and the many times we make the wrong choices we need not make.



The ordeal that Mara experiences is reminiscent of the ordeal that Africa and her people experienced at the hands of the colonialist who commodified Africa by selling her people as slaves to be used to economically develop Europe, after which they systematically evolved a devastating system of social and economic inequalities calculated to render Africa and her people poor. This situation made Africa so dependent on Europe that in order to survive, most African countries have to rely on grants and loans dished out to them by the IMF and other so-called ‘development partners’. Now, although the era of slavery is over, owing to harsh economic situations in many African countries, we have a situation where the majority of African youth sojourn legally or illegally in Europe with the view to acquiring wealth and property. Most of them end up like Mara. They are able to send remittances home but are so dependent on Europe that coming home seems a far-away, illusive will-o’-the wisp.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, male African writers such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Nurrudin Farah and Wole Soyinka have compared the exploitation of African women’s bodies with the European exploitation of Africa and Africans. Monica Bungaro’s observation that ‘Fiction in one way or another reflects the tensions and preoccupations at work in society’, is very true as, day in day out, hundreds of Africans migrate to Europe to seek greener pastures only to end up doing the so called “odd jobs” they would not imagine, let alone do, in their own home country.

What is painful, however, is a situation where the exploitation of African resources is carried out by an African. Like Akobi’s exploitation of Mara, so shameless was the late Sani Abacha, ex-president of Nigeria’s, exploitation of his country’s resources and its people. He stashed in Swiss

---

<sup>36</sup> Also called *ignis fatuus* or Friar’s lantern—a flitting phosphorescent light seen at night, chiefly over marshy ground, and supposed to be due to spontaneous combustion of gas from decomposed organic matter. In literature, it designates *foolish fire*, the French *feu follet*—something deluding or misleading.

banks thousands of millions of dollars. Switzerland's claim of freezing all of the late Brother Muammar Gaddafi's accounts in Swiss banks is a further proof of the economic violence unleashed on Africa. This 'rape' of Africa's resources by Africans and their surrogates, reflects in one way or the other, Mara's maltreatment and exploitation at the hands of her husband Akobi.

Perhaps Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* is an answer to Charles E. Nnolim's dismay that African Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lacks a dynamic urge—that urge which can be realized when African writers investigate challenging themes of global relevance. Nnolim's angst is expressed as follows:

The 21<sup>st</sup> century beckons Africans to embrace new challenges in this epoch of globalization . . . Our literature should no longer be contented to be fixed on our cultural moorings. Europe invaded Africa and the world with their civilization, religion and technology and all of us have since then been transfixed. What prevents the African writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from reinventing Europe and from then developing an international theme in our literature? This is the challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for African writers. (in Emenyonu, 2006:5)

In *Beyond The Horizon*, discords in mother-daughter bonds are not as pronounced as we see in the other three novels—*The Housemaid*, *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers*. However, there are enough occasions in the novel to suggest some sort of conflict between Mara and her mother, even if covertly.

A substantial portion of this novel is devoted to Mara's life in Germany where she is forced by the wicked schemes of her husband, Akobi, to metamorphose from a naïve mother and wife to an icon of a prostitute and a girl of pornography. In Germany, Mara does not like her profession which has left numerous scares and mutilations on parts of her body, yet she is resolved to stay in her trade so as to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother. Ironically, Mara's resolve to play well

her role as a single mother becomes her major flaw. This is the worst of the trials of motherhood because Mara sees motherhood as a self-effacing sacrifice requiring a mother to care for her children even if she has to die! Perhaps what makes Mara's trial so pathetic and complex is how she indulges in self-blame while at the same time she is resolved to live a lie, suffer and die as though there were no alternatives at changing her situation. Take for example the scene where Mara tries to analyze her present situation; she takes some of the blame and yet is not ready to make the necessary amends because she is afraid that her life as prostitute-cum-a-girl-of-pornography will be exposed once she gets home. But more importantly, she is resolved to ensure her sons and family live in comfort even though at a huge cost to herself:

Sometimes I am not sure whether I did the right thing or not by coming here but thank God, here at Oves', I don't have time to worry and regret it. That doesn't mean that I consider myself totally blameless either. After all, I was also party to it all even if involuntarily. And I guess my punishment for it is that I am stuck with Oves for the rest of my life. I have decided to stop thinking about ever going home. I just don't belong there any longer. Moreover, I have this fear that haunts me day in day out, that if I show my face there one day, out of the blue, that sex video Akobi made of me clandestinely will show up there, too. Worse still, I am now to be seen on a couple more sex videos. Home will have to remain a distant place. (p.139)

Mara's analysis above reveals that she is not unaware that she herself has contributed to her present predicament. She is also quick to apportion blame on those who contributed to her suffering; however, she fears exposure and cannot do without being abused for money.

Who introduced Mara to this cult of body merchandising? The discussions below will not only reveal the characters to blame but most importantly, supporting theories will be adduced to help the reader understand why people who are supposed to be relatives can constitute trials for mothers.

This thesis is of the view that the first person to introduce Mara to this cult of body merchandising is Mara's own father. Mara's reaction to her mother's "good news" was one of disappointment:

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

Obviously, Mara's father sees in his daughter's marriage a chance to strike gold. The issue of bride price and how it can influence a father's choice of a husband for his daughter(s) had been explored in the early 1970's by Afua T. Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1990). Ananse's dream of escaping from excruciating poverty drives him to betroth his only child and daughter, Anansewa, to four wealthy chiefs. Knowing very well that it is the payment of the bride price that signifies the sealing of a marriage contract, Ananse manipulates the chiefs with various appellations in order to ensure that they oil the wheels of custom by sending Anansewa and Ananse various gift. In the final analysis, it was chief-who-is-chief, who wins Anansewa's love and Ananse's respect. He performs all the customary requirements prescribed of a husband for a dead wife even though in reality he has not paid the bride price. Anansewa's return to life after a few incantations from the father opens the way for chief-who-is-chief to pay the bride price and make her his wife. Thus, chief-who-is-chief's ability to provide more money and gifts than his other three competitors wins for him Ananse's acceptance and Anansewa's love.

Mara's father, we read, virtually 'sold' Mara to marry Akobi because he needed the money paid for her dowry to pay off a debt he owed:



I don't know why of all the eligible women in the village his father chose me. I only know that the choice, for my father, could not have come at a better time. A man he owed money to had come and forcefully claimed his debt in the form of eight of father's eleven goats. So my dowry came in handy. (p.6)

No wonder Mara aptly equates her status in marriage to the status of a property, sold in exchange for money!; "Three weeks later he came straight from work on a Friday evening, arriving in Naka on Saturday, and left for the city on the same Saturday with me as his wife . . . and property!"

Earlier on in the narrative, Mara explains why she is property; "I learnt later that, drunk from palmwine and belching boisterously, he had proclaimed that he would gladly have given me away even for one goat. But like [sic] I said, Akobi's father bought me off very handsomely." (p.7)

Darko shows that fathers have property rights over their daughters and, in most cases, have the final say when issues to do with choice of husbands crop up. In all of Mara's narration, it is revealed that she had no say at all; she simply had to marry a husband chosen for her by her father even when common sense suggests that there is risk in marrying a son of a wicked father such as Akobi's father.

Indeed the misery of Mara's experience is felt by readers when we pause to reflect on the effects of the metaphorical use of 'goat' and 'property' as used by Mara's father and Mara, respectively.

In Akan culture, goat is an animal valued for its meat and its ability to procreate. For Mara's father to compare his sale of Mara, his daughter, to the sale of a goat is very pathetic; for it reveals that the ideology of patriarchy really places no value on women. Mara's dowry would

obviously be used to purchase some goats to replace the eight claimed by the man her father owed.

A piece of 'property' is anything of value, owned by someone who can exercise authority over it and use it and discard it at will. It is thus no wonder that further events in the novel, as narrated to us by Mara, reveal how Akobi uses and abuses Mara even to the extent of 'commanding' her to sell her body while he takes the profit. The effective metaphorical use of the 'goat' and 'property', then, is that it foreshadows future events in the novel and especially directs our understanding as to why Mara herself failed to come out of abuse. Like a goat, she has no right to run away from her owner, Oves, and like the property that she is, she is owned by Oves and she is stuck with him even if it means she has to die.

As indicated earlier, such behaviour from Akobi but especially Mara's father, is seen in societies where the ideology of patriarchy is upheld. Babara Katz Rothman's explication of the word 'ideology' helps us understand why Mara's father is blind to the fact that he ushers his daughter into a life of doom. Rothman asserts that;

. . . , ideology is the way a group looks at the world, the way it organizes its thinking about the world. An ideology can let us see things, but it can also blind us, close our eyes to our own lived reality, our own experiences, and our own bodies. The ideology of patriarchy, technology and capitalism gives us our vision of motherhood while they block our view, give us a language for some things while they silence us for others. (in Glenn 1994:139-140)

True to Rothman's assertions, Mara's father who has so imbibed this ideology of patriarchy is blind to the fact that the bestiary language he uses when he metaphorically compared Mara to a goat automatically reduces Mara, his daughter, to the level of an animal (and unmistakably, he, the father, to a he-goat). Rothman's explication of the effects of ideology also helps us

understand why Mara remains silent even though she knows she is going to be used as a property! Like her father, she has willingly kowtowed to the ideology of patriarchy, and sees herself as inferior. It is this inferiority complex which makes her accept to dispose of the refuse of her neighbours for “peanuts”; and it is this same inferiority complex which prevents her from relocating to Naka because she is afraid of being exposed by Akobi even though he is by this time, locked up in cells.

Rothman further explains the term patriarchy:

The term “patriarchy” is often used loosely as a synonym for “sexism,” or to refer to any social system where men rule. The term technically means “rule of fathers,” but in its current practical usage it more often refers to any system of male superiority and female inferiority . . . The ideology of patriarchal society thus goes much deeper than male dominance. It means far more than just having men in charge, or men making more decisions than women do. The ideology of patriarchy is a basic worldview, and in a patriarchal system, that view permeates all of our thinking. In our society, the ideology of patriarchy provides us with an understanding not only of the relations between women and men, but also of the relations between mothers and their children. (in Glenn, 1994:140-143)

It is also important to note here that Mara’s mother is likely to have anticipated that Mara’s marriage to Akobi is dictated not by a father’s assured belief that this son-in-law will cater very well for Mara but rather it is dictated by the fact that Akobi’s father can pay the ‘exorbitant’ bride price for his son. Mara’s mother’s refusal to consider evaluating Akobi before offering Mara the ‘good news’ also proves right Rothman’s assertion made earlier that “the ideology of patriarchy provides us with an understanding not only of the relations between women and men, but also of the relations between mothers and their children.”

Our discussion of the father as the first relation to introduce Mara to the cult of body merchandising then can be linked to Mara’s father’s belief in patriarchal ideology. Indeed, the

next time we hear of Mara's father again after he had ushered in Mara's doom in chapter one is in chapter fifteen, the last chapter, where we read that Mara's mother has won back Mara's father because Mara is financing a cement-block house for her mother in the village. Mara's father's patriarchal view of women, whether it is related to his wives or daughters, is that women must be used for his sole benefit. In this, we share the observation made by Rosemary Agonita that:

By nature, dominion is maternal for two reasons—the identity of a child's mother alone is certain, and power over a child is initially in the hands of the mother who nourishes and trains it . . . Marriage is the contract which brings about patriarchy. (1997:97)

The source of Mara's first trial is her father's belief and practice of patriarchal ideology which makes him equate Mara to one of his goats, meant to be reared and sold for cash. Having been sold by her own father then, Mara considers herself a commodity, to be used in exchange for money. This feeling is so embedded in her that she has lost all sense of self-value. She herself succinctly captures her devalued status thus: "Material things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them." (p.140)

Having lost all sense of value, Mara, like a tragic heroine, walks inexorably to her doom with only one assurance that at least she can provide a decent place of abode for her two kids. The sense of female inferiority, upheld by patriarchal ideology, renders Mara a victim who allows herself to be used for the pleasure of others, be they her abusive male clients or her children.

Mara's own mother also contributes in no small way to Mara's trials. Indeed, Mara's mother calls to mind Barbara Katz Rothman's idea in her essay, *Beyond Mothers and Father: Ideology in a Patriarchal Society*, where she reminds us "that ideologies of mothering exist not in isolation, but as part of complex ideologies that buttress male dominance (patriarchy), the



economic system of exploitation (capitalism) and privileging the mind over body (technology).”  
(in Glenn, 1994:141)

Mara’s mother had allowed her life to be shaped by patriarchal ideologies. She virtually had no mind of her own, her obsession was to please Mara’s father and the patriarchal society she belonged to, even if it called for sacrificing her daughters. Take for instance, the scene where she announces to Mara that her father has found her a husband;

I remember the day clearly. I returned from the village well with my fourth bucket of water for the day when mother excitedly beckoned to me in all my wetness and muddiness, dragged me into her hut and breathlessly told me the ‘good news.’  
‘Your father has found a husband for you’, ‘she gasped, ‘a good man!’ (p.4)

Mara’s reaction to the whole announcement reveals her shock at how her mother could just throw caution to the wind because a new in-law had been found by Mara’s father again. “All I did was grin helplessly because I clearly remembered the same good news as this that mother had given my older sister two years before. Found, too, by father. And my sister was a wreck.”  
(p.4)

Form the narrative, there is strong proof that Mara’s mother is aware of her first daughter’s wrecked marriage and should have been sensible enough to probe issues further before accepting the second choice of a husband from Mara’s father. Indeed, Mara’s description of her reaction as ‘All I did was grin helplessly’ reveals that Mara herself was disappointed by the rather irresponsible behaviour of her parents. The effective use of oxymoron as seen in ‘grin helplessly’ attests to Mara’s disappointment and lack of control. Also the ‘abundant’ use of pauses in the rather short sentence; ‘Found, too, by Father.’ reveals Mara’s disappointment, for in a sentence of just four words, we count two pauses. These pauses reveal disappointment and frustration as

Mara has to pause to remember her sister's plight and connect it to what might happen to her in future. Here we have a clear example of premonition which foreshadows later events in the story.

It is thus not surprising that Mara could ask her mother "who is he?" . . . "Father's choice for me?" However, Mara's mother's answer to this penetrating question betrays a mother's total dependence on patriarchal ideology: "Oh, dear child, mother said, you know your father would consider it rude if I disclosed him to you before he did. Dress up, she urged me, I am certain he will send for you soon." (p.4)

Obviously, Mara's mother is so subjected to patriarchal control that she dares not disclose the kind of man her own daughter is supposed to marry even though she knows him too well. The fact that Mara's mother considers it right to hide such sensitive information from her 'dear' daughter for fear of trampling on patriarchal rights, proves then that patriarchal ideology really blinds women to sensitive situations demanding careful analysis and action.

For Mara's mother to take sides irresponsibly for her husband about the sale of her daughter to a man whose background is unknown, constitutes Mara's greatest trial in that the mother who should have protected her little "chick" rather encouraged the "eagle" to prey on her. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2004:71) has aptly stated the role of a mother vis-à-vis her children in the family. She says: "Without a mother as their rallying point and mentor, siblings are thrown into fractious disarray, thus falling easy prey to negative forces."

Darko shows that though Mara's father made the choice of a husband for Mara the mother should never be left out of the blame game as evidenced by Oduyoye's statement above. Had Mara's mother taken her time to discuss Akobi with Mara and advised her, Mara perhaps, would

not have ‘fallen easy prey’ to the exploitation of her father and Akobi. Because their mother failed to mentor them in the area of the choice of a husband, Mara and her sister’s marriages are destined to hit the rock.

It is not only in the area of choice of a husband that Mara’s mother failed to mentor her children, especially concerning Mara. Evidence from the novel attests to the rather myopic advice given to Mara by her mother before Mara leaves for her husband’s house.

Her mother’s advice that the greatest duty of a wife is to please her husband and ensure his well-being is a rather myopic advice. Received opinion has it that reciprocity is like an assurance policy which deserves to be renewed. Thus, Akobi should have considered pleasing Mara in order for Mara to please him as well. Oduyoye opines that in their formative years, girls were tutored in such a way as to prepare them for their future home and in this, the cardinal principle is that as a wife/woman, her life should of necessity revolve around her man and the community without which all her achievements come to naught:

As is commonly agreed, traditional non-formal education (including the telling of these tales) aims at preparing a girl for her future home so that she does not become useless in society or a liability to her future husband. A woman’s life is defined as a male centered and community oriented; she achieves nothing if she fails in this respect. (2004:53)

Oduyoye is however quick to advise her women that;

Survival in such a situation depends on how skillfully a woman can manipulate circumstances to her advantage. Her status as non-being is turned into authentic being, as helplessness and powerlessness are construed as virtues. One obvious way to survive may be seen in the devices women use to ensure that they are not totally deprived of some little comforts. (2004:54)

Oduyoye (2004:54) then warns that it should not be said that women in Africa are resigned to the status of “double losers,” as they, too, can learn from Ananse’s love of life. Oduyoye’s

observation and caution direct our focus not only to Mara's refusal to apply skill in her marriage to Akobi but also to Mara's mother's 'refusal' to teach her daughter the skills needed to survive.

There is enough proof in *Beyond The Horizon* to suggest that Mara's own mother is so obsessed with winning her polygamous husband's love that she obviously comes out as a bad mentor to Mara. In the scene below, Mara had obviously run back to her parent's house due to the maltreatment meted out to her by Akobi. However, she is met with so little sympathy that even her mother fails to take notice of her predicament because Mara's father has switched off his affection from Mara's mother and his other wives to a young hot-blooded widow:

I arrived in the village next day but met with little sympathy, as I had always feared. My father was not even interested to see me because he had taken on yet another wife, a young hot-blooded widow who has so filled his head that mother even cried to me that she was certain that their youngest rival had done juju on father to cause him to forget and disregard his other wives. (p.28)

In character with her superstitious life-style, Mara's mother runs to a juju-man to nullify the potency of the supposed juju: "And so convinced was she that she had even been to the medicine man to ask him to perform a counter juju and as a result was wearing heavy waist-beads of cowries and dried bones." (p.28)

The weight and recognition given to superstitious belief is captured several times in this novel. However, the language used to attest to people's belief in superstition reveals Amma Darko's indifference vis-à-vis such beliefs.

The sentence which begins with "And so convinced was she . . ." reveals Darko's resentment just as Darko allows the ebony doll given Mara by her mother as a symbol of protection to be stolen and sold off with ease by Akobi.



I looked and searched and found nothing; neither the jewellery nor my new cloths. And the costly waist beads I inherited from my grandmother when she died I didn't find it. Plus other little things, all of which were gone, even the little delicate ebony carving mother had given me the first time I was leaving for the city as my protector. (p.31)

The description of the ebony carving as 'little and delicate' clearly establishes Darko's scorn for this belief in the ebony carving. Obviously, the 'little and delicate' ebony carving could not protect its own self from being stolen and sold, how could it have protected Mara! Clearly, Darko's use of language here reveals the author's attempt at liberating herself from this tendency to lean on superstition. In her third novel entitled *Faceless*, Darko, through the analysis of the wise eighty-four-year old Naa Yomo, negates the efficacy of superstition thus:

"You know," Naa Yomo began, "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 the capability 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. And that is why he died a good man." (p.120)

The metaphorical comparison of superstition with the seed of a creeping plant that grows with speed and usurps the power of its immediate environment, reveals how quickly superstition destroys one's ability to progress in life.

The language used in this extract then clearly reveals that anyone who believes in superstition is not only foolish but also is his or her own enemy as it turns out that his or her lack of reasoning and poor sense of responsibility will definitely result in destruction. Indeed, further discussions of Mara's trials reveal that Mara's belief in superstition itself constitutes a trial for her and is obviously one of the many reasons why she ends up being destroyed.

Although there is nothing wrong for a woman to think about the welfare of her mother and her children, Mara's desire to see her mother and children live a comfortable life also becomes a trial for her. The following extracts tell of how Mara's mother's image implants itself deeply in Mara's psyche and contributes to her resolve to destroy herself in order to ensure her mother's survival. The question is: why is Mara not just as concerned about her father, brothers, sisters or other relatives back home in Naka? The obvious explanation is that throughout Mara's life, her mother had taken over the care of Mara's children and naturally this kind gesture endears her to Mara so much so that anytime she thinks of her children, she also thinks of their 'god-mother', her mother. In fact, right from the start of her story, Mara's mother takes centre stage as she elects to care for the children so Mara can join Akobi in Germany. On page two, Mara tells us that she is afraid even to imagine that her mother might one day witness the brutalities imprinted on her (Mara's) skin by her (Mara's) male clients: "What my poor mother back home in black Africa would say to these hideous traces of bites and scratches all over my neck, should she ever have the misfortune of seeing them, I fear to imagine." (p.2)

Obviously, Mara is more scared about the fact that her mother would be worse off should she ever see the scars than about the fact that these scars, like tattoos, have left on her indelible memories of sexual abuse and wickedness.

On one occasion, Mara's thought process is once again interrupted by thoughts of her mother and sons. Mara tells us that memories of her mother and sons make her ineffective in her whoring business, and that resolved as she is to make money to ensure their comfort, she has to depend on cocaine to survive. Mara as a prostitute is more of a performer than a spoilt woman. Even though she admits that she is so used to prostitution she also acknowledges that she is a mother and

thoughts about her children disturb her. She performs the act of prostitution by adopting the trappings of the trade. Yet she cannot feel any fulfillment. The loneliness and thoughts of her children become her major trials and she depends on cocaine to forget home even if temporarily. The pathetic outcome is that Mara becomes addicted to cocaine and this addiction causes her to deteriorate.

I am so much a whore now that I can no longer remember or imagine what being a non-whore is. I have problems recollecting what I was like before I turned into what I am now. I think a lot about my mother and my two sons. Recently, I started getting so sad with the thought of them that I began pleasing my men less. And that nearly landed me in trouble with Oves who is not as tolerant as Pompey and Kaye. And he has no wife in whom I can find a trusted friend as I did in Kaye. He only has his Siamese cat. So when I am down, when any of us is feeling down, Oves gives us 'snow' to sniff, to make us high. Now I can't go through a day without sniffing 'snow'. I am hooked on it. I am fast sinking into a place hotter than hell. But I know this. And that is why I have decided that before I sink too deep, I will make much money as possible for my mother and sons back home. (p.139)

A rather tragic portrayal of a whore's life, this extract is nonetheless revealing as well as interesting owing to Darko's display of a rich use of language and imagery. For Mara to survive in her 'trade', she has to depend on cocaine 'nicely' referred to as "snow" because they both share the same colour and texture. "Snow" is cold and can even lead to death. Should a person come into contact with it for a long time? The fact that both snow and cocaine possess destructive powers irrespective of their 'pure' colour is a paradox. The reference to 'snow' also communicates to us the major setting of the novel. Mara is in cold Germany. The metaphorical link between snow and cocaine is appropriate also because both destroy the 'user' over a period of time.

One major revelation that comes through is that whores are drug addicts and drugs are used to make them forget, even if temporarily, about abuse and sin. The second revelation is that, Mara

comes through as a woman who prefers an easier approach to solving problems. Rather than making an effort at recollecting what she was like before turning into a whore, and probably deciding on a new beginning, Mara prefers to get addicted to cocaine so that she can continue practising prostitution and making money to the detriment of her own being.

Darko subtly advises her readership that the trials of motherhood can be solved by seeking help from reliable friends as to how to solve these problems. Perhaps if Oves had had a wife like Kaye, she would have advised Mara or prevented her from getting addicted to cocaine.

Mara's owner at Oves' brothel is referred to as overseer owing to the oversight responsibilities he has on the prostitutes. He is not married we are told, but he has a Siamese cat he is fond of. This illustrates wickedness, for Oves loves his cat, an animal, more than his fellow human beings. Earlier on Mara tells us about how gently Oves treats his Siamese cat; "Oves comes in holding his snow-white Siamese cat which he is stroking delicately. He's just come in to tell me about the two customers who are coming to me in the next hour." (p.139)

Whereas Oves is gentle with his cat he is ruthless with the prostitutes. A cat enjoys a wonderful treat just at the time that Mara is to be handed over to two men to use her body as they please. This exhibits man's inhumanity to his fellow man—the *Homo hominem lupus*. And are we surprised? Did Akobi, her black husband do any better! After all, he forced her into prostitution and took the money she made to make his girlfriend, Comfort, comfortable. Oves is a shortened form of overseer. Mara tells us that "He is my Lord, my master, and my pimp. And like the other women on my left and right, I am his pawn, his slave and property. What he orders, I do. It's my karma." (p.3) The name Oves is an example of the use of charactonym by which one's name reveals his action or profession.



The use of figurative language and imagery creates not only pictures in the readers' mind but yields important meanings as well. There is a classic example of hyperbole in the first line of this extract; "At Oves' brothel, I have plunged into my profession down to the marrow in my bones." The word 'plunged' itself speaks of voluntarily forceful action that forbids a turn around. However, it is the use of the words 'marrow' and 'bones' that makes this line interesting. How can prostitution be carried out even in one's bone marrow? From this extreme exaggeration, one gleans the meaning that Mara is so steeped in prostitution that every aspect of her being is involved in the practice. The image of the 'marrow in my bones' sends shivers through one's spine and automatically ensures that the reader empathizes with Mara's plight. The Collins Dictionary's definition of 'marrow' is very appropriate for our discussion. According to that definition, the marrow of something is the most important or basic part of that thing. This implies how important to Mara her profession as a prostitute is to her. Marrow bones are bones that contain a lot of marrow bone jelly. This jelly has a lot of medicinal value to human life.

Another classic use of hyperbole is seen in the sentence, "I am fast sinking into a place hotter than hell." The 'New Living Translation' (NLT) Life Application Bible (2007:2363) has an appendix which includes a dictionary-cum-concordance. In that section, 'Hell' is defined as an 'abode of the dead; place of punishment; personification of evil; lowest place one can go.'

Mara says that she is so addicted to cocaine that she is sinking to 'a place hotter than hell'. If the NLT's definition is anything to go by, then, apart from hell, there is no other place where punishment is meted out to evil-doers. In Matthew 22:5, Jesus, in teaching about anger, warns anyone who curses someone that the person who curses is in danger of the fires of hell. The same fires of hell we read in Mark 9:43 are unquenchable. What place then can be hotter than hell?

There really is no reference in the Bible to support Mara's claim that there is somewhere hotter than hell. Yet, this hyperbole causes readers not only to fear for Mara but, more importantly, to understand the destructive force of Mara's human condition. It is therefore a pity that Mara is hooked to cocaine like a fish on bait and like the fish, she cannot free herself. A deep sense of damnation is painted here. Yet Mara is not even prepared to let go what is her undoing because that will mean she cannot provide for her mother and sons. The people she loves are the very people who are indirectly killing her!

Metaphor is not left out in this extract's rich display of figurative language. Cocaine, an addictive drug, which upon sniffing makes one feel 'high', according to Mara, is metaphorically referred to as 'snow' by Mara and her colleagues. Snow, however, is in the form of soft ice which usually falls from the skies during winter. Cocaine is not cold and snow is not an addictive substance. In fact, it is not even sniffed or eaten. However, there is this striking similarity between snow and cocaine because they are all white in colour, and soft, and smooth to touch. The effect of this metaphor is that it creates pictures in our mind's eye and helps us to visualize how something white and smooth can unleash destruction when abused.

Mara's decision not to stop prostitution and run for her life but to make more money also reveals how greedy she is. No wonder she tells us right from the first page that "Yes! I've used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer." This total resignation to fate is tragic especially when there are avenues of escape. Indeed, Mara should have known also that she's already done enough for her mother and sons back home to enable them survive without her sending them any money. After all, she has been remitting them through Mama Kiosk.

On the final page of the novel, Mara still thinks about her mother and children rather than about how to lead a decent lifestyle: “I wonder a lot about what my mother is doing. What games my kids are playing.” ‘To wonder a lot’ suggests that Mara thinks a lot about her mother and children. Wondering has no end and it can be very frustrating. Instead of wondering where the little soles of her children were standing or what her mother and kids were talking about, she could have rushed back home to see things for herself and make the necessary amends. Yet the fear of being exposed, and the fear of a possible stoppage in her income flows and the fact that she is too used to suffering prevents her from nourishing the idea of ever going home.

It must however be emphasized here that Mara’s mother, though a part of Mara’s trials, also does her best in certain instances to make Mara happy even though all those happy moments are transient since they leave behind memories that make her more unhappy.

Reminiscing about her childhood days, Mara recounts the childhood games her mother used to play with her. However, the little finger her mother used to be fond of had been deformed by one of Mara’s best spenders:

I have yet another handicap too, my little finger. I think often of the games my mother used to play with them, my fingers. Childish games when I was her innocent naïve child. ‘Give me your hand,’ she used to say. And I would give it to her. And she would take it, usually my left hand, and spread out my five fingers on her thighs; her coal-black thighs. And start the song: this one cries gaa, gaa, gaa, this one asks what is wrong, this one says maybe hunger, this one says let’s go take and eat, but thicky Tom thumb won’t agree, he says I’ll tell when father comes, and small goes crying on, gaa, gaa, gaa.

Small was my little finger and it still cries, but no more for mother’s playful hunger. It’s bent. Its bone has been displaced and it looks weird. I see it all the time and I loathe it, but not the money that came with it. The injury was done to me by one of my best spenders, a giant of a man but who always, when he comes to me, cries like a baby in my arms, telling me about his dictator wife whom he loves but who treats him so bad she makes him lick her feet at night. Then filled with the loathing and rage of revenge for this wife he’d love to kill, but lacking

the guts even to pull her hair, he imagines me to be her, orders me to shout I am her, and does terrible things to me like I never saw a man ever do to a woman before in the bushes I hail from. But I bear it because it is part of my job. (p.2/3)

Mara's story as quoted above suggests that Mara's mother really enjoyed playing with her little child and she was actually in control then; however, when it comes to taking serious decisions that would affect the future of Mara, like Mara's marriage to Akobi, she allows Mara's father to be in charge and even use the dowry money to settle his debt.

In a chapter entitled 'The Language of Proverbs', Oduyoye observes that many Akan proverbs result in a composite picture that militates against an individual woman's personhood. An example of a proverb which, according to Oduyoye, seeks to debunk the feminine, is "when a woman makes a giant drum, it is kept in a man's room." (2004:61) This proverb, according to Oduyoye, reveals that women let men dictate the pace and nature of their relationships and serve as spokespersons of the family unit.

It is no wonder then that Mara's mother nurtured and played with Mara in her childhood days but then when Mara grew into adulthood, the father exercised the sole control even over Mara's choice of a husband. This accentuates the domination of Mara for neither her mother nor herself is given the chance to even ask questions about Akobi's background or investigate to find out if he can be a good husband. The woman's contentment at her status as a mother or homemaker becomes a liability to her as it numbs her desire to contribute her voice to major decisions.

Oduyoye points this out:

Custom demands that a girl never questions a male, however unreasonable he appears to be. Of course, this means that a girl finds herself in a double bind: as a young person, she must not question adult authority and, since she is usually married to an older man, her subordinate position is doubly established. She



makes no choices except as pertain to her sphere of operation as a housekeeper or homemaker. (2004:53-54)

The proof of Oduyoye's view is seen in the reason Mara's mother gives for her refusal to Mara about what kind of man Akobi is:

'Who is he?' I asked mother, 'father's choice for me?'  
'Oh, dear child,' mother said, 'you know your father would consider it rude if I disclosed him to you before he did. Dress up,' she urged me, 'I am certain he will send for you soon.' (p.4)

Mara's mother's behaviour makes her an agent of patriarchy. Her refusal to give such a vital information to Mara contributes to Mara's woes, for, had she told Mara and even investigated the background of Akobi, they would have chanced upon vital information that could make Mara more prepared for Akobi's ways. Even though Mara's mother has a strong influence on Mara, this influence is limited to upbringing and even in this sphere, her belief in superstition and her determination to be a true agent of culture make her force Mara to imbibe certain doctrines which are inimical to Mara's progress. Indeed, most of these doctrines serve only as entrapments for Mara. Let's consider one of such lessons:

'It was natural, too, that when he demanded it, I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat while he slept all alone on the large grass mattress. Since, after all, mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man to ensure his well-being which included his pleasure . . .  
So that even those nights when he ordered me to sleep on the thin mat on the hard floor, even if I laid there and could not sleep and suffered a splitting headache the next day because of lack of sleep, I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife, and endured it just as I would menstrual pain.' (p.13)

We find here a master-servant relationship for Akobi obviously regards Mara as an inferior person. Having accepted the woman's plight, Mara's mother ensures she teaches it to her daughter. This becomes a very disturbing act creating problems in mother-daughter bonds. It is thus not surprising that Mara sees her mother as contributing to her suffering, a suffering she

concretizes for us by metaphorically comparing it to menstrual pain. This comparison reveals not only the pain which need not be stopped because a woman cannot stop her menstrual flow just because she is in pain. Oduyoye's advice in such situations is that "survival in such a situation depends on how skillfully a woman can manipulate circumstances to her advantage . . . like the witches and queens of tales, women can dare to act autonomously or to make demands." (2004:54)

Even though Mara's mother also helps Mara by agreeing to care for Mara's children during Mara's stay in Germany, it must be noted here, however, that this kind gesture rather facilitates Mara's flight to Germany. Had she been forced to take care of her children herself, there would have been no need for her to travel to Germany to succumb to the whims and caprices of Akobi and her male clients. After all, she could have catered single-handedly for her children because her small business and sewing could have supported the three of them.

Mara's mother then is a bad mentor and literally becomes a trial for Mara in that she wholly accepts the women's plight even when she is sufficiently aware that it is so unfair. Why does she wear heavy beads made of animal bones in order to attract the attention of her husband? Was she not aware that she is married to a polygamist and the tendency to love one wife more than the others is natural? Rather than encouraging Mara to resist oppression from men, Mara's mother prefers to tutor Mara into accepting her plight as a woman as if there are no alternatives. In this sense, Mara's mother can be said to be cast in a similar mould with Tambudzai's mother in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*.

Let us examine two striking extracts from *Nervous Conditions* and *Beyond The Horizon* to prove this point.

Tambudzai dares to compare her own mother to her aunt, Maiguru, and in a childish fashion, chooses her aunt as her role model, just because she thinks Maiguru's education has freed the latter from oppression. This is Tambu's mother's reaction;

My mother was too old to be disturbed by my childish nonsense, she tried to diffuse some by telling me many things . . . 'This business of womanhood is a heavy burden' she said. 'How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burden with strength.' (*Nervous Condition*:16)

The generous use of punctuation marks in this extract buttresses the burden of womanhood. An extract of ten lines have more than twenty punctuation marks. This forces the reader to pause several times in the reading process and with this comes the added advantage of understanding perfectly the actual intent of the author. Tambudzai's mother's analysis supra proves right Evelyn Nakano Glenn's observation that;

. . . Mothering takes place in social contexts that include unequal power relations between men and women, between dominant and subordinate racial groups, between colonized and colonizer. Thus mothering cannot escape being an arena of political struggle. (1994:64)

Mothering which is actually the referential point in Ma'Shingayi's analysis can be made better, yet the pessimistic mother rather highlights its negatives.

Mara, like Tambudzai, recalls a rather disturbing piece of advice given by her mother just before she left home to become the wife of Akobi;

It was natural, too, that when he demanded I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat while he slept all alone on the large grass mattress since, after all, mother

had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure. (p.13)

This advice opens Mara's eyes to the reality of her oppression.

So that even those nights when he ordered me to sleep on the thin mat on the hard floor; even if I laid there and could not sleep, and suffered a splitting headache the next day because of lack of sleep, I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife and endured it just like I would menstrual pains. (p.13)

The language used in this extract depicts extreme cruelty and subjugation. Words like, 'ordered', 'thin', 'hard', 'could not sleep', 'suffered', 'splitting', 'headache', 'lack', 'suffering', 'endured' and 'pains' (p.13) communicate cruelty emanating from total subjugation. The effectiveness of the use of the simile ". . . endured it just like I would menstrual pains" resides in the fact that whereas Mara could resist Akobi's exploitation, she could not resist the monthly flow and the pain associated with it. To make Akobi's exercise of power appear as natural as menstrual pains reveals Mara's unquestionable acceptance of male dominance as taught her by her mother! This is where we see clear evidence of Darko's attempt at challenging the received opinion that perfect motherhood has ceased to exist because real life situations reveal otherwise. Even though Mara never engages in any verbal attack on her mother; her thought processes and the analyses she makes about some of her mother's actions, especially on the advice she gives her prior to her marriage to Akobi, are enough evidence to prove that the relationship between mother and daughter is fraught with misunderstandings. Nowhere in *Beyond The Horizon* do we see Mara talking about the relationship between herself and her mother as that of a mother-daughter relationship. It is rather her relationship with the elderly friend Mama Kiosk, which she regards as a mother-daughter relationship, as evidenced by the following extract:

Between Mama Kiosk and me now existed a mother-daughter relationship. I had grown to trust her and to talk openly with her about everything . . . So it was that



in my desperate need for a mother I saw a substitute in Mama Kiosk. And she took on that role wholeheartedly, advising me on what to do and what not to do; . . . bringing me up to date on hygiene and noting down for me things I could start buying. She was a true friend and a perfect substitute mother. And I valued her enormously. (p.23)

In this extract, the duties of a mother to her daughter are clearly spelt out and readers can realize that, to a large extent, Mara's own biological mother fails in this respect.

Could the name of the novel's narrator or protagonist signify her untold hardships in the novel? In the Fanti culture, tradition and language that Mara hails from, the word 'Mara' means 'me'. It could also signify "me and only me", indicating that all is all her fault as in the Catholic liturgical remonstrance: "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*" Could this suffice as the reason for Mara's single-handed struggle against the torrents of life? For throughout the novel and especially in Germany, Mara has to work out solutions to upsetting situations almost single-handed which, in most cases, turn out to be negative. Even though Mara benefits from the help of other women like Mama Kiosk, Kaye and Vivian, these benefits, in the larger context of the novel, do little to alleviate the protagonist's woes. This is because her failure to listen to Mama Kiosk's warnings about Akobi or her dependence on the advice of Kaye or Vivian further deepens her plight.

Could it also be that Mara's name, which is also found in Ruth chapter 1 verse 20, is deliberately contrived to increase readers' understanding as to why Mara's life is 'decorated' by suffering. In the Bible, Mara becomes Naomi's name after she had lost her husband, her two sons and experienced a harsh famine. On her way back to Bethlehem, Naomi is not easily recognized by the women folk, who are amazed at the drastic change. Naomi's reply to their question; "Is it

really Naomi?” is: “Don’t call me Naomi,” . . . “Instead call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me.” (*NLT*:398)

Probably, Darko’s intention is to lean on charactonym to make Mara’s name corroborate the bitter life experiences encountered by Mara. Mara herself links her bitter experience to the indifference of the gods of Naka. Leaning on her belief in superstition, Mara argues;

As for the morals of life my mother brought me up by, I have cemented them with coal tar in my conscience. If the gods of Naka intended me to live by them, they should have made sure I was married to a man who loved me and who appreciated me and who appreciated the values I was brought up with . . . The rot has gone too deep for me to return to the old me. (p.131)

In the biblical story, although Naomi (Mara) sees in her predicament the workings of the supernatural, she does not resign herself to fate. She advises her daughter-in-law, Ruth, to endear herself to Boaz—a relationship that ends in a blissful marriage from which Naomi’s situation changed for the better.

In the case of the fictional Mara however, she resigns herself to fate. To her, the gods of Naka have committed her to suffer in marriage, and so be it. It must be noted that Mara’s argument in this extract is a rather untenable one because she herself tells her readers that “As for the morals my mother brought me up by, I have cemented them with coal tar in my conscience.” The use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ strongly reveals that Mara has control over her situation. The gods of Naka are merely referred to by her to make an excuse for her inactions. Coal tar is usually used as adhesive to mix gravel together for road construction. Its role then is to cover the earth and make the road smooth for motorists. For Mara then to say that she has cemented her conscience with coal tar means that she is resolved to plunge deeper into the evil of her career. Prostitution is not morally right and Mara herself expresses it clearly; “And I have received into me the rigid

tools of many men and accompanied them on sinful rides through the back doors of heaven and returned with them back to earth, spent men.” (p.131) Darko’s success in making Mara take a chunk of the blame for her downward slide is seen in Mara’s own contrasting analysis, for if the Naka gods determine her fate, why does she say she has cemented the morals thought her by her mother with coal tar?

Further discussions in this chapter reveal that belief in superstition intensifies Mara’s trials. Mara’s faith in the efficacy of superstition contributes to her making the very wrong choices. Darko gives readers one of the most realistic portrayals of the destructive force of a superstitious mind. Mara sees the hands of the Naka gods in her plight and thinks she is destined to be a prostitute. For a married woman to defend prostitution as though it is a good alternative reveals the extent of sexual decadence and immorality which is Mara’s. The behaviour of Mara is astonishing, for a married woman to engage in prostitution for the sake of obtaining material benefits, reveals how consumerist our society has become! For Darko to portray a mother in such a derogatory manner, is not only a proof of the reality of motherhood under trial, but a bold attempt at revealing the extent to which excuses can degenerate the female.

The way forward is indicated by the author’s attempt at generously infusing into the narrative alternative solutions at solving problems, the likes of which Mara faces. During Mara’s stay in Accra, Mara finds a friend and mother in Mama Kiosk, a petty trader who lives near Mara. On countless occasions, Mama Kiosk advises Mara to be wary of Akobi’s behaviour as it has the potential to destroy her. What starts as “service for money” grows into a very beneficial relationship. Initially, Mara’s relationship with Mama Kiosk is based on Mara’s willingness to throw away Mama Kiosk’s garbage for her in exchange for food and used clothing. Then Mama

Kiosk introduces Mara to the sale of boiled eggs. As their relationship progresses, Mara sees in Mama Kiosk, the “mother she never had.” Mara tells her ‘audience’ in the opening sentence of chapter four that “Between Mama Kiosk and me now existed a mother-daughter relationship.” (p.23) She then describes their relationship as one rooted in fellow-feeling. Even though Mama Kiosk is not Mara’s biological mother she relates to Mara like she would her own daughter. Non-biological mothers can also nurture and train daughters who are not their biological daughters. The Mama Kiosk-Mara relationship teaches that non-biological mothers can contribute to the nurturing and the upbringing of younger women.

Amma Darko uses the relationship between Mara and Mama Kiosk to show how mother-daughter bonding should look like.

Mara is a daughter who acknowledges that a mother must be there to protect, nourish, advise and comfort her daughter. The fact that these roles should be played naturally is revealed in the lines; “And she took on the role wholeheartedly . . . She was a true friend and a perfect substitute mother.” It is Mama Kiosk’s demonstration of motherhood that endears her to Mara.

Her advice and warnings, had they been considered seriously, would have changed Mara’s fate. However, Mara’s refusal to adhere to Mama Kiosk’s advice, especially those that cautioned her about Akobi’s wicked nature, reveals that Darko is not too interested in defending her gender when that woman refuses the advice of well-meaning people.

Some examples of the pieces of advice Mama Kiosk gives Mara clearly reveal Darko’s position.

‘Mara’, began Mama Kiosk, this your Ministries man, he is not only a bad man and a bad husband, he has also got something inside his head. I only hope that he won’t destroy you with it before you too start seeing red with your eyes like I do. (p.17)



Mama Kiosk, earlier on, had been ‘flabbergasted’ to learn from Mara that Akobi slapped her thrice for just announcing to him that she is pregnant. Indeed, Mama Kiosk’s warning foreshadows later events in the novel where we see Mara on the verge of destruction. Mama Kiosk also warns Mara to forget Akobi and concentrate on her business and her son. Mama Kiosk’s point is that a man who decides on the night of his departure to Europe to neglect his wife and child, and spend the night with his girlfriend, is not worth waiting for. Yet Mara ignores Mama Kiosk’s warning and rather resolves to put in all her energies at making herself presentable so she can compete with Comfort (the girlfriend) for Akobi’s love. The extract below supports this view:

‘Yes,’ Mama Kiosk replied, ‘and not just that, Greenhorn. It was her who saw him off at the airport. To tell you the truth, Greenhorn, if I was you, now that he’s gone I would forget him and start thinking wholly about yourself and your son. That is what you must do. (p.40)

Mara’s reaction to Mama Kiosk’s advice reveals that Mara has so tightly tied her apron-strings to Akobi so much that she cannot imagine life without her husband and abuser.

I was horrified, to say the least. What was this that Mama Kiosk was telling me? Forget Akobi?  
‘I have plenty respect for you Mama Kiosk,’ I began calculatingly, my bile rising to my throat at what I considered Mama Kiosk going overboard, ‘and I look up to you many times as my mother. And you are so good to me too. But I don’t like this that you are saying to me, Mama Kiosk, I don’t like it at all.’ (p.46)

The generous use of punctuation in this extract reveals Mara’s frustrations. The repetition of the phrase ‘I don’t like . . .’ reveals Mara’s stubbornness. Her unwillingness to consider a change in her circumstances is her major character flaw, a flaw which plunges her into abuse and destruction.

Interestingly, inspite of all her stubbornness, Mama Kiosk never reneges on her desire to be a good mother. In Germany, Mama Kiosk remains the only channel through which Mara remits her family. The view that Mama Kiosk plays the actual role of a mother is suggestive of Darko's belief in the role substitute mothers can play when biological mother's fail to mother their daughters well. However, the fact that at every stage of her life Mara always makes the wrong choice suggests that the author is not indulging Mara. Mara's resolve to 'close her eyes' to all the strategies for escaping exploitation and cruelty is as much a lesson for her as it is for readers.

The whole novel, thus, is wrapped in irony. Mara's whole story, as she tells us, reveals that though she is aware of the unfair treatment she is going through, she still allows herself to be treated unfairly and rather thinks that that is the wisest decision to make! The following dialogue between her and Kaye says it all:

Seeing the determination on my face, Kaye added, 'well, I've told you about the other channels, Mara. Those films, they pay enormously. And you are so beautiful that many men will clamour for you. Pee can fix you up for shows, you know, if you are serious about it, stage shows.'

I turned and faced Kaye and said, 'Kaye, I came here to you and Pee and all the others with thick bushy hair which has now been exotically cut short, close to my scalp. My eyebrows have been plucked thin. I have mastered the use of make-up, so that my lips are never without their scarlet taint. And I have received into me the rigid tools of many men and accompanied them on sinful rides through the backdoors of heaven and returned with them back to earth, spent men. I am no longer green and you know it. As for the morals of life my mother brought me up by, I have cemented them with coal-tar in my conscience. If the gods of Naka intended me to live by them, they should have made sure I was married to a man who loved me and who appreciated the values I was brought up with. I lived by these values until I could no longer do so. The rot has gone too deep for me to return to the old me. And that is why Kaye, I am going to do the films and the stage shows and all there is to it. But I want every pfennig of what I make to come to me!' (p.131)

In this extract, Mara seems to be defending her actions. She is so sure of the rightness of her decision to indulge in prostitution and go further to indulge in pornography. However, the fact

that she leans on superstition to argue out her case reveals how wrong she is in her argument. This extract raises the question of what it means to be a mother surviving through prostitution. Mara does not enter into the profession by her own choice. She is blackmailed into becoming a prostitute by her husband. Her description of the change in her looks is not uncommon to the looks of prostitutes, but talking about it the way she does, suggests that Mara has accepted and even likes prostitution as a profession. The adjective used to describe her short hair implies that Mara really likes her 'new' self. For instance, 'exotically' communicates beauty and freshness. Her eyebrows are plucked thin meaning that those plucked were really out of place. She brags that she has 'mastered' the use of make-up. Her choice of the word 'mastered' tells us she has not only succeeded in learning the skill of make-up; she is in total control of her make-up kits. She wears a bright red lipstick always to advertise herself as a prostitute.

The use of 'rigid tools' to refer to the many penises that have entered her, communicates pain and implies that there is no emotional attachment to the sexual encounters between Mara and her clients. And as if to condemn herself, she describes those sexual engagements as "sinful rides" and describes the men as 'spent' after the experience. For this mother prostitute then, life as a prostitute is interesting and full of guilt. Mara elects to jettison all the morals her mother taught her since adhering to them would mean a goodbye to prostitution. Indeed, Mara concretizes the finality of her resolve by the use of the verb 'cemented'; it would thus be impossible to go back to live a 'clean' life. There is no turning back for she has no conscience to uphold what she had earlier on cemented with 'coal tar'.

For Mara to write about her looks and her life this way shows a high degree of resolve to merchandise her body, come what may! It is therefore surprising to hear her blame the gods of

Naka for having conditioned her to marry a bad husband to start with. Considering that the pronoun 'I' features a whopping dozen times in the thirteen lines that constitute this extract, why then the reference to the Naka gods? This is one frightening aspect of the failed mother. Rather than blame herself and considering alternative routes to redemption, Mara excuses her inactions and blames it all on the gods of Naka. It is this behaviour that makes us appreciate Naa Yomo of *Faceless*' analyses of what belief in superstition does to the mind. According to this old woman, belief in superstition "eats into all reasoning abilities and the capacity of facing responsibilities." (p.120)

By blaming the gods of Naka, Mara seems not to be questioning her shameful career but rather the role of the gods in her predicament. The ambivalence of Mara's analyses of prostitution do not end here. She continues to condemn prostitution by referring to it as 'rot' that is so difficult to cleanse and uses this condemnation to justify her decision to do more films and stage shows. However, she is also very interested in the monetary rewards and so she is determined to get all the money, "But I want every pfennig of what I make to come to me!" If something is bad or full of rot, why then do you want the money that comes from it? This borderline, between achievement and condemnation, presents a contradiction that pinpoints to Mara's total loss of control of herself culminating in the rather pathetic statement which ends the story: "As for myself, there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them." (p.40)

Mara's resignation to fate and her resolve to make enough money from prostitution so as to ensure the upkeep of her children back home, make her a reckless martyr in defence and illustration of motherhood. Arguably, the portrayal of Mara in this novel indicates that



motherhood, bereft of reasoning, can only transfigure women as mere *accoucheuses* (she who is present at the birthside) of daughters whose upbringing goes to the dogs.

In Germany, Mara's abuse at the hands of Akobi rather injects into Mara some kind of strength which metastizes into scheming to ensure Akobi's downfall. The fact that the trials of motherhood are to be blamed on both Mara and Akobi is of special interest to this work. Had Akobi not abused his wife, probably he could have realized his dream of making it big in Africa on his return from Germany. His persistent abuse of Mara results in his final downfall. Akobi's end means that Darko believes in poetic justice. Even though the trials of motherhood might play a role in Mara's own tragic end, the fact that Darko puts strength, *pari passu*, with weakness, elevates Darko as one female writer of Africa who boldly reveals a complex female figure in this work.

In Mara, the reader has experienced an overwhelming sense of frustration at a mother's 'frail' attempt at dealing with the trials of motherhood. Patriarchy constitutes a major trial for Mara as Akobi forces Mara into prostitution because he considers her to be inferior in status. Mara's refusal to fight patriarchy is seen in her resolve to continue merchandising her body to men even though she controls a lot of money and has a five-year visa of stay that would enable her go back home to see her two boys. It is Mara's own willingness to allow patriarchal structures cloud her judgment that make her become Akobi's wife and slave and later turns her into a prostitute suffering only to ensure the survival of her children. Poor parenting as evidence by her mother's instruction that Mara must always please men also explains why Mara allows men to use her body as they like, be it detrimental to her health. Mara's belief in superstition makes her blame the gods of Naka for her marriage to Akobi. And as though she is just a fly in the hands of the

gods, Mara allows her trials to destroy her even though there were so many avenues of escaping her trials. In *Beyond The Horizon* the story of Mara teaches that the subject of motherhood is too complex for facile summarization.

The trials of motherhood come in various shapes and colours. The next chapter adds to these trials as materialism and a refusal to control sexual appetites become trials for mothers and even daughters.

# KNUST



### CHAPTER THREE

#### EXPLOITING THE EXPLOITER: WOMEN'S STRATEGY AT SURVIVING SOCIO – ECONOMIC CHALLENGES.

Amma Darko's second novel, *The Housemaid*, seeks primarily to challenge prevailing views of motherhood held by African societies. In this novel, mothers are portrayed in their real complex natures as nurturers and exploiters especially of their daughters. In most African societies, the African woman is expected to experience motherhood since it is through motherhood that a woman can carve out a sense of dignity for herself. This traditional expectation is rooted in African spiritual belief. An African anthropologist, John Mbiti (1969:33), takes the view that a person's immortality depends not only on his progeny, but also on whether he has descendants who remember him. Mbiti's African *Weltanschauung* (worldview) explains why in Africa a woman who is childless is considered a failure. The barren woman becomes a topic for gossip and she even risks the collapse of her marriage. Indeed, the significance of motherhood in African societies is central to such narratives as Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, among others.

The belief in Africa that motherhood is an automatic role to be assumed by women is clearly expressed by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in her book titled *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Referring to the traditional expectation of women in Akan societies, Oduyoye tells us that in Akan societies, the female is analogous to other female animals. She is expected to fulfill biological roles as a mother: caring, feeding, training, disciplining but never destroying her children. Oduyoye (2004:141) states: "The aura of life and "livingness" that surrounds the woman is assumed to be faithfully motherly." Oduyoye's statement reveals that in African

societies, the primacy of motherhood for women is not only a value shared and protected but it also becomes an expectation that behoves of every woman to fulfill. This expectation however, has inherent conflicts, in that it carelessly assumes a problem-free attitude towards mothering. Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* sharply condemns this view by calling for a critical analysis of the nature of mothers, especially in contemporary times.

In her book entitled, *Sexe et Parenté*, Luce Irigaray's declaration that "Our societies presuppose that the mother nurses the child for free, before and after giving birth, and that she remains the nurse of men and society"<sup>37</sup> seems particularly relevant to African societies.

Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* questions such ideologies which prescribe that automatic maternity is the most cherished ambition for all African women. *The Housemaid* proposes three categories of mother-daughter bonds. In each of these categories, the mother-daughter relationship is marred by conflicts. These conflicts are largely fueled by daughters' awareness of their mothers' exploitative methods and how these daughters' react to these exploitative methods. Invariably, the daughters react in a way which makes them accusers of their mothers, creating tensions in mother-daughter bonds. These conflicts, as we shall show, reveal that the ideology that preaches perfect motherhood no longer exists. Expectations of mothers can no longer be fulfilled. Indeed, in *The Housemaid*, the lives of these three categories of mothers point to a reality that motherhood is on trial and mothers are persistently being put on trial by their daughters who see them as failures, not worth emulating. It must however be stated here that, in *The Housemaid*, the daughters fail to recognize the impact that economic factors play in undermining the roles of mothers as nurturers that society expects them to play. Almost all

---

<sup>37</sup> Irigaray, Luce. *Sexe et Parenté*. Paris, Minuit, 1987, p.97



mothers in this novel fail also because the wrong choices they make are fueled largely by pitiless economic conditions.

Sekyiwa's choice of a husband, who is twenty-four years her senior, is not dictated by love but by the fact that this man has the financial capacity to provide for her needs. When her husband is no longer relevant in her life, Sekyiwa literally dumps him and runs into the arms of young men who can provide her with good sex in exchange for her money;

So, soon after Tika's birth, he got Sekyiwa a big shop and filled it with textile prints. By the third year, Sekyiwa had become one of the wealthy market mummies. Young, good-looking male gold diggers began to vie for her attention. Her husband's libido was waning anyway, so she gave in. (p.18)

The reference to Sekyiwa's lovers as "gold diggers" is significant. By metaphorically comparing these young men to 'gold diggers', Darko adduces reasons as to why young men run after relatively older women—to enrich themselves. That the female body becomes a commodity to be used is not a new phenomenon. However what is striking is that in this case, it is the female who pays money for the use of her body. Body-selling can be patronized by men as well.

It is Sekyiwa's choice of young men as bed-mates which creates the major conflict between Sekyiwa, her husband and her only daughter and child, Tika. Tika's resolve to revenge her father's maltreatment by her mother then becomes the leitmotif of the never-ending conflict between mother and daughter. The exploiter Sekyiwa, then turns out to be exploited by her own daughter. Sekyiwa had earlier on exploited her husband's desire for a child. Having engaged in a clandestine relationship with this married man, Sekyiwa's announcement of pregnancy opens the way for this man to divorce his wife, marry Sekyiwa and make her rich through the textile business. Darko's rendition of the sequential improvement in Sekyiwa's life as a result of the

pregnancy legitimatises Oduyoye's viewpoint made earlier that the one most important factor governing and ensuring the survival of marriages in most African societies is procreation.<sup>38</sup> It is clear then through narrative, Darko reviews some cultural practices in Ghana. "His wife was barren and rumour had it that this was the result of an abortion she had had when they were courting. Then Sekyiwa got pregnant. And the man felt his obligation to his unborn child transcending his loyalty to his wife. He left her." (p.18)

The last line of this extract made up of just three words reflects the ease with which this man leaves his wife for Sekyiwa because the latter is pregnant. The sentence's structure buttresses the content of the extract. This man leaves his wife because she is barren. The barrenness, according to rumours, is even the result of an abortion for which this man was responsible. Later on in the novel, Sekyiwa tries to justify her actions to Tika thus: " 'You selfish, egoistic, self-centered child!' she said bitterly. 'I will no longer be haunted by what I did or did not do to you. You say I am a murderess for jilting a man who also jilted someone else? What should I call you too, heh?' "(p.27) Sekyiwa's reaction to Tika's accusation that she (Sekyiwa) has been the cause of her father's ill-treatment of his first wife reveals why Sekyiwa does not regret her ill-treatment of her husband. After all, he deserves it too.

In the preceeding extract, Sekyiwa is introduced to the reader as a ". . . 100 percent illiterate stinking rich and riddled with guilt." (p.18) Sekyiwa's wealth is metaphorically seen as "stinking". This reveals Darko's judgement of this character. The use of the non-intrusive narrator reflects this view. By carefully tracing the source of Sekyiwa's wealth, Darko is using

---

<sup>38</sup> Oduyoye M. Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Op.cit; p.60

literature as a means to criticize that aspect of Ghanaian culture that sees the woman's value only in terms of her ability to give birth.

This same extract also enlarges the perspectives on some of the strategies women use to survive economic hardships. It dawns on the reader that for an illiterate woman like Sekyiwa, her strategy is to use what Kari Dako and her co-authors (p.276) call "the interwoven survival strategies of fertility, sex, subservience and exploitation." Interestingly, the money Sekyiwa makes through the exploitation of her husband is further controlled by those young men referred to as "gold-diggers". The exploiter is exploited and so whatever gains she makes come to naught. Referring to Sekyiwa's exploitative acts, Dako and her co-authors (p.276) argue: "The bitter irony is that the female self is quite often ultimately diminished and devalued by the nature of the gain in these struggles."

Indeed, Teacher's worry about the neglectedness of Sekyiwa much later reveals the vanity of Sekyiwa's exploitative ways. The following is an example:

'Tika, about your mother,' she began, paused, saw that there was no reaction yet, and continued, 'She is not a woman of means anymore, you know. She is growing old as well. And you her only child, have also abandoned her. You know what that can lead to, or?' (p.106)

Tika's resolve to abandon her mother is also part of Tika's reverse exploitation of the exploiter who is her own mother. The first blow she deals Sekyiwa is to exploit the latter's plea for forgiveness. Irrespective of the business proposal and the "fat cheque" given her by Sekyiwa, Tika refuses to forgive her mother. Sekyiwa asks a friend who is already in the business to coach Tika in the basics of business. Then she signs for Tika a "fat cheque" as seed capital;

'So now am I forgiven?' she asked when she handed it over. Tika looked at the cheque, then at her mother, and mumbled something. Sekyiwa continued to stare

at her expectantly. When Tika still said nothing, Sekyiwa's heart sunk. What else could she do? If this generosity had failed to make an impact on Tika, then maybe the best thing to do was to sit back and wait for Tika herself to decide when to forgive her. Sekyiwa rested her guilt. (pp.21-22)

Tika's show of ingratitude, coupled with her refusal to forgive her mother irrespective of her mother's role in setting her up in business, proves how resolute she is in letting her mother pay for abusing her father. The cheque is described as 'fat', implying that Sekyiwa gives her a lot of money; yet Tika's cold reaction reveals that she is not the least impressed. Later in the novel, Tika openly ridicules her mother for acquiring her wealth through the pilfering of her father's wealth: "Tika went on. 'After all, didn't it come from one of their illustrious sons?' "

Tika's resolve to punish her mother also stems from Sekyiwa's partial neglect of Tika when the latter was but a child. Time and again, Tika's desire to play with her mother does not materialize. Obsessed as she is to make more profit and share it with her boy-lovers, Sekyiwa would always leave her child in the care of house-helps. Readers see here an illustration of Glenn's argument (p.14) that; "In fact, mothers' interests and children's interest may conflict and mothers may be forced to choose between them." Sekyiwa deprives Tika of the companion the girl craves for since she has to make herself available to her boy-lovers. Tika feels the loneliness that comes with the death of her father who hitherto had played that role so well (so unbearable). Through the use of dialogue, Darko reveals how a mother's lascivious and/or libidinous desire for sex can sever mother-daughter bonds:

Then as if seeking emphasis, she added, 'So Dada won't come back again?'  
'No,' Sekyiwa replied.  
'Who will play with me on Saturdays if you do not take me to the shop?'  
'I will find somebody.'  
'Why can't you play with me?'  
'Because I have to make money to look after us.'  
'So when you finish making money, will you play with me?'



But before Sekyiwa could answer that, she was summoned to talk to the new house-help she wanted to employ to look after Tika. Little Tika continued to wait and hope for the day her mother would finish making money and come to play with her. (p.20)

The mother in the above quotation is portrayed as neglecting her child's desire for companionship. The terms that are utilized in the dialogue denote the presence of two parallel semantic universes, one signaling indifference and the other signaling betrayal. Tika feels betrayed by her mother's seeming indifference to her need for a playmate; she is unable to appreciate her mother's need to make money for their survival.

In Tika's mind, her mother has not only killed her father but she has also deprived her of a playmate. This dialogue signals the beginning of the break in communication between mother and daughter. This break in communication creates in Tika an emotional distance resulting in her resolve to pay her mother back for exploiting her in this way. Sekyiwa's exploitation of her child's need for a play mate deprives Tika of the opportunity to further probe the meaning of motherhood through mother-daughter games. This loss of opportunity creates in Tika a hatred for her mother and also an unflattering sense of what it means to be a mother. If Sekyiwa had "played" with Tika, she would have had the opportunity to teach her certain lessons crucial to life. Her obsession for money and good sex and her refusal to play with Tika, constitute a lost opportunity for Sekyiwa since no bonding characterized her relationship with Tika.

Like Bibio, Tika also rejects the idea of being a mini-version of her mother, for she finds nothing acceptable or worth emulating in her mother. Bibio's rejection is seen in her accusation of her mother. Maami Korkor, who in the eyes of Bibio, is seen as conniving with patriarchal culture to unleash hardship on her children. Tika, in like-manner, refuses to be a mother. Tika's resolve to be anything but her mother's replica leads her to abort an innocent fetus even when the man

responsible has the means and desire to take care of the baby. The reason she gives for her refusal to keep the baby shows that Tika is not only revolting against her mother's exploitation of her father; she is also revolting against that cultural expectation which prescribes that a female carve out an identity for herself through childbirth. She elects to embark on a quest that will take her beyond society's narrow meaning of who a mother should be. For Tika, 'to mother' means to inject liveliness into the lives of the deprived:

Tika thought about her late father. And about Kataso, the poor farming village in the east from which he had come. Like most villages in Ghana, it had lost its most successful sons to the cities, and these sons didn't return too often to help those they had left behind. No one to give her money to?

'Wrong mother. I have been thinking. I'll give it to the people of Kataso.' (p.27)

In making this choice, Darko infers that apart from childbirth, women can carve out other dignities for themselves. This also reveals Efuru's choice in *Efuru*, where Efuru uses her wealth to care for the needy in society. Like Flora Nwapa's Efuru, Darko's Tika becomes a prototype of determination and resilience. By reconstructing a new role for herself, Tika recreates herself and imparts a new kind of feminine consciousness. Nwapa's message in her interview with Adeola James makes sense in that it reflects the reason behind Tika's choice of using her money to enrich the lives of the people of Kataso:

I think the message is and it has always been, that whatever happens, in a woman's life . . . marriage is not the end of their world, childlessness is not the end of everything. You must survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and one other things to make you happy apart from marriage and childbirth. (p.14)

In compiling the wrong choices made by Tika's mother and their effect on Tika, Darko reveals how the reality of contemporary urban life can make mothers insensitive to the demands of their children. The desire to acquire money, be it for feeding or for enriching their own lives, leaves a

mother with one choice—to exploit her daughter while she fails to see in her attempt at exploiting the little girl the potential for marring her relationship with her daughter.

Sekyiwa is portrayed as selfish, self-indulgent and domineering. An illiterate, she ties her apron-strings to a wealthy civil servant who is desperate for a child. Sekyiwa's announcement of a pregnancy influences this man to divorce his wife, marry her and set her up in business. After the birth of her daughter, Tika, Sekyiwa realizes it's about time she indulges in sexual ecstasy because she has a lot of wealth. Her obsession to make so much money and spend it on her young lovers rid Tika of the much-needed companion she craves from Sekyiwa. The fact that Sekyiwa chooses to enjoy sex with her young lovers rather than stay home and mother, constitutes a breach of motherhood.

Mothers are supposed to be their daughter's guardians; however in this case, it is Tika's father who rises up to this challenge. Tika's questions to Sekyiwa upon the death of her (Tika's) father illustrates that the father assumed the role of the mother. We therefore understand why Tika never forgave her mother for her role in her father's death:

Her mother, explaining death to her, now said that her father had gone to heaven and wouldn't be returning. Tika wondered if her mother had sent him to heaven because she didn't want him anymore. 'Did you make him die?' she asked her mother innocently.

Sekyiwa was stunned. 'How can you say that?' she reproached guardedly.

'Sometimes you made him cry.' Tika said.

Sekyiwa was overwhelmed. (p.19)

In Tika's opinion, her mother is an apology of a mother because she fails to mother her well.

Tika considers Sekyiwa's ill-treatment of her husband and her refusal to play with her during her formative years as reason enough for her not to marry and have children. She argues out her case so simply:

‘I won’t keep this pregnancy, mother. It will make me do to Attui’s wives what you did to father’s first wife. And what if it grows to be to me what I have become to you? I know you are not proud of me. I am no blessing to you. I don’t only blame you for the loss of my father. Inside here,’ pointing to her heart, ‘I blame you for the loss of Owuraku too. You brought me up to value money above all else.’ (p.27)

The content of this extract suggests that Tika connects her predicament to her mother’s greed. It is her mother’s greed for money and boy-lovers that makes her shift her attention from her husband and daughter to her business and boy-lovers. The major lesson drawn from Sekyiwa’s behaviour in the novel is that maternal love does not happen automatically to biological mothers. This lesson sharply contradicts the traditionally held view that mothers are self-sacrificing beings.

Darko explains the reason behind Sekyiwa’s offer to help establish Tika in business. The language used is calculated to criticize Sekyiwa and showcase her as evil:

So Sekyiwa had always known that Tika blamed her for the death of her father. She tried to buy her forgiveness. Tika saw her mother’s turmoil and relished it . . . And when Tika failed her exam, she knew that all she needs to do was to come up with a business proposal and Sekyiwa would finance it. For her part, Sekyiwa saw in Tika’s exams bungle another opportunity to show her concern; it was a chance to purchase her daughter’s forgiveness . . . Sekyiwa asked a friend who was already in the business to coach Tika in the basics. Then she signed Tika a fat cheque as capital. ‘So now am I forgiven?’ she asked when she handed it over.’ Tika looked at the cheque, then at her mother, and mumbled something. Sekyiwa continued to stare at her expectantly. When Tika still said nothing Sekyiwa’s heart sank. (p.21)

In the above extract, an “eye-for-an-eye” game is played out. We witness therefore a frightening mother-daughter relationship. A mother’s awareness of her sin makes her decide to exploit her daughter’s need for financial security by giving her a fat cheque and a business coach. The daughter’s awareness of her mother’s desire for forgiveness makes her exploit her mother by



showing gross ungratefulness at her mother's huge offer. In the process, Tika becomes a sadist, who derives pleasure from her mother's suffering. Darko puts it so well; "Tika saw her mother's turmoil and relished it." A very classical example of an exploiter being exploited is demonstrated here.

To deepen her mother's pain the more, Tika elects to be barren so as to defraud her mother of the much needed grandchild. It is her refusal to carry her pregnancy to full term which results in an abortion. The complicated nature of this abortion results in the removal of Tika's womb. This action by Tika constitutes not only a payback time for Tika, it is also Tika's way of rejecting society's prescription of automatic motherhood for all females. We must hasten to condemn Tika for she herself explains her actions thus; "And what if it grows up to be to me what I have become to you?" Tika's argument begs the question of the roles of a mother towards her offering(s) – a young woman cannot be a good mother. Probably this is Tika's own contribution to reducing the number of "badly" mothered children. The tension and conflict created by Sekyiwa's exploitation of Tika teach that mothers ought to be careful when it comes to exploiting their daughters—the wrong may never be forgiven.

In the second mother-daughter conflict, we encounter Maami Korkor and her eight-year old daughter, Bibio. Bibio's view of her mother as a failure deserving criticism is fueled by the former's belief that her mother has left the burden of caring for her two younger siblings on the shoulders of her eight-year old daughter. In a rather tense dialogue, Bibio accuses her mother of not sending her to school, and also for allowing their irresponsible father of a husband to make babies with her without counting the cost.

Through the use of dialogue, Darko is able to inject realism into the story. As we hear the voices of the characters, we are better placed to be critical judges of their actions. The following lines illustrate the effect of the use of realism.

Bibio: Your son and his friend, they brought me something from the rubbish dump . . .

Maami Korkor: They still go scavenging on the rubbish dump? Haven't I told you not to allow them?

Bibio: Maami Korkor, which of the two boys did I bring into the world?

Maami Korkor: I don't like your tone Bibio.

Bibio: Too bad. You should have sent me to school to learn some manners there. But since you rather let me stay at home to play mother to you and your friend's sons, where else can I learn my manners but in the streets? And don't forget, Maami Korkor that this very blouse I am wearing also came from the rubbish dump.

Maami Korkor: (But how could she change things? She had to hawk fish from dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and four children. Not a pesewa came from their father.)

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

That an incident as trivial as a mother coming home late because she had to ensure she sells enough fish to feed her family could spark off such verbal attack from a disgruntled daughter reveals that there are larger issues waiting to be confronted, and that Maami Korkor's late arrival only serves as a catalyst to dynamite the venom boiling in Bibio's heart. Here, we see a daughter vituperating against her mother's inability to send her to school. She rudely but rightly accuses her mother for being unable to control her libidinal instincts and failing also to apply common sense when it comes to these same instincts.

Bibio's exploitation of her mother's economic challenges is a reaction to Maami Korkor's earlier exploitation of Bibio, for we glean from the tensed dialogue that Bibio has become a baby-sitter not only for her siblings but also for the children of her mother's friend. For her mother to be

‘free’ to hawk her fish from dawn to dusk, Bibio has to shoulder the responsibility of caring for her siblings rather than go to school.

What Bibio fails to understand is that her mother is trapped since she has to single-handedly provide for their needs. Riche (1976) has emphasized that daughters must first consider the larger issues entrapping their mothers before they label them as failures. Bibio fails to see that her mother’s life has been circumscribed by economic hardships as well as by the laxity that patriarchal society allows some fathers to desire sex without desiring to take care of their offsprings. Riche (1976:235) says, “It is easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her.” In the dialogue captured above, Maami Korkor fails to summon the courage to continue the verbal attack. She opines, “In Bibio’s mind she would always be wrong.” (p.12)

The concession of failure by Maami Korkor is a harbinger of fear and intimidation. If a mother cannot correct her daughter’s view of her as a ‘sex maniac’ and as an irresponsible mother, then it means she admits culpability. The mother’s energy to fight back is sapped by the fact that there is some element of truth in her daughter’s condemnation of her. Her decision to continue in an affair in which the man refuses to take responsibility for his children is Maami Korkor’s Achilles’ heels—her vulnerability. Here, a mother’s self-worth in the eyes of her daughter is ultimately diminished and devalued by the mother’s failure to discipline her sexual life.

Maami Korkor, a single mother, faces serious financial challenges. In the Maami Korkor-Bibio relationship, a daughter exploits her mother’s inability to send her to school and uses it as a reason to talk and behave rudely to her mother.

‘Mami korkor,’ (this was how Bibio addressed her mother when she was in a stinky mood), ‘which of the two boys did I bring into the world?’

Her mother was taken aback.

‘I don’t like your tone, Bibio,’ she warned icily.

Bibio chuckled.

‘Too bad. You should have sent me to school to learn some manners then. But since you rather let me stay home to play mother to you and your friend’s sons—boys I’m only three years older than—where else can I learn my manners but in the streets?’

Mami Korkor’s jaw dropped. (p.11)

In the Sekyiwa-Tika relationship, the exploitation is seen on both sides. Sekyiwa exploits her husband’s needs for a child and dumps the husband after he has established her in business. Tika, their daughter, sees in her mother’s exploitation of her father an avenue to also exploit her mother by constantly refusing to forgive her while at the same time making her pay for her neglect of her childhood need for companionship. Tika’s refusal to allow a cherished fetus live to term is also a means to exacerbate her mother’s woes. Her mother’s hope of having a grandchild from Tika to inherit their wealth is squashed as Tika elects for an abortion which culminates in the removal of her entire womb. A daughter’s obsession to visit justice on her mother fuels her resolve never to be a mother herself. By refusing to become a mother, Tika is not only revolting against her mother; she is also rejecting society’s expectations of automatic motherhood for all women, avenges her father’s untimely death and the pain he suffered at the hands of his hot-blooded wife. Tika whose presence in the house ushers in tension:

It had been even more glaringly clear on those free Saturdays when her mother had not taken her to the shop. On such days her father had become a completely different person, playing and laughing with her. All it had taken was the sound of her mother’s arrival for the gaiety to halt abruptly, as if the light of her father’s life had been extinguished by the flick of a switch. (p.19)

In the above extract, the narrative is designed specifically to blame Sekyiwa as being a source of worry to her husband and her daughter. The fear Sekyiwa brings to the life of her husband is



underscored by the effective use of simile. By comparing the swiftness of the fear that envelops the house due to the foot-steps announcing Sekyiwa's arrival to the swiftness of an electric switch which, in nano-seconds, ushers in darkness. Darko conveys to the reader the exact fear that engulfs husband and daughter upon the arrival of mother and wife.

Tika's desire to return her father's money to her father's people is also a means of letting her mother know that she is not interested in having a child simply for that child to inherit their wealth. Like Bibio, Tika revolts against her mother by refusing to mirror her mother's image.

The extract below illustrates this point:

'I won't keep this pregnancy, mother. It will make me do to Attui's wives what you did to father's first wife. And what if it grows to be to me what I have become to you? I know you are not proud of me. I am no blessing to you. I don't only blame you for the loss of my father. Inside here,' pointing to her heart, 'I blame you for the loss of Owuraku too. You brought me up to value money above all else. So you see, Owuraku and I could have been married by now and producing the grandchildren you crave for so desperately.' (p.27)

Tika's biting analysis in this extract comes out so well through Darko's effective use of diction. A daughter's desire to visit pain on her mother is revealed by the words; "won't", "blame", "loss", "blame, (again)" "crave" and "desperately". These words speak of unfulfilled expectations. The fact that in this extract the word 'blame' appears twice reveals Tika's resolve to condemn her mother for the latter's ill-treatment of her father. Ironically though, the same Tika who blames her mother for treating badly her father's first wife refuses to level any blame against her father. The question is: why does Tika not blame her father also for his ill-treatment of his first wife when he falls in love with Sekyiwa? Is it because she gave him a child? Tika's refusal to blame her father for bringing sorrow and depression to his first wife reveals, perhaps, a blind fidelity to her father. To Tika, her father did well to give birth to her and marry her mother.

As to the fact that her father jilted his first wife, Tika does not consider that a misdemeanour. No wonder Sekyiwa, devastated, accuses her daughter as being self-centered;

‘You selfish, egoistic, self-centered child!’ She said bitterly. ‘I will no longer be haunted by what I did or did not do to you. You say I am a murderess for jilting a man who also jilted someone else? What should I call you too, heh? I paid my price to you, child. In full. Whatever price is left for me to pay must be to God my Creator.’(pp.27-28)

There is however a difference in the two mothers’ reaction to their daughters’ accusations. Whereas in the Maami Korkor-Bibio exchange, Maami Korkor simply accepts her daughter’s accusation and even gives in to her demand, in the Sekyiwa-Tika exchange, Sekyiwa fights back at Tika’s accusation of her which she considers unfair even if it holds an element of truth. Sekyiwa’s rhetorical question: “What shall I call you too, heh?” is an indictment on Tika, who, Sekyiwa thinks, is also a hypocrite and a murderess by refusing to let an innocent fetus live to term simply because she is bent on inflicting pain on the former. Two alleged takers of life are presented and juxtaposed; Sekyiwa, whose manhandling of her husband causes his death and Tika who resolves to abort her baby because she feels she cannot nurture/train it well. According to Sekyiwa, she has paid her full dues to Tika because she has realized that Tika will never forgive her no matter what. In a rather desperate manner of speaking, Darko captures her frustration in just two words: “In full.” This is the shortest sentence in the novel and it shows that there is nothing more to be done about Tika’s attitude towards her. Sekyiwa however tells readers that she has a price to pay.

Sekyiwa knows that she will be punished on Judgement Day; but before then, the rest of her life will be lived in perpetual fear as she awaits the dreadful day of judgement. Interestingly, this same fate will be experienced by Tika against whom Sekyiwa also levels the crime of murder for

aborting a fetus. The use of juxtaposition clearly shows that in the case of Sekyiwa and Tika, both are to be blamed. The mother who exploits her husband and daughter is to be blamed just as the daughter who punishes her mother and aborts a fetus in the name of depriving her mother of a cherished grandchild. The use of juxtaposition therefore reveals differing levels of crime: Sekyiwa and Tika's crime superseding, in terms of moral condemnation, that of Maami Korkor and Bibio's.

The third instance of 'the exploiter being exploited' features a three-generational household. This household is represented by the grandmother, the mother and the granddaughter. The father-figure is diminished because of the matrifocal structure of the story. It is the story of this three-generational household which makes the structure of this novel a rather complex one.

Kofi Anyidoho asserts in his Introductory Notes to Darko's *Faceless* that the title of this novel is misleading in that the housemaid is really not the central character. He maintains:

It is important that we are not misled by the title of Amma Darko's second novel, *The Housemaid*, into unduly focusing critical attention on the girl Efia, the housemaid in the story. Indeed, it is doubtful whether we should regard her as the true 'central character' of this novel. In fact, she does not even properly enter the story until we are almost half way through the narration.<sup>39</sup>

The story of Tika and her housemaid, Efia, constitutes the macrocosm of the narrative. However, the Tika and Efia story is linked with the story of Tika and her mother and on another level, with the story of Bibio and her mother.

It is clear then that by plot design, the novel, *The Housemaid* reveals a complex plot which also depicts an interface between form and content. *The Housemaid* is the life story of Tika, her

---

<sup>39</sup> Anyidoho, Kofi. "An Introductory Essay to *Faceless*." In Amma Darko's *Faceless*. Accra, Ghana Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2003, p.12

journey from an innocent child to a businesswoman using her sexuality to enhance her business, and taking on a housemaid to cater for her housekeeping demands. Efiya, the housemaid, is manipulated by her grandmother and mother into getting pregnant. The idea behind their manipulation is to realize, through Efiya's pregnancy and consequent birth of a child, an avenue through which Sekyiwa's and Tika's misappropriation of Tika's father's wealth would return to Kataso, Tika's father's hometown.

The complex nature of the plot which starts from the middle of the story, comes back to the past and continues into the present is seen to reflect the lives of the female characters in the story. There obviously is, through the plot, a restriction of 'flow' in the story line. For the reader to fully comprehend the story's message, there is the need to read back and forth so as to follow the flow in the story line. This is what is deemed 'a restriction of flow in the story line.' This restriction of flow could also be a statement on the lives of female characters in the novel. Life is a struggle for females in this hostile patriarchal world. Thus, as they see themselves as trapped by the system, these female characters also strategize to come out of these entrapments. They escape through the exploitation of men, (husbands or lovers of women, their daughters and granddaughter and housemaid). In the end, it is only an illusory escape, as their exploitative ways turn out to devalue them especially in the eyes of their daughters.

Thus the plot which starts in the middle and moves on to the past and present also agrees with the content in the sense that whereas the working-life of these female characters seems exciting (owing to the workings of their exploitative strategies), they still have to confront their past when the whole exploitative system fails to enrich their lives and diminish their value as well. The present then becomes a struggle—a struggle meant to correct mistakes of the past.



Interestingly, these female characters or mothers use exploitation as a strategy to escape the trials of motherhood. Exploitation then becomes a choice for these mothers in their bid to survive hardships. It is this choice that we see Efi's grandmother and mother make. It is in this sense, that, Dako and her co-authors' posit that: "The women who traditionally are entrusted with the role of raising children have themselves become lured by the trappings of this exploitative web." Dako and her co-authors (p.281) see in this exploitation the reason for the breaking down of our society: "The women who traditionally are assigned the role of raising children have themselves become lured by the trappings of this exploitative web. This is why our society is breaking down."

Evelyn Nakano Glenn has also noted that Motherhood ideology encompasses multiple contradictions. It is these contradictions which we see illustrated in the Efi story. Glenn's argument is that:

Motherhood ideology certainly encompasses multiple contradictions. Mothers are romanticized as life-giving, self-sacrificing and forgiving, and demonized as smothering, overly involved and destructive. They are seen as all powerful—holding the fate of their children and ultimately the future of society in their hands—and as powerless—subordinated to the dictates of nature, instinct, and social forces beyond their ken. (p.11)

In a pattern familiar with Glenn's analysis/argument above is cast Efi's grandmother and mother whose obsession to enrich themselves through Efi's stay with Tika transcends the necessity for these 'mothers' to see to the proper upbringing of Efi. In this rather frightening story, we realize the multiple contradictions of motherhood talked about by Evelyn Nakano Glenn.

Efia's grandmother and mother advise Efia to get herself pregnant in order that Tika would be deceived into giving to Efia all her money. This plan is targeted at coaxing the barren Tika to adopt Efia's child who would then siphon all of Tika's wealth not only for Efia and her people but for the whole of Kataso. This sinister blue-print then becomes the exploitative ploy used by Efia's grandmother and mother. These two mothers exploit Efia's sexuality as they exploit Tika's barrenness. From this point of view, Efia's body is considered by her grandmother and mother to be used to provide the physical labour of bearing and raising a child while the moral authority and control over the child's presumed future wealth will be conferred on the grandmother.

The reader is able to see and analyze the influence and impact of Efia's grandmother's advice on Efia and her mother. The following dialogue shows that in this three-generational household, it is the grandmother who is the main protagonist as she is the one whose calculus maps and rolls out the exploitative strategy, and who teaches her grandchild how to execute it:

'So my granddaughter, if you ask me, the present circumstances are no coincidence at all. It has been destined this way ever since that day that evil wife stole our illustrious son's . . .'

'Please, mother . . .'

'The gods and ancestors of this village of ours designed everything. And your going to live with her is an essential piece of that design. So hear me! Be subservient, humble and very dependable . . .'

'Good advice, mother!'

'Then get yourself pregnant.'

'W-h-a-a-t?'

'You both heard me right. Efia, you will live with her, win her affection, become indispensable to her. So that when you innocently become pregnant . . .'

'Innocently? How does she become pregnant innocently?' Efia's mother asked.

'By pretending she was forced into the sexual act,' the old lady replied.

'By whom?' the mother again.

'It doesn't matter. Hers is just to get pregnant.'

'How?' asked Efia innocently.

‘Fool! By sleeping with a man. How else?’ her mother yelled, warming to the old lady’s plan, whatever it was. ‘Don’t tell me you don’t already know about that!’ the old lady cast her daughter a curious look and smiled a little. (pp.46-47)

In this extract, the grandmother represents a radical shift from what the Ghanaian traditional society expects from an old woman. In the traditional setting, an old woman is expected to be the repository of wisdom. She is a guide to the younger generation and it is she who is the thermometer of what constitutes corrective and impeccable moral behaviour. However, Efiā’s grandmother deviates from this traditional expectation and rather becomes a schemer of evil! She becomes an agent of patriarchy as she strategizes to use Efiā’s pregnancy to siphon all of Tika’s mother.

By adopting the dialogue form in which the grandmother shares her diabolical plan with her daughter and granddaughter, Darko gives her readers the opportunity to hear and see for themselves how a grandmother can be a manipulator and make her daughter and granddaughter partners in crime! This technique strategically positions readers to analyze and criticize the behaviour of this old lady whose actions are motivated by her greedy desire to amass wealth for herself, her family, and to gain recognition in Kataso. Her reaction to her daughter’s and granddaughter’s willingness to comply with her diabolical plans reveals the actual intention behind the plan:

‘So I am happy that we are all in agreement now. It means success is assured. Our task will be to make sure that the child never forgets who her real mother is. That way, the wealth will also belong to Efiā, and therefore to all of us. We will transform Kataso. The village will hold us in great estimation. May our ancestors see us through with dogged determination.’

‘Oh, mother!’ admiringly.

‘Oh, grandmother!’ shyly. (p.48)

Through this old lady's devilish plan, Darko voices the limitations and repercussions that arise when the female body is valued only for its reproductive and other potentials. Oduyoye's statement that "The livingness of the daughters of Anowa, is limited to their biology" (p.10) is apt here.

Efia's mother in Darko's *The Housemaid* is analogous to Adjoa's mother in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Girl Who Can*. In both works, we identify grandmothers who exercise undue control over their daughters and granddaughters. The striking resemblance of the behaviour of these three-generational households in both novels calls for some kind of comparative analysis of *The Girl Who Can* and *The Housemaid*. The two mother-figures in both works show complete helplessness in the face of their mothers' dictates. Kaya in Aidoo's *The Girl Who Can* sees in education the vehicle for individual progress. Even though she is deprived of the benefits of education, she nevertheless feels that her daughter's schooling will afford her (Adjoa) the opportunity to side-step and to overcome the oppressive obstacles in the traditional system. Elated by her daughter's keen interest in education, Kaya affirms the power of education in her complaints to her own mother, Nana; "She kept telling Nana that she felt she was locked into some kind of darkness because she didn't go to school."<sup>40</sup>

However, Kaya's mother sees nothing good in education. In fact, the power of education is lost on this old woman who strongly believes that education is for those females who cannot fulfill the traditional expectation of women. This is where we identify the grandmother-mother-daughter conflict. In this instance, the grandmother opposes her daughter's interest in her child's education. As the two maternal figures oppose each other on the topic of the relevance of

---

<sup>40</sup> Aidoo, Ama Ata. *The Girl Who Can*. In Yvonne Vera (ed.), *Opening Spaces: Contemporary African Women's Writing*. London, Heinemann, 1998, p.11



Adjoa's education, Adjoa comments on the behaviour of these women. However, since the traditional system takes an exception to young girls' criticism of their mothers or grandmothers, Adjoa expresses her grandmother's opinion with repressed assessment. "Nana thought it would be a waste of time"; as Nana would say, "Maybe with legs like hers she might as well go to school." (p.11)

Once again, the question of a granddaughter's fertility comes up. In the eyes of the grandmother, her granddaughter's spindly legs are not suitable for carrying a baby. This then leaves her granddaughter only with the choice of educating herself. However her grandmother never says anything about the benefits of girl-child education. Yet when Adjoa wins the cup for the best all-round junior athlete, the grandmother symbolically carries the cup on her back and makes a big show of it in their community. The grandmother's action here implies that she herself has come to a new understanding of the value of education. Legs too, she now acquiesces, hitherto considered inappropriate for carrying babies, bring in a prize. This teaches the old woman that the female body must not only be limited to biology. Adjoa's victory is yet another lesson for the grandmother and justifies Oduyoye's dictum that the livingness of daughters must not be limited to their biology.

In Aidoo's *The Girl Who Can*, Adjoa carves out a new dignity for herself. However in Darko's *The Housemaid*, Efi, the granddaughter, passively accepts the dictates of her grandmother and mother. Her acceptance to use subservience and sex as exploitative methods reveals that Efi herself has accepted to fulfill the expectation of motherhood that her traditional society has carved out for her. The two books considered here reveal the power of education. In *The Girl Who Can*, education helps Adjoa to see through oppressive cracks in the traditional system. This

awareness then fuels in her the desire to take her education seriously. This breakthrough leads to victory and recognition for her. In *The Housemaid*, however, Efia has no knowledge of formal education, thus she is not able to analyze the import of her grandmother's advice. To her, it is alright to become pregnant without making sure that the father-to-be will be responsible.

In *The Housemaid* therefore, the Efia story is analogous to the story of the spider who strategically weaves a web to trap a fly for food. Yet when the fly is caught, the spider cannot extricate itself from the web, let alone get access to the fly it has entrapped. In this case, the spider is as much a victim as the fly it intends to prey upon. The spider's victory is a Pyrrich victory.

The Efia story ends on a very pathetic note. Though Efia gets pregnant, she wrongly names one of Tika's impotent lovers as the man responsible for the deed. Mr. Nsorhwe's insistence that Efia, her unborn child and himself, undergo a DNA test to ascertain the paternity of the child before he takes full responsibility, does not go down well with Efia and her people. Their reactions to the process of the DNA test capture the fate of the proverbial spider who is caught in its own web!

Six eyes stared at him in great suspense.

'I am sorry, but this is the part that is the most painful. But it also happens to be the most important. They will have to draw some blood from the baby too.'

'How?' Efia's mother shrieked.

'It's simple. They use this special long needle with which they will pierce Efia's womb to draw the blood from the baby too, after which . . .'

'I won't do it!' Efia yelled in frenzy.

'She's right,' said the old lady. 'Why go through such a painful test when you know already what the result will be?' And went numb. (pp.90-91)

The language used in this extract reveals that Efia's mother, Efia and Efia's grandmother are all not prepared for Mr. Nsorhwe's plan. Mr. Nsorhwe's behaviour in this situation is in line with

the meaning of his name in Fante. Nsorhwe in Fante means trial. Nsorhwe, true to type, uses temptation as a strategy to force Efia and her people to retreat. Amma Darko's uses effectively charactonym to forcefully drive home a point: Nsorhwe turns out to be a real thorn in the flesh of Efia and her people. Their first reaction to Nsorhwe's decision to get a DNA test done also attests to their fear of having been caught in their own web!

"Six eyes stared at him in great suspense." Synecdoche has been used for great effect. The 'six eyes' here represent those of Efia, her mother and her grandmother. Since the eyes are the most important part in the staring process, they are used to represent the perceptions of this three-generational household.

To forestall further embarrassment, Efia's mother then decides that it is about time they took their shame to Kataso; however, before taking off, Efia's mother hints of the trouble awaiting them in Kataso should the village know of their failed plot:

'Mother,' Efia's mother came in soberly, feeling her daughter's pain, 'all we can now do is come up with some excuse to leave here gracefully with Efia.'  
'Yes,' with biting cynicism, 'and disappear forever back to Kataso with our miserable failure. And now what will happen? We will be a laughingstock. And you,' pointing to Efia's mother, 'should it get out of hand, be rest assured that I will be the first to visit the chief and tell him where the idea came from. And you too,' pointing accusingly to Efia, 'better start thinking about the life waiting for you back in the village. Even without a child, how was it?' (p.92)

Efia's mother, seeing the mood the old lady is in, decides it is best not to argue further; " 'My husband will deal with you,' she inwardly consoles herself." (p.92)

The grandmother's reaction to her daughter's advice that they go back to Kataso clearly corroborates Nakano Glenn's opinion referred to earlier on, that motherhood ideology encompasses multiple contradictions. The grandmother who is usually portrayed as a repository

of wisdom is portrayed as a schemer of evil. Concerned as she is with portrayal of verifiable reality, Amma Darko exposes her readership to the other side of the old woman which is not complimentary. Amma Darko is urging her readers and critics to take another look at this text to see how women can be their own enemies. Obioma Nnaemeka has argued from her reading of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* that "Woman-on-woman violence and abuse show women as a group suffering from self-inflicted wounds."<sup>41</sup> These self-inflicted wounds, according to Nnaemeka, result from women's active participation in oppressive practices which in turn make them instruments of oppression.

In the case of Efi's grandmother, she does not only exploit her granddaughter. She instructs her daughter to abuse her granddaughter so as to influence Tika to believe that they have no diabolical intentions. It is this same grandmother who instructs Efi to get herself pregnant by any means possible;

'The gods and ancestors of this village of ours designed everything. And your going to live with her is an essential piece of that design. So hear me! Be subservient, humble and very dependable . . .'  
'Good advice, mother!'  
'Then get yourself pregnant'  
'W-h-a-a-t?'  
'You both heard me right. Efi, you will live with her, win her affection, become indispensable to her. So that when you innocently become pregnant . . .'  
'Innocently? How does she become pregnant innocently?' Efi's mother asked.  
'By pretending she was forced into the sexual act,' the old lady replied. (pp.46-47)

This is a perfect example of an exploitation plan. Efi is advised by no other person than a grandmother to use what Kari Dako and her co-authors refer to as "interwoven survival

---

<sup>41</sup> Nnaemeka, Obioma (ed). *The Politics Of (M)othering: Womanhood Identity and Resistance in Nwapa Flora's Efuru*. London, Heinemann, 1966, p.22



strategies” of fertility, sex, subservience, and exploitation. Indeed, a closer look at the ordering hand behind the strategies foisted on Efiya reveal that the grandmother is very calculating.

When Efiya, upon the advice of her grandmother, is nearly caught *in flagrante delicto* (right in the act) in bed with her boyfriend, Tika decides to send her away since she cannot accommodate a housemaid who has a boyfriend. Efiya’s mother’s reaction reveals also that she is a schemer. Her motive is to enrich herself through her granddaughter.

The iciness in Tika’s voice jolted Efiya’s mother.

‘No! Madam Tika, please, that’s not what I meant. I mean, oh . . .’ and she sprang up. ‘Stupid girl!’ She screamed there quietly and looking on helplessly. ‘Is that what you did?’

And at a loss as to what else to do, she swiftly administered six slaps across the cheeks of a very bewildered Efiya, who could not understand why she was being beaten for something she had been ordered to do.’ (p.59)

Efiya’s own reaction to her mother’s apparent show of hypocrisy is captured vividly:

Efiya stood there, heart pounding, waiting anxiously for Tika’s back to disappear, so that she could devour her mother alive. Her mother also knew what was going on inside her daughter’s head so she did not wait for her to pounce.

‘It was all just for show,’ she explained as Efiya gave her a dagger look. ‘I had to act upset.’ And she showed her the small cloth with the pepper. (p.60)

Evidently, the words “pounding”, “devour”, and “pounce” suggest that, at that point, Efiya was so angry for revenge that the fierceness of her pent-up anger is metaphorically compared to a hungry beast upon citing a prey or a killer with a dagger ready to kill! This scene so graphically rendered, illustrates one of the main causes of mother-daughter conflicts. All of her gestures reveal her disappointment and anger at her mother’s blackmail tactics calculated to make Tika blame Efiya alone, rather than her mother and grandmother. The reader is given the chance to picture Efiya’s anger at being so unfairly treated by her own mother. The feeling of being

betrayed by her mother (who should have protected her) causes Efi to initiate a verbal war with her mother.

Pawned by her mother and grandmother, Efi's announcement of her pregnancy causes Tika to dismiss Efi from the house. Having resolved never to go back to the excruciating poverty and shame that await her in Kataso, Efi has no choice but to be a squatter in an uncompleted building until she gives birth to a still-born child. It is the discovery of this still-born child in the bushes that opens the story of this novel. The offshoot of all this is Efi's grandmother's and mother's failure to mother Efi well. Women are traditionally entrusted with the role of raising up children, especially their daughters. In *The Housemaid* however, mothers become lured by considerations of material gain. Thus they connive even with oppressive patriarchal norms so as to exploit their own kind. Mother-daughter relationships become commodified and decency flies out of the window.

The story in *The Housemaid* ends tragically. Poetic justice is visited on all these women whose desire to have power makes of them exploiters. "The bitter irony," as pointed out by Kari Dako and co-authors is that the female self is quite often ultimately diminished and devalued by the nature of the gain in these struggles. Readers see this in the lives of all the women in the novel who join the train of exploitation.

Sekyiwa, as we have noted earlier on, ends up as an indigent, neglected by her one and only child, Tika. Tika herself will never experience motherhood and so she is bound to suffer the fate of the rich but infertile woman who is taunted by her society. Amma Darko tells us that Tika's current medical condition is as a result of her own decision to destroy her fertility to spite her

mother. Had her mother not ‘exploited’ her, Tika would have loved to be a mother: “It had never been Tika’s dream still to be single and childless at the ripe age of thirty-five.” (p.17)

Efia, the victim/exploiter, ends up in squatters enclave with no hope of realizing her dreams. Her grandmother and mother will never realize their dream of taking back the money Sekyiwaa and Tika stole from ‘one of their illustrious sons.’ In addition, they will forever stand condemned by Efia and their own conscience.

Amma Darko’s *The Housemaid* also captures the plight of old women in Ghana. The opening line of *The Housemaid* is not only frightening but true:

“In Ghana if you come into the world a she, acquire the habit of praying. And master it. Because you will need it, desperately, as old age pursues you and mother nature’s hand approaches you with a wry smile, paint and brush at the ready to daub you with wrinkles.” (p.13)

These opening lines of *The Housemaid* are therefore an apologia for the pathetic state of the old woman. The misery of the old woman has nothing to do with living a good life or a life of exploitation. Darko’s analysis here reveals that nature is even unfair to women. She is however quick to add that rather than bemoan her fate, the woman, right from childhood, should acquire the habit of praying so as to seek the help of a deity above herself to counteract this accursed fate.

Nature is personified in these lines. She is a make-up artist, with her equipment ready to transform a once youthful face into that of an ugly, old, witchy face. And so nature pursues. Interestingly, nature is a woman; ‘mother nature’s hand’, and it shows then that both the ordinary woman and the spiritual woman unleash pain to their own kind. Her smile is ‘wry,’ showing her wicked nature. The ordinary woman is a victim not only of oppressive patriarchal norms but also

of time and tide (the match of events). The effective use of personification in these lines is masterly in its ability to capture women as helpless at the hands of time.

Darko, however, departs from the Aristotelian requirement of the tragic heroine where circumstances beyond the control of the tragic heroine contribute to her downfall. Thus in the second and third paragraphs of the first chapter of *The Housemaid*, Darko elevates character flaw over fate in determining the tragic end. Darko cites economic hardships as the factor that makes children neglect their mothers and make their mothers appear as witches. The kind of trade the dejected widow indulges in during her youth, renders her unpopular in her old age. By this kind of narrative design, Darko emphasizes the role that women play in their own downfall:

A dejected widow, once upon a time a vibrant akpeteshie seller in the village of Braha, now penniless, aged and lonesome, started towards 'witchdom' when one of her grandchildren developed kwashiorkor. She had turned herself into a snake and lodged inside the poor child's stomach, they said. Then another grandchild got a goiter. And all eyes in Braha saw red. 'What is she doing lodging in parts of her grandchildren's bodies like that?' they asked. And formally pronounced her a witch. They drove her to live in an isolated hut on the outskirts of the village. No one helped her except a few sympathizers who dropped off leftovers as they passed on their way to their farms. (pp.4-5)

The sequential progression of this old woman's life as captured in these lines reveals that probably it is not just old age or determinism that renders her a witch. Evidence from these lines shows that she was once a vibrant akpeteshie seller. Akpeteshie is a locally-brewed gin usually patronized by poor men enthusiastic about consuming hard liquor. It is relatively cheaper than other alcoholic beverages and so it is well patronized by the under-privileged who cannot afford expensive hard liquor. However, its ability to destroy those who patronize it cannot be overemphasised. Among the diseases associated with the consumption of akpeteshie are liver cirrhosis and renal diseases. The implication here is that for this old woman to sell akpeteshie



during her youth, she is also responsible for prematurely sending people to their graves. Perhaps that also explains the mould in which she is cast as a witch.

Superstition also plays a role here. The grandchild whose unfortunate condition makes people see this old woman as a witch is just used as a pretext to treat the old woman badly. Kwashiorkor and goiter are diseases which go with malnutrition. Thus for the people to lay the blame on this old lady reveals not only their ignorance but also their propensity for superstition.

Oduyoye also talks about the habit of labeling old women as witches and attempts an explication of this rather unfortunate occurrence.

As witches have become known and haunted, women (and especially old women) have fallen victim to this spasmodic appearance of anti-witchcraft cults.

...  
Witches are women who work against the unity and coherence of the community, and who do not seek the good of others or actively care for others. Since women are expected above all to give selfless attention to the needs of others, women who prosper are often accused of not having been conscientious enough about their duties to others. (p.121)

Oduyoye's explication here proves right the plight of this old woman labeled as a witch in the opening lines of *The Housemaid*.

This old lady, we read, was once 'a vibrant akpeteshie seller' which indicates she had money. It is then not surprising that her earlier circumstances, judged against the fact that she sent people prematurely into their graves, might be one of the reasons for her being labeled a witch. Secondly, some of her grandchildren suffer 'abnormal' diseases and so they draw the hasty decision and label her as a witch-resulting in her being outcast.

Darko then uses literature as a vehicle for bringing about correction. This old lady who is considered a witch, turns out to be the 'sensitive eye' of the community. Her persistence that the

youth search the bushes to unravel the truth behind the trail of black ants emanating from the plants, though initially ignored, results in the discovery of the abandoned corpse of a still-born baby in a polythene bag wrapped with stained clothing.

Evidently, Darko's subtle portrayal of the wisdom of the old woman is calculated to give to these old women the honour they deserve. The old woman in our tradition is considered the repository of wisdom, and by using her wisdom, a corpse is discovered. Had it not been for her insistence, the village would have been overwhelmed with stench and even diseases.

In *Faceless*, Darko's third novel, the old woman, as a repository of wisdom, is given a further backing with the role of Naa Yomo, the eighty-seven year-old grandmother whom no one dares call a witch because she lives a responsible life during her youth, unlike the old woman in *The Housemaid*.

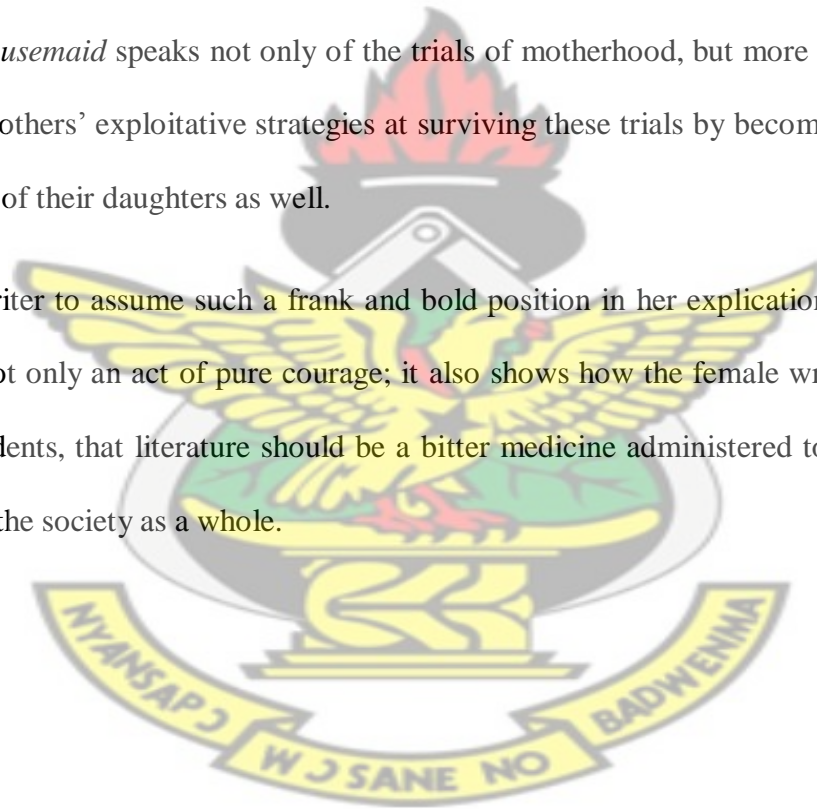
It must be said also that the old woman whose story is captured on the first page of *The Housemaid* is actually a reflection of the rise and fall of Sekyiwa. Thus, in terms of form, this old lady whose life story is summarized in the first two chapters of *The Housemaid*, foreshadows Sekyiwa whose story forms the bulk of the novel. No wonder then that Darko paints a picture of her lonesome, penniless and dejected state even in the last pages of the novel. Teacher reminds Tika that she better start visiting her mother because it can lead to her being pronounced a witch: "She is not a woman of means anymore, you know. She is growing old as well. And you, her only child, have also abandoned her. You know what that can lead to, or?" (p.106)

The answer to the rhetorical question posed by Teacher is found on the first page of the novel where we read that the old lady who was once a ‘vibrant akpeteshie seller’ ends up lonely, poor and dejected and so qualifies to be a witch because she had previously exploited poor drunkards.

By mirroring this old lady’s life through Sekyiwa’s life, Darko’s moral is that even though nature and patriarchal structures are unfair to women, women themselves can choose to be seen as witches or not. Bad choices which make them exploiters not only of their men but of their own shared gender seem to qualify them as witches.

Darko’s *The Housemaid* speaks not only of the trials of motherhood, but more importantly, links these trials to mothers’ exploitative strategies at surviving these trials by becoming exploiters not only of men but of their daughters as well.

For a female writer to assume such a frank and bold position in her explication of why mothers are on trial is not only an act of pure courage; it also shows how the female writer believes, like Aristotelian students, that literature should be a bitter medicine administered to bring healing to individuals and the society as a whole.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### A DAUGHTER'S REVOLT AGAINST HER MOTHER AND SOCIETY: A CRITICAL READING OF *FACELESS*.

Life experiences more often than not have found space and expression in fictional narratives. Amma Darko's novels regularly focus on the condition of mothers in Ghana. For Darko, the trials of motherhood, as illustrated in *Faceless*, her third novel, come from within and without. Darko lashes out at those mothers who have internalized a socially constructed sense of self that makes them to consciously accept subservient roles and maltreatment at the hands of their men.

Pitched against these 'failed mothers' are the victorious mothers who dare to create change by refusing to internalize dominating norms and practices which render them helpless and 'unproductive.'

In *Faceless*, then, Darko sets herself a double task. She portrays with very little compassion the manner in which some mothers **allow** themselves to be burdened by discriminatory cultural, social and even religious structures. The end result of such behaviour is mothers' failure in the eyes of their daughters in whose judgement such mothers stand forever condemned. With the use of juxtaposition, Darko's second task is seen as she portrays victorious mothers, the opposite of the 'failed mothers', who apply foresight, courage and reasoning in their determination to confront and overthrow those socially constructed norms and practices which tend to rid mothers of their sense of self. Darko elevates these mothers (the victorious mothers) as role models for their daughters. Indeed, what distinguishes *Faceless* from its two predecessors is that in *Faceless* we have mothers whose life-stories teach readers that a people's awareness of the value of mothers will ultimately and substantively transform their societies. Thus the role of mothers is



not limited to only the nurturing of children but is made to encompass their contribution to solving national problems and contributing towards development. If in *Beyond The Horizon* and *The Housemaid* men feature as oppressors of women, in *Faceless* not all men are oppressors. A few men believe in the value of women and help them to carve out dignified images for themselves.

Darko begins her novel in the middle of her character's story, then, in a flashback movement, takes us back in time before she brings us into the present. We meet the street child, Fofo, Darko's protagonist, as she discusses with Odarley, a co-street child, her agenda for the day. Fofo's plan is to see her mother and tell her about Poison's failed attempt to rape her. Poison is introduced as 'the no-nonsense streetlord.' Scared that Poison will probably kill her because of the pain she had caused him in her struggle to escape from being raped, Fofo decides to see her mother whom she over-heard discussing Poison with Fofo's stepfather. Gradually, we move from an outside view of Fofo, a view that sees her as carelessly strong-willed, to an inside view, in which her strong-willed behaviour makes perfect sense within the context of her present circumstances.

The use of dialogue within the narration allows the characters to speak for themselves so that readers can critically judge their actions.

Readers' first encounter with Fofo and her mother, Maa Tsuru, reveal that there is a lot of loathing on the part of Fofo for her mother who she considers to be an exploiter of her own children and a failure as well. Maa Tsuru's plea that Fofo runs away from Poison results in a tensed verbal exchange between mother and daughter, with the daughter's voice subduing her mother's:

Why should I go away, mother? Who are they?  
Maa Tsuru wiped away her tears with the back of her hand and blew her nose into her cover cloth. 'It's Baby T,' she said eventually.  
'Baby T?'  
'Yes. Maami Broni . . .'  
'The fat fair woman she lives with?'  
'Yes. She came to me last week.'  
'So? Doesn't she sometimes come to . . .'  
'I know Fofo. I know. Oh God!'  
'Don't bring in God's name, mother. You knew what you were doing when you chose him over . . .'  
'It was for their sake,' she pointed at the baby and the sleeping boy, 'What should I have done?'  
'I don't know. But you should never have fed him and his sons at Baby T's expense. You don't see her. We don't know how she has grown to look like. All for what, mother. For what?'  
Maa Tsuru didn't respond. She wiped away fresh tears from her face and resumed from where she left off. 'Something happened, Fofo.'  
'Something is always happening, no? Always and had I not gotten the good sense to leave home, who knows, he probably would have made you send me away too to work for some woman to make money for you four to live on. No?'  
Maa Tsuru choked on saliva and coughed violently. 'I don't have the strength to fight you with words Fofo,' she spoke slowly, 'and even if I did, I wouldn't do it.'  
(pp.46-47)

In the extract above, Fofo's reaction to her mother's reason behind the plea that Fofo runs far away from Poison underscores the toll that Maa Tsuru's exploitation of her daughters had taken on the relationship between mother and daughter. The dialogue reveals a total breakdown of communication between mother and daughter. Fofo's cutting questions to her mother reveal that she is bent on revolting against her mother by judging her actions and proving to her mother that the latter is an exploiter.

Tracing the source of patriarchy, Rosemary Agonita (1997) writes:

By nature, dominion is maternal for two reasons—the identity of a child's mother alone is certain, and power over a child is initially in the hands of the mother who nourishes and trains it . . . Marriage is the contract that brings about patriarchy.  
(p.97)

Agonita's assertion holds true in that Maa Tsuru's refusal to nourish and train Fofo results in Maa Tsuru's inability to control or nurture her. Fofo virtually lives on the streets, she survives by cleaning carrots for a vegetable seller, and by pick-pocketing when the need arises. It is thus not surprising that Fofo can bandy about words with her mother; after all, her mother had failed in her core duty of nourishing and protecting her child. It is evident also that Maa Tsuru fails in other respects too, for in the ensuing conflict captured in the dialogue alluded to, Fofo blames her mother for trading off her sister Baby T in order that she (Maa Tsuru) can feed her lover and his two sons.

Fofo's warning to her mother not to bring in God's name is calculated to make her mother take all the blame for whatever misfortune has overtaken Fofo and her sister Baby T. It is clear from Fofo's accusations that Maa Tsuru's choice to make life comfortable for herself, her lover and her two sons rather than nourish and train Fofo and Baby T makes her a failure. The dialogue referred to here reveals that Maa Tsuru has allowed herself to be manipulated by a man into making a very wrong decision—a decision which results in her inability to defend herself when attacked verbally by her own daughter. This admission of total guilt and helplessness is a proof of the truth in Fofo's accusation.

Maa Tsuru's reaction to her daughter's accusations or criticisms proves that in this novel, Darko places her analysis of motherhood in the context of a contested terrain that must be understood before it can be analysed. This contested terrain involves three distinct points of view—a father's view of motherhood; a mother's view of motherhood and a daughter's view of motherhood. These points of view intersect, albeit violently, to produce a distinctly complex ideology of

motherhood. Thus motherhood, though an honoured institution in Africa, simultaneously circumscribes and denigrates African mothers.

Maa Tsuru's bed-mate and father of her last two sons, Kpakpo, has a rather myopic view of motherhood. In Kpakpo's view, which is the first view, a mother must sacrifice her older daughters when the need arises so that she and her bed-mate as well as their younger children can survive. Kpakpo's point of view here explains why he connives with Maame Abidjan to send Baby T to Maame Broni as a prostitute. Meanwhile, Kpakpo feeds on the sweat of Baby T by enjoying the money sent him by Maami Broni meant as Baby T's salary.

Ironically, Maa Tsuru's awareness of Baby T's real job does not bring about any corrective measure. Preferring to live off her daughter's commodified body, Maa Tsuru keeps faith with Kpakpo rather than ensure the return of Baby T. Kpakpo views a mother as one conditioned to sacrifice her daughters so that she can 'enjoy' with her male partner. Through Kpakpo's advice, Onko is able to locate Maame Broni's house where he manages to get some of Baby T's pubic hair. The jujuman who promised to exorcise from Onko the spirit responsible for his fall in business had instructed Onko to bring to him Baby T's hair for ritual.

The gruesome murder of Baby T by Onko is occasioned by a jujuman's insistence that only the pubic hair of Baby T will help pull Onko's business out of its slumber. Onko's welding business had suffered a drastic decline ever since he raped Baby T and gave Maa Tsuru money to discourage her from taking the matter up with the police:

Maa Tsuru stared long at the thick wad of notes in her hand. There was a look of worry and hopelessness in her eyes and another not so easily discernible. Then she rested her gaze upon Onko's face



Maa Tsuru rose abruptly. Onko's face fell. Then the corners of his lips stretched into a smile as Maa Tsuru untied her cover cloth around her waist; placed the wad of notes in one corner of it and proceeded to slowly tie it up. She did not look once in Onko's face. If she had, she would have seen how the initial trace of shame and remorse had completely disappeared from Onko's face. (pp.167-168)

Darko's authorial comments on Onko's reaction to Maa Tsuru's tacit acceptance of Onko's 'bribe' (meant to stop her from taking the matter up) is not just a criticism but also illustrates the extent to which poverty and greed can degrade a mother and make her a ploy not only in the game of patriarchal abuse but also of a pawn in a crime.

The character of Maa Tsuru is painted in colours that form an image of disharmony and self-centeredness. By accepting the wads of notes from a man who has raped her daughter, Maa Tsuru steps out of line with the traditional expectation of a mother as one conditioned to nurture and protect her progeny. Really the tables have turned as we witness a paradigmatic shift—a mother now collaborates with an evil man at the expense of her own daughter.

Fofu's ferocious criticism of her mother's inability to nourish or protect her children stems from Kpakpo's rather myopic and self-seeking view of motherhood. Kpakpo's view of motherhood influences Maa Tsuru's neglect and exploitation of her daughters. In spite of the more obvious focus on the exploitation of daughters by their mothers, there arises the need to critically examine Darko's attitude to mothers to ascertain whether she provides logical reasons as to why some mothers prefer to live off the sweat of their daughters.

Maa Tsuru is presented as a rather unfortunate female who suffers undue discrimination and exploitation right from her conception to her adult life. All the men who come her way exploit her sexuality and leave her poorer by neglecting the children they make with her. This situation places severe economic strains on Maa Tsuru. Having been neglected by these men, and even by

her own family members, Maa Tsuru considers her plight as resulting from her mother's curse. She makes no effort to change her situation and even exploits her children so she can eat. Is Darko suggesting here that the economically challenged and abused mother, when given the chance, can unleash with equal fervour, pain and injustice on her own children? Perhaps Maa Tsuru's indifference to her daughter's pain is the result of society's indifference to the plight of the single mother.

The story in *Faceless* is divided into four parts. The various divisions of the novel also strengthen the marginalized nature of Maa Tsuru's life. Book One is made up of thirteen chapters and it introduces the reader to Fofu and how, through pilfering, she bumps into Kabria, the lady working with MUTE, whose acts of generosity set Fofu on a new road towards rehabilitation. In Book One also we meet Slyv Po, the media man who publicizes the issue of Fofu's murdered sister, and who, together with MUTE, assume the diligent role of detectives rummaging through Sodom and Gomorrah to find the murderers.

Book Two is mainly a flashback made up of only three chapters (chapter 14 to 16). It is the background story of Maa Tsuru. The mysticism surrounding her birth and her exploitation by the very man she expects to care for her. It is also the story of how Maa Tsuru's children came into the world only to be thrown unto the streets to eke out a living. It is this Book (2) which we will focus on to find out whether Darko, through flashback, defends Maa Tsuru or blames her the more. Thus Book Two, sandwiched between Book One, which is made up of thirteen chapters and Book Three, which has nine chapters (chapters 17 to 25), provides us also with another classic template of form agreeing with content. Book Two, taken up by only three chapters, speaks about the constricted life of Maa Tsuru. It is also noteworthy to point out that the form of

the novel as per its division into books also reflects the kind of style preferred by the French feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous. Even though the novel comprises three Books and an epilogue, the story does not follow the linear plot method pointed out earlier. Indeed, the story begins not even at the beginning of Book Three but rather at the end of Book Three (chapter twenty-five) where we understand why, where and how Baby T was killed after readers have been informed of her death repeatedly in chapter three. *Faceless* exhibits examples of the non-linear plot or *l'écriture féminine*. Perhaps too, the choice of the non-linear plot or circulatory plot is meant to reveal the complexities of motherhood. Motherhood and its joys, but particularly its woes, come in various shades. Too many forces are at war against motherhood making the irresponsible falter every step of the way. Right from conception, Maa Tsuru's life seems regimented and complex as though she is doomed to end badly. We have used the auxiliary verb 'seems' carefully here because, in fact, Darko downplays the role of superstition in the life of Maa Tsuru. She juxtaposes issues in such a way that Tsuru's own irresponsible choices are made to culminate in her failure as a mother rather than the power of superstition or fate.

What is evident in the circumstances surrounding Maa Tsuru's birth is that the trials of motherhood are traced not only to pregnancy, but even to the source of the pregnancy. Kwei's mother's anger at her son for choosing to impregnate Maa Tsuru, the 'so-called' cursed child, reveals the power of superstition. Having heard of the circumstances surrounding Maa Tsuru's birth, Kwei's mother sees in his son's relationship with Maa Tsuru, an automatic genetic transfer of evil from Tsuru's family chromosomes to her family. The following extract talks about how a mother's belief in the workings of fate can render her blind to the plight of her shared gender. Here Darko attempts to offer readers a reason why women/mothers can elect to be enemies of their own gender:

The seed was planted years ago, several years ago when 'British Accra' woke up one dawn to wails and cries of one of her residents . . .

The reason for the woman's action became clear when she cried, 'Did it have to be her? Of all the young girls around here, did it have to be the cursed one? The one girl cursed by her own dying mother? Is she the one you should go and impregnate? . . . She made her position clear to her son. 'The whole family will have nothing to do with this pregnancy. Nothing!'

Then fetching a cup of water, she washed her hands at Kwei's feet and declared, 'See? I have washed my hands off you too!' (pp.147-148)

One of the most compelling aspects of Darko's art is the use of superstition. The novel in fact gives readers one of the most realistic analyses of the impact of superstition on human reasoning that has ever been made. Darko shows the power of superstition to rid the mind of its ability to rationalize and to arrive at a balanced judgement. Superstition, of course, is extremely common in African life—something akin to the African belief in the workings of the spirit world. Superstition is supposed to explain some of the happenings that seem to elude human comprehension.

People stand to desecrate their life-giving functions if they allow curses and superstitious beliefs to become arenas for blaming others for their irresponsible lifestyles rather than working hard to negate the efficacy of these curses and superstitious beliefs. Instead of locking herself up in the room with her children and crying about a curse, Maa Tsuru would do well to involve herself in some trade so that she can feed her children and herself. Using the curse as an explanation for her despicable lifestyle is simply playing the patriarchal man's game—a game in which the man's irresponsible life-style is calculated to reduce the woman to a mere beggar.

Naa Yomo explicates for us the effects of leaning unto superstitious beliefs: "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 the capability of facing responsibilities.” (p.120)

The fact that the belief in a curse could override Maa Tsuru’s innate instinct—that of a ‘mother’s duty to ensure that her children are nourished and protected’, stresses the negative outcome of leaning unto superstition.

In an article submitted by International Humanist News on 23 November, 2007, the author attempted to trace the source and character of superstitions; “In Africa, superstitions are common and widespread. They include absurd claims and conceptions. Crafted by primitive human beings, these irrational beliefs permeate all aspects of African thought and culture: family life, trading, mining, politics, film industry etc.”<sup>42</sup>

An analysis of the above statement shows that curses or superstitions are created to oppress anyone who believes in them. It thus behoves on anyone upon whom a curse has been invoked to work out conditions under which he or she can eliminate the psychological burdens that curses and superstitions impose on human beings.

Oppressed by a curse which condemns relations to suffering, Maa Tsuru in turn becomes an oppressor to her daughter Baby T and Fofo, both of whom she and Kpakpo exploit under prevailing patriarchal cruelty.

This condemnation of superstition as a belief that holds no logic or truth is also shown clearly in another definition of superstitions. According to this definition,

---

<sup>42</sup> “Superstitution and Witchcraft in Africa.” Submitted by International Humanist News, 23 November, 2007.

Superstitions are beliefs or notions, not based on reason or knowledge. The word is often used pejoratively to refer to supposedly irrational beliefs of others, and its precise meaning is therefore subjective. It is commonly applied to beliefs and practices surrounding luck, prophecy and spiritual beings.<sup>43</sup>

The idea that Fofu refuses to understand her mother's behaviour shows that she does not see how a curse can result in their privation. By electing to allow the ladies of MUTE to give her a new start rather than allow the burdens of a lethargic mother weigh her down, reveals that Fofu does not believe in the efficacy of curses or superstitions.

Indeed, the bonding of MUTE and Fofu is so liberating that it enables a pilferer of a street child to put away fear and shame and to agree to go through a series of tests to ascertain her STD status in addition to learning a trade. All these show that believing in the efficacy of curses is a choice rather than a result of fatalism.

Kwei's mother's reaction to the news of Maa Tsuru's pregnancy reveals that her belief in superstition supposedly guides her actions. Indeed, superstition is widely considered as the basis for the performance of most rituals and is regarded both as life-giving and life-threatening. This is the role that superstition plays in the life of Maa Tsuru. Indeed it becomes the force that fuels Maa Tsuru's reckless choices and is therefore partly responsible for her failure.

Having washed her hands off Kwei, a superstitious act that is supposed to clear one of guilt, Kwei's mother does not just reject Kwei and Maa Tsuru's 'unborn' child; she and her family members sever their relationship with Kwei:

Kwei's mother however, no longer fed him. His family also treated him like a leper. The peace that Maa Tsuru's family wished him eluded him mercilessly. Kwei survived this situation for only a few days. Then he took the drastic decision to leave home. He went and informed Maa Tsuru's family. (p.148)

---

<sup>43</sup> [www.bartleby.com/superstition.html](http://www.bartleby.com/superstition.html)> 25 November, 2011.

The fact that his decision to leave Maa Tsuru with an unborn baby will contribute to the problems of mother and child, does not even occur to Kwei. In the extract referred to here, Kwei's family, we are told, treat him like a leper because of his relationship with Maa Tsuru—the daughter-in-law who is supposedly cursed. The use of the simile in this extract shows the power of superstition. For within a matter of minutes kwei had metamorphosed into a leper whose association with healthy beings could result in their being contaminated as well. The leper imagery used here speaks also of how merciless people who believe in superstition can react. A son becomes an outcast because his mother and relations fear that if they do not cast him away like a leper, he would bring down a curse on them. Their actions however result in Kwei not only leaving home, but also indulging in crime just to survive; and coming back later with "little money and plenty of bodily scars" (p.149). As though his presumed punishment is not enough, Kwei's mother adds to his son's woes by taunting him the more: "Kwei's mother quickly sought refuge in the matter of the curse and sang her son the 'I told you so' verse with glee" (p.149).

Darko shows that belief in superstition also contributes to the trials of motherhood. Indeed, Kwei's mother's action has far-reaching results. Even though between Tsuru and Kwei things move on normally, Tsuru's third pregnancy for Kwei transforms Kwei from an understanding bed-mate to an ardent disciple of superstitious beliefs. He begins to nurture the view that Tsuru's fertile womb is linked to her accursed state:

Maa Tsuru was still spending the nights with Kwei. Neither of them took any precaution. They knew it could happen. They assumed and hoped it wouldn't. Then it did. Maa Tsuru picked seed for the third time. And their second son was still crawling.

Kwei became a changed man overnight. 'How?' He yelled at Maa Tsuru. 'Why? Why did it happen?' As though he played no part at all in the making of it.

‘Nonsense!’ Maa Tsuru’s uncle yelled back. ‘Why didn’t you ensure it didn’t happen by glueing an iron sheet around your lions?’

Kwei’s response was prompt and cruel. He stopped Maa Tsuru from cooking for him with immediate effect, banned her from stepping anywhere near his doorstep, as he said to her, ‘After all you are not my wife!’ Then he cursed Maa Tsuru of being a bad luck woman and having a bad womb that has no sense of judgement or direction. Maa Tsuru and everyone else were dumbfounded. Since when did a fertile womb become a bad thing?

In the secrecy of his head, Kwei also began to wonder if maybe there wasn’t really something in the matter with the curse on Maa Tsuru’s head. (pp.150-151)

This extract illustrates the misery of a young mother whose ignorance about family planning methods deprives her even of the understanding of her male companion. Maa Tsuru is thus jilted and her children are also neglected by their own father. There is a feeling of a tremendous sense of wasted potential for had these pregnancies not occurred in such rapid succession, Kwei could have proved his family members wrong by his show of understanding and care.

Indeed, two authorial comments on this issue reveal Darko’s preoccupation with the subject of male egoism, irrationality and harshness—a subject that she treats with deep concern. Darko’s presentation of male cruelty is precise and quite objective. Even though she blames Kwei, Maa Tsuru is also given her fair share of the blame as evidenced by the following authorial comments:

Neither of them took any precaution. They knew it could happen. They assumed and hoped it wouldn’t. Then it did . . .

‘How?’ He yelled at Maa Tsuru. ‘Why? Why did it happen?’ As though he played no part at all in the making of it. (p.150)

This passage thus demonstrates Darko’s balanced portrayal of the trials of motherhood. Here the father is blamed just as the mother is also blamed for contributing to the trials of motherhood. If Kwei is harsh, irrational and inconsiderate, Maa Tsuru too is portrayed as careless and as having a burning desire for sex even in the face of severe hardship. The rhetorical question “Since when



did a fertile womb become a bad thing?” (p.151) seems to contradict John Mbiti’s argument (1969:33) that: “but if the African woman was ‘barren,’ she was an outcast in her society.” It must be noted that it is not Maa Tsuru’s fertility that makes her the victim but the rapid successions of pregnancies. The moral is for women to take their sexuality into their own hands and practise family planning.

After Kwei’s departure from her life, Maa Tsuru still nourishes the idea that Kwei would come back into her life again: “Maa Tsuru weaved her way back to the mercy of her aunt, while secretly waiting and hoping for Kwei to reconcile with her.” (p.151)

Having waited for too long, Maa Tsuru makes an unannounced visit to Kwei’s room only to meet another woman, who makes a show of her knowledge of the curse on Maa Tsuru’s head.

Darko thus gives us another classic instance of woman-on-woman violence:

‘Melon-bosom’ in response, hurled with the flowing gusto of a volcano, every existing Ga insult, many of it, unprintable, at Maa Tsuru. Then crowned it with, ‘Foolish woman! Don’t you know it was the curse on your head that got him into bad company when he set off during your first pregnancy in search of good work and money?’ (p.151)

Darko’s criticism is not only directed at Kwei’s mother who subtly tutored her son into believing that that curse on Maa Tsuru’s head will bring him bad omen. Her criticism is also directed at Maa Tsuru and Kwei for not taking the necessary steps to ensure that unwanted pregnancies are avoided. Darko also criticizes Maa Tsuru for allowing a man who has not married her properly to have children with her. Also she criticizes Melon-bosom, Kwei’s second girlfriend, for her bad treatment of Maa Tsuru which results in Kwei beating Maa Tsuru mercilessly even when he is aware of her pregnancy. However, the burden of Darko’s criticism is directed more at Maa Tsuru’s deceased mother.

Riche (1976:204) has asserted that: “The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy.” The Maa Tsuru tragedy is linked also to the curse invoked by Maa Tsuru’s mother on Tsuru’s father and his descendants. As the eighty-four year old Naa Yomo tells us, Maa Tsuru’s mother had, before passing on to the other side, cursed the man who had impregnated and betrayed her;

‘By the time the baby’s shoulders burst through her and tore to shreds the lining of her womanhood, the curse was on her lips. She was fading away, but wasn’t going to go without a legacy. The cord was still uncut when she yelled that may her lover and his descendants after him, suffer in more ways and in more forms than he had made her suffer. Someone shouted that she was dying. I cried that she should be made to undo the curse first. But it was too late. She lay there dead, while they took the child away. The child with no mother and whose father and his lineage had been cursed. A child cursed by her own mother.’  
‘So Maa Tsuru thinks her situation is a result of the curse?’ Kabria asked.  
‘Who knows? But something robbed her of her sanity.’  
Kabria frowned. ‘Is she mad?’  
Naa Yomo took her time. ‘She has lost her soul,’ she replied, ‘only a woman robbed of her soul would do what she was doing?’ (p.122)

The extract above reveals a rather confusing understanding of the potency or otherwise of a curse. The fact that Naa Yomo alludes to the curse but fails to pinpoint its efficacy in the words “Who knows” calls for a more critical examination of this old woman’s opinions about the potency of curses.

Naa Yomo’s words, properly analysed, establish that she herself does not believe in the efficacy of curses but she knows that it can take hold of the reasoning faculties of many a people who believe in curses. Naa Yomo’s shock that a mother can curse her own child proves right Riche’s declaration that: “The loss of the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy” (p.240). By her death, Maa Tsuru loses a mother who would have nourished and trained her into

womanhood. The story of Maa Tsuru's mother demonstrates once again that the betrayal by a loved partner constitutes a major trial to motherhood.

Indeed, on a more disappointing note, Maa Tsuru's mother's death, interestingly enough, demonstrates Maa Tsuru's inability to mother her own daughters. Indeed, believing in the potency of her mother's curse, Maa Tsuru decides to see herself as a trapped woman. The fact that a belief in the potency of a curse can create such a flat character as Maa Tsuru reveals it is Maa Tsuru's own belief in the curse that constitutes the essential tragedy not the curse itself. Here, Naa Yomo's rather penetrative analysis of the workings of a curse becomes relevant:

'You know,' Naa Yomo begun, 'when the seed of a curse finds a fertile ground in a human mind, it spreads with the destructive speed of creeping plant. And while it does, it nurtures superstition, which in turn eats into all reasoning abilities and the capability of facing responsibilities.' (p.120)

In this examination of the potency or efficacy of a curse, Darko stresses certain elements essential to rendering a curse potent. For a curse to work, there should be a fertile ground in a human mind. The curse is metaphorically compared to a seed and the human mind compared to soil. Once the soil is fertile, which suggests a personal effort at injecting fertility into that soil, the curse will work. We observe from Maa Tsuru's own response to Kabria and Vickie's knock on her door that Maa Tsuru herself had nurtured a fertile ground for the seed of her mother's curse to grow. Her rather vague claim that it is her mother's curse that has made her a tragic figure sounds unreal; "It's the curse!" Maa Tsuru wailed from inside. "It's the curse!" (p.119)

Although it is bad enough for a dying mother to curse her own daughter's father and his descendants, Tsuru's claim that "It's the curse" points to a conscious effort to see to it that the curse works. Maa Tsuru herself elects to translate the curse into reality and make it work. Indeed

the story is very silent on the efficacy of the curse on Maa Tsuru's father or on any of her father's relations. This probably suggests that the effect of the curse on the father or his descendants is negligible. After all, Maa Tsuru's father who betrays Maa Tsuru's mother is not even mentioned after the birth of Maa Tsuru. *Faceless* is silent on Maa Tsuru's father. This is a rather disturbing silence since in a way his exit from the pages of this novel can be misinterpreted to mean his freedom from all the accusations leveled against him.

Another element essential to rendering a curse potent is one's own irresponsible lifestyle. Anyone with a curse hanging on his or her head will render the curse potent if he/she leans on the curse to explain acts of irresponsibility. Maa Tsuru's relationship with Kwei and Kpakpo manifests a sheer display of irresponsible lifestyle. Why should she allow a man to impregnate her when he had not properly married her? By this time Maa Tsuru had been told of the plight of her birth and the death of her mother. Why does she allow a portion of her mother's history to be repeated in her own life? Even if the death of her mother constitutes, in the words of Adrienne Riche, her essential tragedy, at least it leaves her with a lesson to be wary of men lest she suffers betrayal. Why does Maa Tsuru refuse to heed her aunt's warning: "It is bad enough that he has a son with you, and yet is obstinately avoiding questions about marriage rites and making you his wife properly. But you providing him with all the services of a wife so free of charge, is really rubbing in the salt" (p.150). This reprimand comes a bit too late for Maa Tsuru was already pregnant again for Kwei.

A third pregnancy for Kwei is said to have woken him from his slumber. He considers the curse on Maa Tsuru's head and quickly relates the "numerous" pregnancies to the workings of the curse:



Kwei's response, was prompt and cruel. He stopped Maa Tsuru from cooking for him with immediate effect, banned her from stepping anywhere near his doorstep, as he said to her, 'After all you are not my wife!' Then he accused Maa Tsuru of being a bad luck woman and of having a bad womb that had no sense of judgment or direction. Maa Tsuru and everyone else were dumbfounded. Since when did a fertile womb become a bad thing?

In the secrecy of his head, Kwei also began to wonder if maybe there wasn't really something in the matter with the curse on Maa Tsuru's head. (p.151)

The rhetorical question in this extract expresses Darko's own assessment of the issue. Certainly,

Darko herself is appealing to the efficacy of common sense if such curses are to be eradicated.

This extract also points to one of the trials of motherhood. Pregnancy itself is considered to be both a blessing and a curse. This two-way portrayal of pregnancy constitutes a paradigmatic shift from our understanding of pregnancy. In Africa especially, pregnancy is considered as the one sure means by which a woman's marriage to a man is sustained. Indeed, as early as in 2006, Kari Dako and her co-authors state (2006:278) that; "... In Ghana a barren woman is considered neither male nor female, she inhabits an undignified space peculiar to her situation." Darko contradicts this assertion as she realistically points out that it is not in all cases that pregnancy ensures the survival of marriage or of a relationship between a man and a woman.

Kwei's reaction to this third pregnancy establishes also the consistent motif that for men, the likes of Kwei, electing to be irresponsible in the face of struggle comes naturally. The fact that irresponsible behaviour from fathers constitutes a major trial on motherhood is clearly established. This irresponsible behaviour is displayed in various ways as we see Kwei not only betraying Maa Tsuru's trust, but also inflicting pain on Maa Tsuru by battering her mercilessly and refusing to take care of the needs of his children. The question again is why should Maa Tsuru make another effort to win back Kwei? Why should she secretly wait and hope for reconciliation from Kwei? Why on earth does Maa Tsuru accept Kwei back again, after a year of

his disappearing act? And why does Maa Tsuru allow Kwei to touch and impregnate her for the fourth time running, having experienced his brutality at the announcement of her third pregnancy. The answers to these numerous questions lie in Tsuru's own defense; a defense that has nothing to do with curses or their potency. After promising to open up to Fofu and the ladies from MUTE, Maa Tsuru carelessly explains why she throws caution to the wind anytime a man approaches her for sex:

'I am a woman and I was lonely,' Maa Tsuru opened up. 'He gave me the right words. He said, I want to retire to bed with you at night and wake up with you in the morning. It felt good. I had been without a man since Kwei's disappearance from our lives. No man wanted me. I was a cursed woman. I felt like a woman. I needed to be wanted by a man.' (p.186)

From Tsuru's own words, we glean a clearer understanding of why a woman would rather consort with irresponsible men even at the expense of her children's comfort and survival. If Tsuru is a helpless victim of male exploitation, then it is because she cannot control her sexual desires. The need to satisfy her sexual drive supersedes the need to scrutinize the background of the men who come into her life. She is so interested in sex that she drives her children into the streets so that she can enjoy sex in comfort, used by men, yes, but still harbouring more desire to be used the more. Indeed Maa Tsuru herself still nurtures a desire for Kpakpo to come back and continue with their sexual escapades:

Kabria asked if she was expecting him back. Maa Tsuru's solemn reply of, 'He left some of his things!' made evident a lingering hope harboured by her that Kpakpo would return. It was heart-breaking to see her continued longing for Kpakpo so clearly in her face. 'He is their father!' She went on, as though seeking a desperate reason for so glaringly betraying her on-going desire for Kpakpo." (p.188)

It is very clear that by narrative design Darko is strategically making Maa Tsuru take all the blame not only for her despicable behaviour, but also for her failure as a mother. The life story of

Maa Tsuru is told with a scant show of female solidarity. Indeed it lacks that political edge that is so much expressed in works by feminists; for Darko openly blames women and mothers who refuse to think. There really is no show of compassion towards Maa Tsuru. By allowing Maa Tsuru herself to speak even, Darko calls on her readers to pass judgement on Maa Tsuru. This is Darko's way of dispelling the carelessly held view that in African societies, (where motherhood is a cherished institution), women are always victims.

For mothers like Maa Tsuru, motherhood just happens and so it deserves no attention. In *Faceless*, maternal authority is under interrogation. We encounter Maa Tsuru's fourth daughter, Fofu, accusing her mother and condemning her in a domestic tribunal scenario. Here, Fofu's piercing questions directed at Maa Tsuru reveal a daughter's rebellion against her mother. Indeed through the constant use of dialogue, Darko allows the reader to hear directly from the characters themselves. Through Fofu's questions, which cannot be answered by Maa Tsuru, Fofu condemns her mother by singling her out as an embarrassing model of a mother who has betrayed the institutionalized system of maternal love and devotion.

Fofu's questions to her mother also reveal that she refuses to accept to mirror her mother's image. The questions speak of revolt, revenge and a desire for a breakthrough:

Fofu was appalled. 'So you will do it again, won't you?' She wailed at her mother. 'If he returned today you would let him in and probably get pregnant by him again, won't you? Why mother, why? What life have you been able to give those of us you already have? Look at the boys here. Look at me. We have no idea where the two older boys are. Are they dead? I often wonder. Are they alive? Are they in prison? Are they killing people to survive? You offered us all generously to the streets, mother. You made the streets claim and own us. These two at your feet are already going hours without food. Only time, and they will also be venturing out onto the streets to fend for themselves. You grew too used to living off the sweat of your children, especially Baby T, whom you . . .'

'Fofu!' Maa Tsuru cut in sharply.

Foyo ignored her mother. 'Baby T is gone, mother!' The tears began to flow freely. 'You couldn't even mourn her openly. You couldn't bury her decently. You couldn't even talk about her death. What is it you are looking for, mother? Tell me.' (p.188)

Foyo's relationship with her mother is, in fact, revealed to the reader through the abundant flow of interrogations. As many as eleven questions are put to Maa Tsuru by her daughter in rapid succession. The manner of the questions (that is, their rapid succession) suggests strongly that Foyo is not interested in answers. She is fully aware that her mother has no answers. The only therapeutic answer comes from Foyo herself. She weeps uncontrollably; tears she has suppressed all the time she was in the streets flow:

'... What is it you want?' and collapsed in more tears into Kabria's arms. Kabria held her close. The tears flowed in torrents. Tears suppressed for too long. Tears that could not be shed out there on the streets where toughness was the prescription for survival and tears were a sign of weakness. Tears held back lest they reveal her fourteen years. She let it all out. (pp.188-189)

The mother here is featured as a target of a daughter's condemnation. In confronting Maa Tsuru, Foyo adopts the double role of a judge and a victim. In Foyo's mind, her mother's obsession to fulfill her sexual desires at the expense of her children's survival is the cause not only of Baby T's death but also of the bitter life confronting her siblings and herself.

The fact that Foyo is being judgemental is revealed through the numerous questions she addresses to her mother. She is a victim and this comes out through her tears. Darko captures the tears as "torrents." Torrential rainfall describes rainfall that falls so heavily that it results in floods washing away everything in its path. Obviously, Foyo's tears do not flood the room. Yet, the exaggerative use of "torrents" emphasizes the extent of Foyo's frustration and pain. Indeed this emphasis is also explained, for Darko tells us that all those tears that had been suppressed for too long on the streets flowed freely. Foyo's questions and tears mainly express her rejection of



the life she has been condemned to live because of her mother's mistakes. She feels a mixture of anger and sadness for the sorry state of her mother, fallen victim to Kwei and Kpakpo.

Fortunately, Fofo finds in Kabria a valid gender model to look up to. In the extract cited, we are told that Fofo collapses into the arms of Kabria and Kabria responds by holding her close. This shows some kind of bonding between the two. The affectivity that is absent in the Maa Tsuru-Fofo relationship is seen in the Kabria-Fofo relationship. We read earlier on that Fofo freezes when her mother attempts to embrace her: "Inside the room, Maa Tsuru was made to embrace Fofo. Fofo went rigid. Maa Tsuru's face fell. She withdrew slowly from her daughter. There was pain in her eyes." (p.185)

Though Fofo revolts against and rejects her biological mother, she embraces Kabria. Kabria thus becomes to Fofo an alternative mother. Rapoport and co-authors (1977) have identified the beneficial roles of alternative mothers.

Rapoport and co-authors have proposed a broadening of the concept of parenting to include supplementary figures other than mothers and fathers. The need for supplementary mothers and fathers, according to Rapoport and co-authors' proposal, arises when there is a deficiency or inadequacy of family functioning like the one illustrated in the Maa Tsuru-Fofo's case.

Rapoport and co-authors (1977:361) maintain that including supplementary figures in the parenting process implies "a recognition of the potentials for parenting by people other than fathers and mothers—inside and outside the family. Children, kin, neighbours, professional helpers, and friends may contribute to parenting." Kabria's relationship with Fofo manifests reference as a supplementary parent-figure template.

The reason for Maa Tsuru's inability to mother her children well has been succinctly captured by Rapoport and her co-authors: "A mother who feels lonely and isolated, unfairly treated and wasted is hardly likely to provide a satisfactory role model even for her growing daughter; and she is unlikely to be an effective disciplinarian for her children" (p.355).

In *Faceless* also, Darko's portrayal of the mistakes that lead to Maa Tsuru's helpless state is meant also to subvert stereotypical notions about motherhood. She presents motherhood as a terrain which might incorporate excesses. Mothers, according to Darko's portrayal, are not always nurturers since some can be abusers and exploiters. What can make a mother an exploiter and abuser, especially of her own daughters? Rapoport and co-authors provide a tangible answer to the above question: "There are various value conflicts necessarily involved in parenting within the new frame work proposed. Values of self-actualization must at some points be recognized to conflict with those of care-giving" (p.362)

For Maa Tsuru, her self-actualization lies in sex and monetary rewards. Motivated by money, Maa Tsuru pushes her children into child labour: "By the time each of Fofu's two older brothers struck ten, they were running errands at the sea side and the fish market. Baby T and Fofu by then were performing petty chores for family members in exchange for food leftovers and old clothes" (p.156). With the departure of the boys from Maa Tsuru's room due to the discomfort they feel anytime Maa Tsuru and Kpakpo make love, Fofu and Baby T become the automatic bread-winners doing menial jobs and pick-pocketing to bring in the money.

Maa Tsuru grows so used to living off the sweat and toil of her children that she never anticipates the damage she does to their sub-conscious mind.

When Onko rapes Baby T, he only has to offer Maa Tsuru money to keep her silent. Later on when Maa Tsuru realizes that Baby T is not learning dressmaking as Maami Broni informs her but that the former is involved in prostitution, she keeps quiet because she feels comfortable with the monetary rewards it brings her and her bed-mate Kpakpo.

But after all that Maami Broni saw of Maa Tsuru's reactions, it was too little said too late to clear her suspicion. She decided there and then to handle the deliveries of the envelopes herself. Thus it began, that for years, Maami Broni came to symbolize the arrival of an envelope containing money whenever she showed up in the house. It always brought a smile to Kpakpo's face and a wince to Maa Tsuru's who nevertheless turned it down. (p.172)

We are here presented with the image of an avaricious mother, whose desire for sex and 'chop money' supersedes the need to ensure the sexual health of her daughter. Maa Tsuru is depicted as a mother who contradicts any ideas related to good mothering. She neither fulfills her maternal role of providing and protecting her children nor of bringing up her children to become decent citizens. For Maa Tsuru, her trials as a mother emanate from her own wrong choices which are mostly dictated by her desire to exploit her own children in order to serve well the dictates of her desires. The trials of motherhood in Maa Tsuru's case, do not come from outside pressures but from Maa Tsuru's own doings. There is a break from the romanticization of motherhood to the criticism of mothers who consciously fail to mother well.

It is however not a totally gloomy story, for the story of *Faceless* also encompasses the story of Kabria and her co-workers at MUTE. Whereas in Maa Tsuru we find an example of a mother unable to mother her children, especially her daughters, in Kabria we find a mother who makes sensible choices, and is able not only to mother her own children but to mother Fofo, Maa Tsuru's daughter, as well.

In an interview with Amma Darko, her reply to our question as to whether her own life experiences mirror that of Kabria, giving the nagging impression that the character Kabria is created as a role model is very insightful. Though Darko declines to ‘openly’ see herself as the ‘life image’ of Kabria, she nevertheless agrees that Kabria is a very likeable character and even confesses that this same question has been asked her by many interviewers:

I think the crux of the matter here is not whether I am Kabria or not. I like this character very much myself. I have been asked this same question by a number of interviewers. My only reply is that a character like Kabria deserves to be studied carefully and imitated by any woman who does not want to limit her roles to the kitchen and the bedroom.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed the portrait of the defeated, pitiable woman as we glean from Maa Tsuru’s portrayal gives way to the more assertive character, Kabria. In this novel, Kabria and her colleagues at MUTE respond to social change by rejecting all those strictures that militate against women’s self-realization.

Kabria is married with three children. She works with the NGO called MUTE that is into documentation of ‘serious’ events that gain little attention from the government. Although she is not satisfied with her meager salary, she still refuses to give up her work because she derives job satisfaction from her work. Her husband Adade is an architect whose belief and practice of patriarchy create tensions and sometimes deprive Kabria of her joy as a married woman. Added to the “Adade problem” is her children, two girls and a boy, each posing a different kind of challenge to Kabria. The “icing on the cake,” however, is Kabria’s troublesome car, affectionately called Creamy. Indeed in this novel, Creamy is not just an ordinary car as it

---

<sup>44</sup> In an interview with Amma Darko on “What motivates her to write irrespective of her tight schedules at work” at her office at Internal Revenue, Kaneshie Branch, Accra, April 2010.



sometimes behaves like a human being. This car, we read, has been to so many mechanical shops and has had so many surgeries that have left indelible marks on its “body.”

Two extracts will be cited here to reveal the basic differences in life-styles of Maa Tsuru and Kabria. The reason behind this comparative analysis is to appreciate Darko’s use of juxtaposition as a means of elevating one character and positioning her as a role model for her readership while condemning the other (Maa Tsuru) because of the irresponsible choices she makes. Even though these mothers (Kabria and Maa Tsuru) are all bedeviled with the trials of motherhood, Kabria is able to strategize in such a way that she is not burdened by these trials. She surmounts all challenges and is able to raise her children properly. Maa Tsuru is a counter weight to Kabria in the sense that she allows the trials of motherhood to cower her into senseless submission. She is not only incapable of reasoning but she literally allows her children to suffer the repercussions of her irresponsible behaviour. These two extracts then bring out a clear dichotomy; the first one is on Maa Tsuru and is followed by the one on Kabria:

In the midst of angry mothers and screaming children and bleating goats and sheep, Maa Tsuru looked like a soul drowned in torpidity. The baby in her arm didn’t seem to even impact into her oblivion. And but for the sounds from the child’s throat, her world was dead. A life dissolved in absolute lethargy. Odarley smiled sadly; then even the sad smile waned when she noticed the desperate scramble of one tiny hand to ferret for something loose almost non-existent in Maa Tsuru’s bosom. The weak grab of the loose and hanging breast. The searching mouth in the tiny lean face. The voracious draw on tired wrinkled nipple. The spurt of energy from the enervated body that was clearly the anger of a little child. And Odarley knew that the gurgling of Fofu’s half brother was one of anguish. In process, was the nurturing of another prospective soul into the devouring jaws of the streets. A life brought forth for the sake of bringing forth. A hungry mouth created not out of want. (p.42)

Darko’s preoccupation with portraying objective reality renders fictional distancing minimal as exemplified in this extract. Her authorial intrusion reveals a writer who is not apologetic about

launching poignant attacks on a society where child abuse has become a matter of fact. Anger and want become living realities of this baby's life whose need for breast milk is obviously not fulfilled. Indeed his mother, we are told, is neither moved by her child's hunger nor even bothered by the lack of milk in her breast. Maa Tsuru has literally allowed the trials of motherhood to sap both her energy and her breast milk; "And but for the sounds from her child's throat, her world was dead" (p.42). The language in use in this extract points to a mother's irreversible self-destruction impacting on a tiny baby. Maa Tsuru's soul is described as 'drowned in torpidity'—she is "oblivious" also to reality and her world is 'dead'. Her life is expressed as one 'dissolved in absolute lethargy.' Thus her mental faculties are dulled resulting in physical slowness. These words and expressions reveal that Maa Tsuru has accepted her situation. In Darko's literary discourse on the trials of motherhood and its impact on children, the fictional lives of Maa Tsuru and her children share one major characteristic. It is Maa Tsuru's bed-mate, (the child's Father) who put mother and child into this mess. At this time of her life, Kpakpo had left Maa Tsuru. But as has been pointed out earlier, Maa Tsuru herself is given a large chunk of the blame because she chooses Kpakpo in the first place as a bed-mate. Darko's description of the baby as "A hungry mouth created not out of want" (p.42), suggests that there really is no need for this child to be born only to suffer hunger. His birth makes no sense because it is 'A life brought forth for the sake of bringing forth.' No prior preparations had been put in place to accommodate and nurture this child. Tsuru herself is poor and cannot adequately feed herself. This results in little or no breast milk for this child warranting his description as a hungry mouth.

We have here a challenging, controversial and subversive discourse on automatic maternal love and devotion. This depiction of the mother as one who cares less about her children's needs, a mother with neither ambition nor nurturing abilities is really the thrust of the force that motivates

Amma Darko to correct the atrociously misconceived notion that mothers are automatic nurturers and protectors of their children.

The fact is that Maa Tsuru's baby boy continues to search for milk irrespective of its frailty. He is not ready to give up the fight even though he knows that there really is no milk in these 'loose and hanging breasts.' The child still invests his energy into the search, for the word 'spurt' suggests a sudden burst of energy—energy devoted to an angry, illusive search. The fact is that this child is not ready to separate itself from the mother's breast; it clings to it with all the force it can generate. Though angry, he still grabs the breast. This scene is suggestive of anger and emotional link and proves that even in cases where a mother fails to provide the essential needs of a child, there can still be a kind of link.

Darko thus debunks the traditional notion that maternal love exists naturally in women. Indeed it is the collapse of the Maa Tsuru/Kpakpo's family structure that results in this pathetic situation. Darko's critique is not only directed at Maa Tsuru's inability to take better care of her children, but at society's failure to ensure a decent life for its women who, by all intents and purposes, are subjugated in most contemporary societies. Darko's biting remarks which end this extract; "A hungry mouth created not out of want" (p.42), are meant to uncover the ineffectiveness of social services in dealing with the plight of single mothers. Darko demonstrates her consciousness as an artist by revealing the traumatic outcome of neglect both on the side of mothers, fathers and on the side of government support systems. Her claim that "In process, was the nurturing of another prospective soul into the devouring jaws of the streets" (p.42), manifests a writer participating in helping solve the problem of streetism by establishing the basis of streetism whilst cautioning

governments about the plight of street children as they enter the “devouring jaws” of the streets. There is no hope then for the prey destined inexorably for the streets.

Synecdoche has been used to great effect in this extract. Parts of the body are made to function as the whole so as to create vivid pictures of want. The sound of a hungry child’s throat jostles a mother from her dead world; the tiny hand of the child, that ferrets for non-existent breast milk evokes malnourishment due to excruciating poverty. The loose and hanging breast of Maa Tsuru mean that she herself is very hungry. The hunger and disillusionment painted by the effective use of synecdoche culminate in the paradoxical sentence—“In process, was the nurturing of another prospective soul into the devouring jaws of the streets” (p.42). To nurture a soul with the aim of donating it to the devouring jaws of the streets is an imagery of real hopelessness.

Maa Tsuru epitomizes the failed mother crushed under the trials of motherhood. However, Kabria is portrayed as a successful mother who refuses to be swamped under the trials of motherhood. This extract shows that mothers can be on trial and yet refuse to be annihilated by those trials.

Kabria’s role in *Faceless* could be seen as one of the most revolutionary fictionalizations of the quest for African mothers’ self-realization. Kabria is a woman who knows her own mind. Even though she gets little support from her husband Adade, she still performs her nurturing roles creditably. The challenges she encounters with her children’s ‘demands’ rather invigorate her to rise up to the challenges and surmount them. Thus, irrespective of all the challenges she faces which can be seen as trials of motherhood, Kabria still finds the time and energy to contribute to solving the problem of the street child Fofu. The portrayal of Kabria is particularly well done.



Darko is able to penetrate into Kabria's psyche and display to readers the basis and motivations of her conduct.

Darko's narrative technique in *Faceless* encompasses first a listing of the character's life-style and attributes and then a dramatization of the "list". Indeed this method is coloured by her sociological concern. Darko classifies Kabria's character by her social status—as a mother, wife, worker and car owner. She is presented as a distinct social type representing a cross-section of modern Ghanaian working women. The portrayal of Kabria presents the professional self as expressed in the personal. Thus we see a career woman whose career influences also her role as a mother and wife. The mother Kabria is extremely self-conscious about her career and the demands it makes on her. This kind of awareness helps her to better work out things so that she is efficient both as a mother and a worker. The introduction of Kabria, quoted below, illustrates the above statement.

The mother of three children between the ages of seven and fifteen, events both in and outside the home sometimes got her thinking that those ought to be the most impossible of all ages.

Married sixteen years to Adade, her architect husband, Kabria passionately loved her job with MUTE, a Non Governmental Organization that was basically into documentation and information build up. And with equal fervour, she loathed the figure that appeared on her salary slip. But topping it all was her shamelessness about her special attachment to her old-hand-me-down-thank-you-very-much-Adade 1975 VW Beetle nicknamed creamy.

The mother, wife, worker and battered car owner that she was, no day passed that Kabria didn't wonder how come the good Lord created a day to be made up of only twenty four hours, because from dawn to dusk, domestic schedules gobbled her up; office duties ate her alive; her three children devoured her with their sometimes realistic and many times very unrealistic demands; while the icing on the cake, their father, needed do no more than simply be your regular husband, and she was in perpetual quandary. (pp.34-35)

Clearly, Kabria's life struggles as captured in the narrative reveals that she is burdened by her work, her husband, her children and even her car!

The last paragraph of this extract reveals Darko's skill at creating understanding through content and form. The entire last paragraph above is made up of seven lines yet this is a paragraph which has subsumed the role of just a single sentence as we see only one full-stop ending all the eight lines. Though we have one sentence, we can equally count as many as eleven punctuation marks (one apostrophe, five commas and three semi-colons). These punctuations so scattered in this sentence of a paragraph really slow down the reading. These punctuations force the reader to pause at several intervals to ponder the import of the content. These are really authorial intrusions and yet they capture well the difficulty that the mother, wife, worker and car owner goes through each day. It is thus no wonder that in her mind, Kabria cannot comprehend why God 'created a day to be made up of only twenty-four hours' (p.34). With her numerous 'duty-calls', twenty-four hours is definitely not enough. Her inquiring mind in this regard speaks of her own trials as a mother. God the creator is seemingly portrayed as contributing to trials of motherhood because He creates a day made up of only twenty four hours. However, the adjective 'good' is used to modify God because he also gives Kabria the strength and skill to be able to achieve much within the twenty four hours at her disposal.

We vividly picture the trials of motherhood as experienced by Kabria through the effective use of personification and hyperbole. She works from dawn to dusk, which means no rest at all, yet no where do we read that Kabria suffers a break down. This implies that at least there is time for sleep! The exaggeration in the word 'devoured' also creates some kind of fear. Are Kabria's children carnivores or some pre-historic dinosaurs? Certainly not! Yet their many demands, according to the narrative, devour Kabria. The use of hyperbole in this paragraph emphasizes how burdened she feels.

There is also the use of personification. In the house, Kabria is not free. She is gobbled by her domestic schedules. At the office, it is even worse because her duties eat her alive! The personification and exaggeration reveal that not only does she suffer at home but she suffers at the office too. The language used thus prepares our mind to later appreciate Kabria who does not allow her lot to mar her life and role as a mother. What makes Kabria successful in spite of her circumstances is her ability to act for herself as an agent of culture and of change. Acting as an agent of culture means reviewing the cultural expectations of the woman and deconstructing those expectations which are inimical to the woman's development. Acting as an agent of change means enriching the lives not only of her children but of everyone she encounters through the uplifting of consciousness, aimed at making them realize the benefits of giving a human touch to all situations. Kabria's life therefore echoes Iniobong I. Uko's statement:

. . . societal constructs set motherhood and procreation as the woman's major sources of fulfillment, but contemporary African women are seeking new avenues for self-fulfillment, arguing that it is now untenable, obnoxious and unacceptable that womanhood is validated only through motherhood and procreation, where procreation implies the male-child principle.<sup>45</sup>

It is important then to explore how Kabria is able to surmount the trials of motherhood and to become not only a successful mother but also a versatile social worker and detective all in one.

Darko describes each of Kabria's children who pose a lot of challenge to their mother. With ages ranging between fifteen and seven, each of these children pose a different kind of challenge, eliciting from Kabria the thought that, "those ought to be the most impossible of all ages" (p.34).

---

<sup>45</sup> Uko, Iniobong I. "Transcending the Margins: New Directions in Women's writing." In Ernest N. Emenyonu ed. *New Directions in African Literature*. Trenton, N.J, African World Press, 2006, p.86

Obea, her first daughter is a year older than Fofa. At fifteen, she is not a street child, neither is she rude. However, it is rather her full entry into adolescence which creates some kind of panic to both Kabria and Adade: whilst Kabria prays for God's guidance to help her "deal with her physically maturing daughter," Adade rather wonders whether "the time had not come for him to maybe invest in two bulldogs to discourage potential young male whistlers behind the wall" (p.35).

Kabria's reaction to Obea's growth reveals that Kabria is aware that if she relaxes in her duty towards the proper training of Obea, she may lead a promiscuous life-style. The notion that a daughter attaining adolescence can cause a trial for her mother is very worthy of note. Importantly, as we analyze Kabria's reaction, we realize that Kabria seeks a power above herself to help her deal with her "now physically maturing daughter." Why does Kabria fear that she might fail in this direction? Why does she seek help from God by "praying to God for guidance on how to deal with her now physically maturing daughter"? (p.35) The answer is readily provided in the novel. In a number of instances, Adade blames Kabria anytime the children seem to be misbehaving.

Motherhood in Africa defines female identity, and for Kabria the fear of possibly failing to mother a child well is seen by Kabria as a loss of her identity as a mother. Upon chancing on a PPAG pamphlet under Obea's pillow, Kabria becomes upset because she had not anticipated that Obea would want to read anything about family planning. It is only after talking with them about Fofa and the causes of streetism that she feels at ease with herself. By teaching her children to know the causes of streetism, Kabria is not only helping them to appreciate that they are



privileged and ought to make the best out of it but also in helping them to understand and appreciate the plight of street children.

Considering Adade's reaction to Obea's growth, Darko shows that fathers have proprietary rights over their daughters. Thus, whilst Kabria prays and teaches her children, Adade rather thinks of "buying two bulldogs to discourage potential young male whistlers behind the wall" (p.35). The female daughter here is seen as property to be protected rather than as a human being to be trained. Adade's reaction to Obea's growth reveals that he is not interested in the moral upbringing of his children; he is only interested in holding at bay potential young male whistlers.

Kabria's second child, Essie, also poses a different kind of challenge to her. At age nine, Essie stops at nothing once she decides to ask her mother for financial and material needs. Although these demands are a burden on Kabria's meager income, Essie sees no problem at all with them. This attitude causes a lot of worry to Kabria. Ostensibly, it is Obea's entry into adolescence that creates the bigger burden to Kabria. Obea's 'blossoming bosom' and 'fairly rounded hips' generate some kind of fear in her parents:

And as much as Kabria could recall, Obea said goodnight to her one night, baby faced, flat chested and all, only to wake up the following morning sporting a blossoming bosom and a pair of fairly rounded hips. The result? Obea threw both Kabria and Adade into absolute turmoil . . . And while Kabria suffered her period of discomfort in silence, praying to God for guidance on how to deal with her now physically maturing daughter, Adade for his part, retired to bed each night wondering if the time had not come for him to maybe invest in two bulldogs to discourage potential young male whistlers behind the wall. (p.35)

Obea's blossoming chest and fairly rounded hips symbolize her entrance into adolescence. Darko portrays differences in parents' perception about adolescence by presenting the reaction of each parent to this phenomenon. Whereas Kabria feels that she needs God's guidance to enable her

mother her adolescent child well, Adade feels that he needs to invest in two bull-dogs to scare away potential young whisperers. Kabria's reaction teaches that mothers need to train and guide their daughters so as to ensure that these daughters do not go wayward. The mother-daughter relationship would be a healthy one if all mothers applied themselves sedulously to the proper training of their daughters. Darko gives this responsibility to mothers and so we understand why Adade's worry only has to do with investing in two bull-dogs to scare away intruders. Whereas Adade clears his fears with the ability to purchase bull-dogs, Kabria seeks divine intervention. The burden of motherhood at times demands divine strength to be able to surmount it and that is exactly what mothers are called upon to do in order for daughters to fit well in society.

Examples of male narcissism<sup>46</sup> and irrationality are seen in the life of Ottu, Kabria's youngest child and only son of seven years. For instance, Ottu feels that he lessened his mother's pain by coming into the world a boy—a subject he preaches to Kabria with great joy. To him, his mother should excuse him even when he errs because of his privileged status as the only male child. To make Kabria see the import of his insistence as a privileged child, Ottu alludes to the story of his friend who, like him, is the only son of his mother: The following dialogue sums up Ottu's argument (in favour of his gender) and Kabria's ability to teach his son to respect not only his gender but females as well:

'I have a friend at school,' Ottu launched into a self-promotion campaign, 'They are six . . .'

'Six children?'

'Yes.'

'In this day and age?'

'That is why my friend is special.'

---

<sup>46</sup> In Greek mythology, Narcissus is a youth who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool, and who, after eventually wasting away from unsatisfied desire, was transformed into a plant with showy flowers: cissus/cissi

And Kabria wondered where this was leading to. ‘Ottu, please, every child is special. Every child ought to be precious to the parents, be they even ten or twenty.’

‘Mum, you don’t understand,’ Ottu reproached, ‘he is also the only son. Just like me. And his grandmother said he is special. Veeeeeeery special.’

Kabria began to suspect where the conversation was leading to and asked carefully, ‘Did he say why his grandmother said that?’

‘Yes. You see, by coming as a boy, he earned his mother plenty of respect and also ended her pains.’

‘Her pains?’

‘Yes. When you are bringing forth a baby they say it is painful. Veeeeeeery painful. No?’

Kabria very stubbornly ignored that. Her beloved son went on unperturbed anyway.

‘You see, my friend’s grandmother said that had my friend not come as a boy, she, being my friend’s father’s mother, would have ensured that my father’s mother continued to bear more and more children till she bore a son.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes. And because of that, his Mum never punishes my friend. If you like when you take us to school tomorrow, I’ll call him for you to ask him yourself.’

Kabria turned down the offer with stiff politeness, told her son that like his two sisters, he too was special, but definitely not because he was a boy. And would have equally been special had he also come as a girl.’ (pp.37-38)

It is apparent that Kabria tutors her only son to respect all sexes. In doing so, Kabria is solving a futuristic problem that is likely to arise in Ottu’s married home. Had Kabria not educated Ottu, Ottu in future would most likely exercise undue egoistic pressure on his wife and female children just as we see Adade do to Kabria and the children. The fact that Kabria attempts to resolve this issue of male egocentrism with the hope of forestalling a repetition of the Adade life-style in Ottu’s future home, shows how resourceful she is in dealing with her challenges.

It is also significant to see how woman-on-woman violence is perpetrated with no sense of shame. Such is the situation in Ottu’s friend’s family. According to Ottu’s friend, had he not come into the world a boy, his paternal grandmother would have ensured that his mother perpetually gives birth irrespective of her knowledge of the pains associated with childbirth.

The grandmother's words justify Uko's argument referred to earlier on that: ". . . it is now untenable, obnoxious and unacceptable that womanhood is validated only through motherhood and procreation where procreation implies the male-child principle" (p.86).

What surprises the reader is the friend's mother's attitude towards her only son. As reported by Ottu, his friend's mother never punishes him because he is the only boy whose birth cut short his mother's ordeal.

'Yes. You see, by coming as a boy, he earned his mother plenty of respect and also ended her pains.'

'Her pains?'

'Yes. When you are bringing forth a baby, they say it is painful. Veeeeery painful.'

'No?'

Kabria very stubbornly ignored that her beloved son went on unperturbed anyway.

'You see, my friend's grandmother said that had my friend not come as a boy, she being my friend's father's mother, would have insisted and ensured that my friend's mother continued to bear more and more children till she bore a son.'

(pp.37-38)

The fact that a woman could succumb to such subjugative traditional practice is rather pathetic. Darko shows through Ottu's friend's grandmother that such mothers must be blamed for the increasing rise of patriarchal oppression and male egocentrism.

It is remarkable to note that Darko is literally advertising Kabria as a model of a good mother. A good mother does not only nourish her children; she trains their mind to see through abusive practices and to help others refrain from them. Though in her home, Kabria, the mother and wife, may be said to be situated on the fringes, her strength, resilience and foresight keep her in control of the centre. Through Kabria, Amma Darko is able, in the words of Uko (p.10), to "deconstruct



and recreate the hitherto contemptuous stereotype of the voluptuous and sexual African woman; the stereotype that justified her exclusion from serious matters and credible activities.”

Just as Kabria trains her children to live responsible life-styles, so does she, by careful and sometimes radical strategies, train her self-centered husband Adade to take up those responsibilities he overlooks. In her sequential presentation of the trials of motherhood as seen in Kabria’s life, Darko strategically positions Adade in the middle. Having chronicled the challenge that Kabria’s children pose, Darko then moves on to tell us about Adade. Adade’s selfish attitude in his own house is seen through his refusal to help in the upbringing of his own children. He supplies the daily financial upkeep (which is grossly inadequate) and that probably is his only positive contribution.

Adade, we read, is the last to rise from bed everyday in the house. His expectation to find his breakfast already prepared each morning reveals his magisterial status. In order not to be disturbed by Kabria or his children, he had adopted this despicable habit of reading and re-reading newspapers. After the day’s work, he is the last to come home having released pent-up tension by socializing over bottles of beer with his friends.

Adade’s rather uncaring attitude compels Kabria to wonder which one of the two of them really needs to release tension. The extract below shows that Adade, the husband is also a major trial in the life of Kabria, the mother-wife:

Kabria often wondered which of them needed a more urgent release of tension. Whether it shouldn’t be she, who after having been labeled the weaker sex, had to, in spite of a full job, perform all her traditional duties at home, without an iota of relief. Everyday after work, while Adade set off on route to go and release his tension, she had to go and pick up the children from school, head straight for home, change clothes, and go to the kitchen to see to dinner. Only to have him

declare first thing on arrival home after releasing his tension, ‘Oh Kabria, I am so tired!’ (p.39)

The terms used in this narrative reveal the object of the author’s use of sarcasm. The weaker sex does more work without complaining about tiredness whilst the man, who is considered as “strong”, complains about tiredness endlessly. For sure, the effect of Darko’s use of sarcasm here underlines Adade’s hypocritical nature while elevating Kabria as the one who deserves praise and admiration.

Kabria does not only care for her children and husband but for her car which she affectionately calls Creamy. Handed to her by her husband, this 1975 model VW car, has undergone so many “plastic” surgeries that it has grown immune to the work of mechanics and welders. Responding to the need to re-spray Creamy, Kabria seeks help from Adade since she has very little money. However, after being turned down several times by Adade, Kabria devises a radical plan to squeeze the money out of Adade. Kabria’s strategy reveals a bold attempt at dealing with the trials of motherhood. Through Kabria’s radical action, the reader realizes that for a mother to overcome the trials of motherhood she has to be resolute, courageous and resilient. These are the attitudes that enable Kabria to elicit the money for the required paint colour from Adade:

Kabria cast her mind onto the daily bottles of beers gobbled up in the name of releasing tension and paid Adade a surprise visit at his fine office the fourth day. Tu-tu-tu-tu-tu . . . Creamy’s furious engine and exhaust heralded its tattooed arrival. And Kabria, who meant business, parked it right beside Adade’s brand new Toyota Corona, provided him on loan by his employers. When Adade saw his wife and car, he prayed desperately for the earth to open up and swallow him whole. Kabria compounded his embarrassment by deliberately soliciting for more attention with her loud and gay hellos to all of Adade’s co-workers; then in their full and attentive glare, hopped gingerly into the car and drove away in the same tu-tu-tu-tu-tu fashion. Her little coup d’état paid off. (pp.39-40)

Kabria's ability to penetrate Adade's psyche to know what would cause him embarrassment pays off. Even though Adade brings in the car paint, it is blue instead of the cream Kabria requested. Kabria continues to drive her tattooed car for three weeks until Adade gives in to her stubbornness by providing her with cream car paint.

In the passage quoted supra, Kabria resorts to action rather than bandy words with Adade. Her action is metaphorically compared to a coup-d'état through which a *de jure* authority supersedes a *de facto* one. The metaphorical reference to a coup-d'état here suggests that mothers, when faced with trials such as these, are capable of developing strategies to attain their goals.

Having dealt with the trials of motherhood in her own home, Kabria ventures into Fofo's life to transform this street child into a respectable human being. Kabria's and MUTE's involvement in Fofo's life thus links the theme of mother-daughter relations with the wider theme of female-solidarity ethics and how this can be brought to bear on the solution of problems.

Oduyoye has spoken about the need for solidarity among women: "We need to take on our share in enabling others to recover their own worth as women and to empower other women to survive and struggle against injustice" (p.119). By taking on the mother-role, Kabria and her colleagues at MUTE involved in a process of expansion—a process which makes them broaden their original job schedules to include those of private detectives, social workers and mothers as well. Here we have the meeting point of economic and gender development. As these ladies of Mute add onto their job schedules including Fofo's rehabilitation process and the search for Baby T's murderer(s), they are seeking their own economic well-being as well as that of Fofo. Since this economic empowerment focuses also on women, these ladies at MUTE are also contributing to gender development.

Amma Darko makes very salient points about the role of men in combating the abuse of women by men. MUTE would have failed in its bid to trace the murderer(s) of Baby T, had Slyv Po, the presenter of Harvest FM, not gotten involved. Darko's portrait of Slyv Po reveals that Darko acknowledges that it takes men and women to collaborate to solve gender problems, and alleviate the problems that women encounter as they maneuver through patriarchal minefields.

The involvement of Slyv Po in the Fofo case typifies the potency that can be unleashed when positive-minded<sup>47</sup> men partner with positive-minded women. Slyv Po's collaboration with MUTE and the street child Fofo reveals the formation of a vibrant group that cuts across different kinds of dividing lines. Slyv Po's voluntary collaboration with MUTE to solve Fofo's problem is in line with the position of many African womanists. African womanists uphold the view that building a wall around oneself to shut off the male gender is not beneficial. This explains why African womanists' aesthetics acknowledges the role of positive-minded men in gender development (Kolawole, p.123). It may as well be stated here that male collaboration is an asset in the hands of women seeking partnerships in women's developmental issues.

It would be a mistake to assume however, that male collaboration comes easy. In *Faceless*, it takes the creative mind of Dina, the CEO of MUTE to connect with Slyv Po. Having heard about Kabria's encounter with Fofo, Dina found an outlet for further action. The use of dialogue in the narration reveals a creative mind in motion:

Dina's creative mind was already in motion. 'There could be something to be unraveled in there, you know.' She muttered thoughtfully. 'A girl at the market who tried to rob someone while dressed as a boy, who wants to meet government, and who claims a dead suspected prostitute found at the market place was her

---

<sup>47</sup>This is our own term coined to refer to any individual who desires to contribute to problem-solving issues through collaborative efforts.



sister? And you say Harvest FM did a programme this morning on AIDS and street children?’

‘Yes.’

‘Shouldn’t we talk to them?’

‘On what?’ Aggie asked.

‘I am not yet exactly sure on what. But I can feel something in there. And if we should do our bit and get more on the girl, we could convince them to do a programme on her. It could be good for us too.’

Kabria was all but enthused. ‘Could this be leading to something like me keeping my promise and going back there tomorrow?’

‘Let me talk to Harvest FM first,’ Dina proffered and went into her office to make the call. (pp.74-75)

The conversation reveals that though Dina is the BOSS at MUTE, she practises collaboration as we see her soliciting the views of her subordinates even though she knows what to do. This is one of the numerous instances in the novel which challenges the received view that women are their own enemies. Dina’s behaviour reveals that it is not in all cases that we find women rivaling with one another. By the use of powerful dialogue, Darko convincingly portrays the relations between the lady BOSS and her subordinates, who are all ladies. Once Darko gets Dina into Slyv Po’s activities, the novelist’s portrayal of Dina is outstanding. The reader does feel Dina’s energy, intelligence, foresight, and even her anxiety when she is sent a parcel of human excrement by Poison to warn her to desist from pursuing Baby T’s murderer(s). With determination, she ignores the warning and still goes on with her search and her plans of rehabilitating Fofo.

Slyv Po’s involvement with MUTE is made possible through Dina’s networking abilities. Through Slyv Po’s interview with Miss Kamame, her resource person on the ‘Good Morning Ghana Show’, the reader is carefully tutored on not only the exact cause of streetism but also the need for all to collaborate to ensure a permanent solution to the problem of streetism.

The name Kamame is deliberately contrived to enhance the role of this lady in exposing the hazards of streetism. Kamame in Akan means “speak for me” or be a mouth-piece for me. This corroborates the role of Miss Kamame, whose NGO, she tells us, is into sensitizing young girls to take control of their sexuality so as not to fall prey to irresponsible men.

. . . we recognize the urgent need to concentrate on the girls because it is they who get pregnant and who bear the brunt of that joint carelessness. It is the females who end up saddled with the child after the male has decided he no longer wishes to stick around and play father after all. So it is the girls who should be sensitized to this reality and urged to take the responsibility of their lives into their own hands. (p.140)

Ms Kamame’s choice of young girls as her NGO’s target reveals that the NGO sees itself as playing an important role in solving the problem of streetism.

In her analysis also, the blame of streetism is laid first at the footsteps of irresponsible fathers. Readers glean from Ms Kamame’s analysis that one major trial on motherhood is absentee fathers. Through her analysis we are made to understand why Maa Tsuru throws her children onto the streets. It has more to do with off-loading her burden than she being just a wicked mother. Expounding on the issue of absentee fathers, Ms. Kwamame, as her name connotes, becomes Maa Tsuru’s mouth-piece and, even to some extent, Kabria’s as well:

‘That is not only the father who refuses to acknowledge or take responsibility for his child, but also the father with a narrow perception of fatherhood, who sees his role as fulfilled so long as he has paid the school fees, placed food on the table and put clothes on the child’s back,’ Ms Kamame replied, ‘But the significant difference between the two examples I have cited is that, the child in the latter case, may not necessarily end up in the streets to beg in order to survive, while the child in the former case, most likely would. In both cases however, the responsibility of the mother doubles. She becomes the only caretaker of the child’s emotional or physical or financial needs or all three combined. That means performing the tasks of two.’

‘Hers and the absentee father.’

‘Yes.’

‘It is bad enough for a mother to have to perform the double role of any one of the three. So if she has to take on all three . . .!’

‘Which is what happens mostly in the former case. And if you are carrying a load and you begin to feel the first cracks of tension in the neck, what first thought comes to your mind?’

‘Unload!’ Sylv Po replied.

‘Exactly. Which is what many mothers in that situation do. They unload at the first sign of any crack. The load here unfortunately, being the child.’

‘Like Fofu.’ (pp.137-138)

In *Faceless* Amma Darko reveals her strong gender bias as she bitterly attacks a system that is indifferent to fathers who abuse and neglect mothers and their children. It is these fathers whose acts of commission or omission encourage mothers to be irresponsible towards their own children as we see in Maa Tsuru’s case. However, Darko elevates those men who partner with women to solve problems created by irresponsible fathers. As an accomplice of the system of neglect, Maa Tsuru is shown to fuel Fofu’s aggressiveness and subsequent revolt through her unwillingness to fight patriarchal structures. Fofu’s reaction to her mother’s alliance with destructive patriarchal structures varies from passivity to resentment and insouciance. Her reaction is not only against Maa Tsuru but against society’s indifference to the plight of the street child as seen in her insistence on seeing government which, to all intent and purposes, is oblivious to the plight of streetism.

In an introductory essay to *Faceless*, the renowned Ghanaian writer and poet Kofi Anyidoho, maintains that unless government attaches importance to the problem of streetism, street children will not only abound but they will forever condemn government for its lack of interest in the plight of street children. In Anyidoho’s preface to Darko’s *Faceless*, he contends that irrespective of the numerous ‘talks’ about streetism, the problem of streetism continues to escalate:

The phenomenon of street children has become one of the most widely discussed social tragedies of our time. We are witnesses to a deluge of talk about the plight of these children, from newspaper articles, to radio talk-shows, television documentaries and elegant academic discussions. There are countless NGOs supposedly working for the interest of street children. Many well-funded, well-attended workshops and conferences have been convened on the subject. Even Government claims to be doing its very best to tackle the problem. And yet, in spite of all these well-publicized efforts, the problem not only persists but also seems to be getting even more intractable. (pp.19-20)

However, with the help of the ladies of MUTE, Dina, Kabria, Aggie and Vickie, Fofo can avoid a repetition of her mother's life experiences. The ladies at MUTE and their collaboration with Sylv Po, help to draw a positive road map for Fofo, through which she can become independent economically. Even though for children like Fofo, opportunities for decent survival seem limited, MUTE's role in her life reveals that with a combination of foresight and resources, non-relatives can come in to help solve the problem of street children, considerably reducing the trials that mother's face.

This study reveals then that even though a mother's irresponsible behaviour can cause a daughter to resent her, other women, acting as responsible mothers, can take over and help this daughter.

The four ladies of MUTE though not related to Fofo by blood, consider it an obligation to ensure the well-being of Fofo. These four ladies are portrayed as assertive women who are bent on exposing all ideologies and structures that war against a 'determined' girl's ambition to fight oppression. The women work together to set Fofo on the road towards her rehabilitation and integration into 'normal' society. However, among these four ladies, kabria and Dina are exceptional. Apart from introducing Fofo to MUTE, Kabria willingly decides to absent herself from home so as to ensure the "well-being" of Fofo even though she is unsure of the outcome of this rather unusual act. Kolawole expresses it clearly: "The modern African woman's dilemma



often emanates from modern work ethics that take her away from home for long hours” (p.158).

Darko illustrates this “dilemma”:

On their way home after picking the children, Kabria said, ‘Obea, I am going to do something that I haven’t done before. I have to leave home tonight for Antie Dina’s place’  
‘Why?’ they all shrieked  
‘We have some work to do about Fofu.’ (p.124)

The fact that Kabria chose to interfere with her normal routine of being at home to receive her husband and rather be at Dina’s place to ensure Fofu talks, is a tribute to Kabria’s egalitarian nature. By discussing her plan with her children, Kabria is indirectly training them to learn how to reach out to those in need.

Dina’s decision to allow Fofu to stay with her teaches us that mothering should not be the exclusive preserve of biological mothers. Dina has no children, yet she plays mother to Fofu: “The few days under Dina’s secure roof and in MUTE’s absolute care put Fofu through a tremendous transformation. She became relaxed. Her face rested. She emitted an aura of softness.” (p.127)

Dina’s “mothering” of Fofu injects a change in society’s awareness. The fact that a “non-biological” mother can sometimes better mother a child than her own biological mother, becomes one of the major lessons gathered not only from *Faceless* but also from *Beyond The Horizon* when we consider the relationship between Mama Kiosk and Mara.

Dina’s relationship with Fofu also teaches that women can achieve a lot of recognition also through motherhood. Through her relationship with Fofu, Dina is able to taste and enjoy motherhood. Kolawole’s observation is relevant here:

The characters depicted in modern African settings have turned the wheel of change around to suit their new dispensation. These writers are not just writing feminine works; an overt feminist ideological statement is visible. The thrust is the search for self-respect, dignity, self-assertion and new moral values in a new quest for redefinition and self-esteem. (p.160)

It must be noted that right from the onset, Dina envisages a kind of benefit to be derived from “Fofo’s case”. After Kabria had let MUTE in on how Fofo disguised as a boy, pickpocketed her money and later asked to see government about the murder of Baby T, Dina says: “I am not yet exactly sure on what. But I can feel something in there. And if we should do our bit and get more on the girl, we could convince them to do a programme on her. It could be good for us too” (p.174)

Dina’s plan for Fofo is a laudable one indeed: Her interest goes beyond just providing Fofo with a place to stay, she is also interested in empowering Fofo financially by ensuring she gets a trade.

In a reply to Aggie’s question as to what is to be done for Fofo, Dina says:

‘Eventually, we will have to talk with reputable organizations like ‘Children-In-Need’ or ‘Street-Girls-Aid.’ But before we release her, we must be certain she will be safe. We can do our bit by adopting and sponsoring her training and all, but we must tie up all loose ends first. We are already too deep in it and cannot turn our back to the so many unanswered questions.’ (pp.123-124)

Important to our discussion also is Dina’s belief in the benefits of collaboration. Even though the decision to help Fofo is derived from her, her willingness to include the rest of the staff in solving Fofo’s problems illustrates her communal consciousness. Her use of the first person plural “we” establishes her desire for partnerships and this desire is taken to another level when she brings on board Harvest F.M.’s Sylv Po to publicize Fofo’s case on the airwaves. This collaborative measure leads to the identification of Baby T’s murder(s). More importantly, listeners are educated on repercussions of streetism. *Faceless* calls on African women and men

to come together in a progressive move to solve the myriad of problems confronting mothers, children and the nation as a whole. Kolawole articulates these same views in her defense of “womanism”:

African women’s self-definition focuses on positive collectivity as opposed to individuality. It also endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood and motherhood with no apologia . . .

Nonetheless, these women are crying out for justice where these values and traditions are abused or when the ideals of African culture are perverted in the patriarchal structure. To many, female bonding therefore consists of bringing out and enhancing common and positive African values, as opposed to building a wall around women in exclusion of men. Womanism then articulates certain unarticulated premises that appear to be outside dominant discursive systems in Western academia. (pp.197-198)

Amma Darko’s *Faceless* reveals her strong womanist inclinations. She criticizes women who allow themselves to be manipulated by the patriarchal culture and submit to oppression. The ultimate womanist message of *Faceless* is expressed by Kolawole thus:

African womanism cannot be separated from humanism. Rather, it seeks to enrich the female gender through consciousness-raising while giving a human touch to the struggle for the appreciation, emancipation, elevation and total self-fulfillment of the woman, in positive ways. (p.204)

In *Faceless*, we find a world composed primarily of women; some of these women are struggling to surmount the trials of motherhood whilst others look on indifferently and allow the trials of motherhood to capture them - hook, line and sinker. It is those women who work hard at motherhood who become for us archetypes planted on a sub-soil of the symbolic. Learning from these “successful” mothers, also, can enrich the female gender and bring appreciation and recognition to motherhood.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PARASITES AND SUFFERERS: A MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN'S STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE TRIALS OF MOTHERHOOD IN *NOT WITHOUT FLOWERS*.

In *Not Without Flowers*<sup>48</sup>, Amma Darko focuses on the story of a mentally ill mother as a way of commenting not only on the infidelity of a husband but also on the reaction of his children to their mother's mental illness, and how this reaction affects the health of her daughters. The main subject in the novel is the causes, effects and treatment of mental illness. The handling of this subject affords Darko the opportunity to analyze the effects of men's infidelity on their wives, children and even associates in an era of HIV/AIDS.

The significance of this story is on three levels. First, it explains the reason behind a husband's incurable and near-fatal magnetic pull to a female undergraduate student. Secondly, it describes the effects of this man's neglect of his duties towards his wife; and thirdly, it explores the reaction of children, especially daughters, to their mother's mental illness. Indeed, the quest for vengeance remains a central leitmotiv throughout the novel—the all-consuming passion to visit vengeance on the woman who is responsible for their mother's illness results in Cora and Randa's strategy to punish Aggie, their father's girlfriend by wrecking her marriage. The thought that a female undergraduate student, pushed by materialism, should mastermind the exploitation of a married man, literally cause his death and make his wife suffer mental illness is one of the greatest domestic tragedies of our times.

---

<sup>48</sup> Subsequent references to this text will be abbreviated as *NWF*.



We have chosen this rather provocative title because it reflects the exploitation of mothers and the difficulties their children go through in a bid to right the wrongs meted out to their mothers. In *NWF*, mothers are portrayed as victims of a huge exploitative machinery whilst daughters are portrayed as parasites seeking nourishment through vengeance. To these daughters, survival depends on their ability to exploit and maim the men and women whose activities have brought untold hardships upon their mothers and themselves.

This chapter's title recalls a similar title of an article published by Abena Busia in 1986. Her article entitled *Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels*,<sup>49</sup> also categorises women as prophets and parasites. Though this chapter is not about women as prophets, we will briefly discuss Abena Busia's idea of women as prophets since the parasites are the antithesis of the prophets.

Busia maintains that the parasites are greedy Westernised or white women who are all out to exploit the men. They are seen as oppressors who make merciless demands on their men just to keep up social appearances. Busia further explains that the demands made by these 'parasites' provoke conflict and destroy the men. In *NWF*, Aggie and Randa are cast in the mould of parasites. Both women can be referred to as 'Westernised' since they are in the University. Aggie and Randa are oppressors for they make merciless demands on their men. Aggie drains the finances of Pa, her "sugar daddy", leaving him with a huge debt and a desire to commit suicide. Aggie as parasite, however, goes beyond the Busia paradigm; she does not only destroy Pa, her lover, she also destroys Ma, Pa's wife. By taking over Pa's attention from Ma, Aggie, the flower, makes Ma suffer mental illness because of Pa's neglect of Ma. Randa, daughter of Ma and Pa, is

<sup>49</sup> Busia, Abena. *Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels*, op. cit; pp. 89-113

also cast in the mould of a parasite. Randa befriends Idan, Aggie's husband, just to position herself well enough to punish Aggie for the havoc she has caused the family. From this position, Randa ensures her complete possession of Idan, and the complete neglect of Aggie by Idan. This "I-do-you-you-do-me" syndrome battle which ensues between Randa and Aggie has bitter consequences on the three characters. Randa who unknowingly carries the HIV/AIDS virus (through her relationship with Dam, her fiancé) generously spreads the virus first to Idan and subsequently to Aggie. There is undisputable evidence that parasites can maim and kill their victims but that these same parasites stand to suffer from their own activities is not only pathetic but mind-boggling.

The women prophets on the other hand, set out to liberate their people. According to Busia, the prophets "...are those women who are seen as being true to the aspirations of Black African people, true to the ancient way that has long since been forgotten" (pp.89-113). Ma in *NWF* can be said to be the artistic embodiment of a prophet in that her pronouncements impact on Aggie's married life. Ma's curse that the tears she has shed since Aggie rudely intruded into her marital life must fall as rain on Aggie's special day, actually materializes during Aggie's wedding day when it rained so much. Also, Ma is not promiscuous. To Ma, the marriage bed is a sanctuary and dirty sexual games must not be played thereon. Aggie however is a shameless flirt who uses her skill at playing dirty sexual games to get Pa stuck to her so as to exploit him. Ma can thus be said to be true to the ancient way where purity and moderation dictate man's very action whilst Aggie's modernised way of going about sex and matters relating to the sensual belies the ancient way. The fact that Ma prays for Pa and even tries to play her role as a wife, irrespective of Pa's neglect of her emotional needs, makes Ma true to the ancient way. The women prophets, according to Busia, also set out to liberate their people. This is seen in the way Ma, irrespective

of her hatred for the name Flower, refers to Aggie as flower and even asks her to tell her children to bring her flowers:

‘Flower,’ Ma called when Aggie was almost in the doorway. Aggie nearly toppled over. She began to cry. Ma’s face was still buried in the pillow. She neither raised her head nor opened her eyes. ‘Tell my children I want to smell some flowers. Tell Kweku to bring me some flowers. I want to smell the delightful perfume of a bunch of beautiful yellow roses.’ (p.37)

Ma’s action is totally liberating. It takes a woman with a big heart to talk issues out with her utmost enemy and even ask her to carry out a wish for her. Ma’s request here shows her skill at fusing feeling with reasoning. The implication of Ma’s request reveals that she has not only forgiven Aggie, but that she has liberated Aggie from all the pain Aggie inflicted on her. Ma’s request also opens the way for her children to decorate her coffin and tomb with flowers upon her dignified passing. This act of liberation injects some kind of peace into a novel reeking of HIV/AIDS infections and vengeance.

The novel’s title, *Not Without Flowers*, is borrowed from Kweku’s question to Beam. Kweku is Ma’s only son. In an answer to Beam, the journalist, as to why he teamed up with his sisters to send their psychologically traumatized mother to a prayer camp, Kweku retorts: “How could we have a funeral without flowers for her when she died?” Cora is Ma’s first child. Her persistent dreams explain why she and her siblings send Ma to the prayer camp, only for Ma to be whipped and chained. In a conversation with Beam, Kweku explains:

‘Yes Cora started having a haunting, vivid recurring dream, in which Ma had died and had been buried. We held a fine funeral for her but her spirit remained restless, hovering the earth and shedding tears because of what we, her children had done . . .’

‘In Cora’s dream, we held a fine funeral for Ma, a funeral with flowers!’  
The strangest smile crossed Beam’s face. ‘Come again, Pa! Please. I am not getting you at all. Flowers?’ ‘Yes flowers!’

Beam chuckled, too perplexed. ‘Pa, I am sorry but this doesn’t make sense. What is it with flowers? And in which part of this world is a funeral held without flowers?’

‘See the insanity of it?’ Kweku moaned, ‘Are you now beginning to understand why three . . . to borrow your own words . . . sane and solid adults did something so insane as bring their mother to this prayer camp?’ His eyes watered. ‘Be it a single white rose, a bunch of rich red roses, a carpet of bougainvillea, a field of sunflowers, violets . . . whatever . . . our mother sets eyes on them, and she is sparked off.’ Beam’s shock tripled. ‘Your mother’s trigger element is flowers?’ Kweku looked into the fast disappearing distance from the moving van. ‘That’s how sane and rational people can be drawn and driven to act insane and irrationally.’ (pp.35-36)

Though this conversation is held in a van carrying a sick mother who is oozing stale urine, it is interesting to note that the pathetic effect of the content of this conversation is annulled by the generous pictures of flowers Kweku talks about. This signifies hope: the hope that his mother is sick but will heal soon.

The account here, presented through a skilful blending of the omniscient narrative technique and dialogue, reveals that in *NWF*, Darko strives to inject objectivity into the story. The omniscient narrator is usually seen as too authoritative with the tendency to be subjective. To overcome being labelled as such, Darko involves her characters in the telling. Now it is not Darko telling us the entire story; the characters tell us their own story too. This skill helps readers to be better judges of the characters and their actions. In *Not Without Flowers*, there are instances where characters’ actions are influenced by dreams. This is a useful technique, for the use of dreams in this novel portrays that the discrepancies between vision and reality are blurred. Probably, this is Amma Darko’s own way of exonerating Ma’s children from blame. Had their thinking not being blurred by Cora’s persistent dream, they would not have sent their mother to the prayer camp which, unknown to them, chains and whips mentally-ill patients with the view of exorcising the demons responsible for madness. Indeed the use of the word ‘insane’ in Kweku’s explanation is



calculated to make us understand the precarious situation Ma's children find themselves in before sending her to the prayer camp. Like their mother, they too have become traumatized. The children's fear of ever holding a funeral without flowers make them send their mother to the prayer camp. It is their belief that once Ma gets healed of her hatred for flowers, they can be free to bury her with flowers in the event of her passing. *Not Without Flowers*, the novel's title, then, foreshadows later events in the novel. The novel ends with Ma asking Flower to tell her children to bring her flowers, specifically a bunch of yellow roses. This shows that in the event of Ma's death, her children can bury her with flowers. It is proof of her healing and shows the efficacy of psychiatric hospitals' treatment of mental illness over that of prayer camps. *Not Without Flowers* means with flowers, this illustrates an instance of the use of a double negative throwing up a positive in English. We understand the spirit in which Ma asks for flowers. It is a way of telling Cora and her siblings that they are now free to bury her with flowers anytime she dies.

The title *Not Without Flowers* is very appropriate in that it gives a crisp summary of the novel's content. It is for the very reason of ensuring a funeral with flowers which makes Ma's children act the way they did. It is Ma's aversion to the name "flower" that makes her relapse anytime she sees natural flowers. Ma's "butchering" of her flowers symbolizes her mental illness. However, it is her request for flowers which marks her healing. Through her request, Ma absolves Aggie of her guilt. From now onwards, she **cannot** live WITHOUT FLOWERS.

All of Amma Darko's novels under study in this thesis do not follow a chronological sequence. Darko has a penchant for addressing social realities and these realities are complex and do not follow any chronological sequence. In view of this, the plot in all her four novels is not linear. It can at best be described as topsy-turvy. It starts with the present, and moves to the past as in a

flashback from where past events are linked to the present and the future. *NWF* is no exception; the plot is, to borrow the words of Roderick Wilson, “cast in the form of a flashback set within the frame of an existential present moment.”<sup>50</sup>

*NWF* starts with a prologue where readers journey with Ma’s children, accompanied by a journalist, a farmer, and his son, en route to a prayer camp to remove Ma from this prayer camp and send her back home for better treatment. In the prologue, we are given hints as to why Ma is sent by her own children to this prayer camp only to be chained and whipped and starved.

There is, however, a huge gap in the story line because even though Kweku tells Dam that Ma’s mental ailment is the result of her hatred for flowers, readers are not told the reason for that hatred. Between the prologue and the epilogue, there are twenty five chapters. It is however very striking that from chapter one to the end of chapter twenty one, readers are still kept in the dark about why Ma hates flowers with such passion. Darko’s mastery of the use of suspense is at play here. Even though we read about Aggie’s career and her tensed marital life, we are never given any cues to help us link Aggie to Ma’s aversion for flowers. It is only when we get to the last sentence of chapter 21 that the two words “Dear Flower . . .” link Aggie to the name Flower. The rest of the chapters, twenty-two to twenty-five, reveal the reason for Ma’s aversion to flowers.

Aggie, affectionately called Flower by Pa is the cause of Ma’s mental illness. Pa’s extra marital affair with Aggie and his complete neglect of Ma, trigger Ma’s voices, nightmares, and a paranoia with flowers, culminating in a subconscious transfer of her abhorrence of the name Flower to the general dislike of natural flowers in her garden. It is her obedience to the

---

<sup>50</sup> Wilson, Roderick. *Eliot and Achebe: An Analysis of Some Formal and Philosophical Qualities of No Longer At Ease*, English Studies in Africa, vol. 14, No. 2, September 1971, p. 222.

commanding voices which make her butcher all the flowers that symbolizes her mental illness. After sending Ma to a psychiatric hospital, Ma's children, acting upon Cora's dream, send Ma to a prayer camp so that she can be healed from the flower-fixation she suffers from—a healing which, as Kweku explains, will afford them all the peace of mind to bury Ma with flowers in the event of her passing.

In the epilogue, the repercussions of Aggie and Randa's lifestyles are revealed. Aggie ends up as an unhappy wife. She and her husband, Idan, have been infected with the HIV/AIDS virus because of Idan's relationship with Randa. Randa also realizes too late that her so called wealthy boyfriend is a male prostitute who makes his money by befriending wealthy women. Dam, Randa's boyfriend, disappears, leaving Randa alone to deal with her HIV/AIDS status. Thus from the prologue up to the end of chapter twenty-one, we have an instance of a flashback. We are only ushered into the present from chapter twenty-two onwards. The question is, why does Amma Darko present about eighty-five percent of her story in a flashback? This is once again a classical display of form agreeing with content. The trials of motherhood for Ma begin in the past, affect the present and overshadow the future with its demands. Randa's present HIV/AIDS situation relates to her past life and this situation has very damning consequences for a young lady. The use of flashback here illustrates that our past life can really alter our progress not only in the present but in the future as well. Randa's past heavily constricts her present and even her future life.

In tracing the source of Ma's trial, Amma Darko suggests that Ma's upbringing may have something to do with Ma's trial. Indeed in *Beyond The Horizon*, Mara's trial also has something to do with her mother's instruction that a woman's duty is to please her husband and so she has

to endure abuse from her husband as she would menstrual pains. Evidently, these two novels portray mothers as contributing to their daughters' exploitation by their husbands. The answer to Pa's question as to why women, the likes of Ma, consider sex a sanctimonious exercise, reveals that strict adherence to a mother's tutelage can have negative repercussions on her daughter's married life: " 'Why do women equate respectability with 'clean' thoughts about sex?' He once asked his friend. 'Because that is what their mothers taught them to think! His friend replied'" (p.329).

This answer to Pa's question suggests that it is mothers who nurture their female daughters to view sex with sanctimoniousness. This view, though not totally false, needs to be revised since women who stick to it may stand the risk of losing their husbands to other women. Ma's view of sex as a sacred form of righteousness pushes her to stick to a regimental way of conjugal relationship with her husband.

Received opinion would indicate that variety is the spice of life. Unknown to Ma, her devotion to her religious sanctity of sex elicits in Pa a desire to look for romance and ecstasy elsewhere. The following passage is a dramatization of Pa's desire for a sex-life laced with variety.

Pa's frustration gradually developed into a tension that was waiting to erupt . . . Then gradually it gathered momentum. Eventually it became a pre-occupation. The absence of nurturing and intimacy began to eat him up. He began to fantasize about sex with another woman and felt guilty about it. And with the guilt came anger at the guilt. It became a lonely battle with himself. He could express his frustration to a friend but he could not open up about the turmoil with fantasies. So he kept it in, which fanned the volcanic fires the more. Soon, the inevitable happened. He discovered the practice of cruising in his car around areas where young women were known to seek rides in cars to offer services of pleasure to the male drivers for a fee. It abated the tension and frustration but it did not offer what he was searching for, the nurturing and intimacy. (p.328)



This extract reveals a beautiful attempt by the novelist at penetrating the psyche of a man so as to explain his actions. The metaphoric use of “volcanic fires” helps us to visualize Pa’s sexual temperature. A volcanic eruption is accompanied by a molten mass, magma and fire. Its extreme heat has an unparalleled melting effect. Comparing Pa’s frustration at his wife’s unappealing sex-life to volcanic fires, Darko succeeds in illustrating to us that at this time of Pa’s life, he is not only heated up; he is actually being consumed by his desire for romance and a bovaristic (glamourized) sexual-life. Fire destroys, and volcanic fires destroy even faster. The effect of the metaphor here is that it foreshadows later events in which Pa destroys himself due to his inability to quench the volcanic fires erupting in him. The suicide he commits is the physical manifestation of the melting power of the volcanic fires. Pa’s frustration at his inability to enjoy his sexual encounters with his wife is said to have “fanned” those volcanic fires. The personification of the word “frustration,” by giving it the human ability to fan volcanic fires, also reveals the destructive power of his frustration. Once these volcanic fires are fanned, they erupt and melt all of Pa’s reasoning, making him search for prostitutes with whom he engages in lustful sex in his car for a fee. From the point of view of Darko, these encounters with prostitutes fail to solve Pa’s search for fulfillment. Darko tells us that; “It abated the tension and frustration but didn’t offer what he was searching for, the nurturing and intimacy” (p.328). The answer to this question is provided by Darko’s own analysis of the nature of sexual encounters between Pa and the prostitutes:

‘Indeed, sometimes it was they who rather shocked him with some of their recommended recipes. But for them it was all business, and it was the lack of any emotional commitment and intimacy that left him feeling unclean.’ (p.330)

Thus, whilst they nourish his sexual appetite, they fail to get him sentimentally involved with even one of them because their lack of emotional commitment to sex leaves Pa feeling unclean.

It is from this position that Pa begins to look for a permanent mistress “with whom he could share his sexual fantasies and cravings without shame, guilt or fear. Someone who would nurture him and with whom he could even inter-connect emotionally . . .” (p.330). Darko succinctly expresses it as follows: “. . . Pa warmed up to the idea and began a look out crusade. Oblivious to whom she would turn out to be, where he would encounter her, when it would happen and how Pa bided his time” (p.330).

In her narrative, Amma Darko usually throws in words that speak to future happenings. The use of the word “oblivious” in these lines is very appropriate for it foreshadows fear. We are thus not surprised to read that Pa commits suicide just because he could not think of a life without Aggie, his Flower. It all starts because he is oblivious of the fact that his search could lead him to the *femme fatale*, Aggie. It is mainly through the description of Aggie’s gestures and looks that Darko portrays her as a parasite and a *femme fatale*, all in one:

‘Her yellow flared skirt shifted up in the process. Way up. She did not make any attempt to straighten it back down. She remained there beside him with her firm young thighs completely exposed. The edge of her skirt was far up as her upper thighs stretched . . . She was attractive and sexy and care free. He was hooked. Pa’s mind registered a field of sunflowers. An unending expanse of yellowness, like her skirt. Pleasing. Like her. She was brightness. She was a sunflower and more. A rose. A beautiful yellow rose. She was every beautiful flower on earth. She was all that and more. He smiled at her feeling fulfilled.’ (p.331)

The above extract is an instance of Darko’s usage of colour and objects as a means to comment on situations. The yellow colour permeates the “environment” of this passage so much so that Pa’s thoughts are virtually overrun by the yellow colour: “. . . Pa’s mind registered a field of yellow flowers. An unending expanse of yellowness, like her skirt” (p.331)

It is thus not surprising that Pa fails to consider the evil scheme behind Aggie's gestures. Earlier on in the narrative, Darko succinctly captures Aggie's strategy: "Her yellow flared skirt shifted up in the process. Way up. She didn't make any attempt to straighten it back down" (p.331).

Even though Aggie is aware that her thighs are exposed, she calculatingly ignores it, expecting Pa to view those thighs and get mesmerized. Through her use of form, Darko is able to portray the enormity of the danger behind Aggie's gestures. By sandwiching a short sentence "Way up" within long sentences, Darko crisply and skillfully reveals danger. Darko tells us that Aggie's thighs have a dangerous effect. "Way up" is an adjectival phrase made up of just two words; and yet it opens up the reader to a multitude of interpretations. The reader unknowingly becomes a part of the novel's creative ethos as his or her interpretations inject meanings into the story. This phrase is multi-layered for it is an eloquent testimony of the mannerisms of prostitutes. However, because Pa is also blinded by the colour yellow, he is not able to see through Aggie's mannerisms; rather, he indulges in his obsessive tropism for the yellow colour, leading him to associate this colour with flowers. Two flowers are mentioned in this context. It is very important to discuss the import of Pa's choice of these two flowers: "She was a sunflower and more. Across. A beautiful yellow rose."

The sunflower is an edible flower. Oil extracted from sunflower is cholesterol-free. This implies that like the edible sunflower, Pa desires a sexual relationship with Aggie. A yellow rose is unique. It emits a nice smell and is gorgeous to behold. Let us not forget however, that like all roses, the yellow rose has thorns that can prick the careless admirer and cause pain. These two flowers communicate a sense of beauty; however, the yellow rose has thorns and Pa's careless admiration of Aggie will lead to his being pricked by her thorns. This is how Darko portrays

Aggie; beautiful and captivating yet capable of the most abysmal wreckage—the notion of *femme fatale*. Pa calls Aggie Flower but she is a poisonous flower. It is not only Amma Darko who compares a beautiful woman to flowers. In the poem “Amakom Flowers”, the poet and academic S.K Okleme, also refers to the beautiful prostitutes who parade the streets of Amakom as Amakom Flowers. There is a striking resemblance between Okleme and Darko’s views of women as flowers. In the seventh and eighth stanzas of Okleme’s poem, the *modus operandi* of prostitutes is showcased even as the poet cautions his readership on the dangers of getting involved with them:

Heart-warming conversations and encouraging smiles  
Are their exclusive preserves;  
The perfume-like fragrance they exude  
Exercising a hypnotic effect.

Admire them, these Amakom flowers!  
For admiration with no evil intent is no sin;  
It’s rather therapeutic and comforting.  
Producing restful sleep and celestial dreams.<sup>51</sup>

Just like Darko, Okleme warns of the danger in befriending these prostitutes.

Pa however refuses to see the warning signs. He is unable to distinguish between admiration and evil intent and so indulges in sexual fantasies with Aggie. Having won Pa’s attention through her looks and sexual expertise, Aggie gets Pa hooked to her. It is from this picture that the parasite-victim portrayal of Aggie and Pa becomes evident. Indeed *NWF* provides us with an illustration of a commercialized male-female relationship in which Aggie’s sexual encounters with Pa uncover the flip side of the coin that goes counter to the Ghanaian social norms. The clashes

---

<sup>51</sup> Okleme, S. K. *Reconciliation and Other Poems*. Kumasi, Ghana, Setsu Educational Books, 2003, p. 33



between traditional and contemporary values are strikingly portrayed. Ma's sexual encounters with Pa are devoid of fantasies. Let us consider Darko's comparison of Pa's sexual life with Ma and Aggie:

His attraction for her was violent and sweetly sinful. It was different, bad, naughty, strong. It stirred and scared him at the same time. Flower flared and lit up fires of longing gone low and benign him. She rekindled his passion and injected momentum into his lifestyle, which had fallen in the doldrums of routine. The same time, same way, same thing cycle had curdled inside his belly for too long and was churning and burning and seeking to burst out. The boring and killing sameness, all polite, all correct, all formal, even in sex. Day in and day out it killed him slowly without him noticing. A slow conscious death. Marital suicide. Then flower came into his life and saved him with her physical pleasantness and her sensuality. Flower was so out of routine it was dizzying. And so out of tune it felt crazily risky and magically good. (p.337)

In describing Pa's sexual life with Ma and Aggie, Darko reflects a sharp consciousness of the role of sex in marriage. The fact that a wife can lose her husband to another hot-headed woman because her husband is fed up with her routine sexual life is one message Darko clearly teaches. What is particularly engrossing about this excerpt is the author's effective use of language to communicate the import of her message. Through the use of oxymoron, Darko reveals the power of sexual "immorality" in marriage. Even though Pa had a wedded wife, he engages in an extra-marital affair with Aggie. Though conscious of his sin, he finds it so difficult to put a stop to it because the attraction overwhelms him. The adverb "sweetly" is placed close to the adjective "sinful" to enhance the trappings of immoral life taking control of Pa's conscience. The repetitive nature of Ma's sexual "posture" with Pa is illustrated by the use of the adjective 'same'. There really is no variety in the Ma-Pa sexual encounters. The time they make love is the same—probably at night. The repetitive use of 'same' communicates to us the regimental nature of the Ma-Pa sexual life and Pa describes the whole exercise as "boring" and "killing". It becomes a chore to be performed not to be enjoyed. The two-word sentence 'Marital Suicide'

shows the effect that this routine lifestyle has on their marriage. This lack of sexual fulfillment leads Pa to ostracize his sexual desire for Ma. Darko personifies their marriage by giving it the ability to self-immolate because of sexual boredom. Darko is thus warning wives who take for granted their outlook on sexual life once they begin to make babies to wake up and work hard at the carnal side of marriage. Sinking into routine can bedevil one's marital joy and that is exactly what happens to Ma. "Thus whilst Ma was busily caring for her beloved Randa and her shop, Pa was also searching frantically for a fantastic sexual partner; "Ma lived for Randa and the shop. She lost energy for everyone else" (pp.327-328).

Amma Darko's ability to confront the unspeakable is seen in this excerpt. A woman herself, she deems it befitting to teach her fellow women how to make a marriage work! It is not too helpful to adopt a puritan lifestyle in marriage. Ma's obsession to do things the prescribed way destroys her marriage. To Darko, a wife can do all things correctly but when it comes to sex, she probably needs to be "naughty", "incorrect" and sensual. Darko's use of the adverbial phrase 'even in sex' carries her message to all of us. For Darko to assume such a frank attitude on the importance of a good sex life in marriage is an act of pure courage considering that the discussion of such a topic is yet to gain acceptability in Ghana. Darko herself has been married for over thirty years; her experience in marriage may be the reason for her ability to openly discuss the role of sex in marriage. Her ability to use literature as a medium to speak the unspeakable deserves commendation.

The fact that Ma cannot play the naughty girl in her sexual encounters with Pa constitute a major trial for her. Aggie knows of this inability, for in a conversation with her roommate, Minny, she reveals to us the reason behind a husband's extra-marital affair:

‘His whole being was crying. I am sure his old lady has kept him behind bars for a long time.’ Aggie remarked. ‘Or maybe she is one of those who act like the Pope’s right hand women. Pious to a hilt.’ Minny began, ‘Maybe even reciting verses while at it. And seeking forgiveness for doing it. Who knows?’ More laughter. ‘They drive them into our hands then blame and accuse us of having snatched their husbands!’ Aggie remarked sourly, ‘I doubt if the wife even heard or ever dished it out to him . . . you know . . .’ And slipped her right forefinger in her mouth. (pp.333-335)

Both Aggie and Minny are undergraduates who also double as prostitutes in order to live affluent lifestyles on campus. It is no wonder then that they know the skills that make men lust for them. They know the cause of the hunger in these men and know how to satisfy them. It is important to note here that Darko refuses to teach us those fantastic skills that make a husband stick, like a drowning person, to whores. Even though she has explained that a lack of knowledge in these skills can result in “marital suicide”, she does not teach it. The reason for her refusal to teach it is that it probably need not be taught. A husband and a wife must feel free to communicate their needs and expectations to one another and know how to please each other even in bed. Pa and Ma’s marital suicide does not really come about as a result of Ma’s inability to make Pa happy in bed. The main cause is that there is lack of communication in their married life, especially when it comes to their sexual life; and this is a lesson Darko dares us all to learn. It is important to note that in the excerpt analyzed, Darko’s ability to render the realistic in her characters is calculated to create realistic fictions through which she confronts boring lifestyles that need to be revised no matter how justified they may be!

We have already explained how a mother’s determination to stick to acceptable standards of behaviour even in her sexual life can constitute a trial for her. In the excerpt under review, Aggie views Pa’s uncontrollable tears shed on their first sexual encounter as an expression of Pa’s sexual freedom. She compares the restriction characterizing the Pa-Ma sexual encounters to a life

behind bars, and compares his desire for sex to hunger. Indeed she sees Pa as so naïve in sexual matters that she compares him to the colour green. The use of metaphor as seen in our explanation illustrates Darko's attempt to graphically capture a sexual experience without having recourse to profane language and she deserves our commendation. The obvious impression gleaned from this excerpt is that it unveils Aggie as an opportunistic flirt who feeds on men's ignorance of sexual skills for her benefit. The fact that Aggie is a shameless woman of sexual depravity is seen in Darko's description of Aggie's gestures as; "And slipped her right forefinger inside her mouth" (p.335). She brags of her skilful sexual life and her ability to tutor it to her unsuspecting victim. "And I am going to tutor him real good and slow with all the intricacies of the trade, so that by the time I am done with him, even at the primary level, he will be clinging to me like my second skin" (p.335).

The simile, "like my second skin" shows that Aggie knows how to turn a man into a leech that sticks to one's skin and feeds on one's blood. The reader sees the hypocrisy of Aggie in that she pretends she is not a parasite. To her, it is the man who is so glued to her who is a parasite. We however observe that Aggie is really the parasite for she drains Pa financially and emotionally, and causes his death. Minny's warning forecasts the end of the Aggie-Pa relationship. There is so much foreboding in Minny's warning that should have made Aggie tread cautiously with Pa, but she ignores the warning due to her greed for money. Indeed, things really get complicated for Aggie and we read of her inability to enjoy marital bliss especially when Randa, Pa's daughter, decides to pay Aggie back by flirting with Idan, Aggie's husband. Perhaps if Aggie had heeded Minny's warning, things would have changed. Minny warns Aggie that: ". . . You know how emotionally frail some of them are. They can get it all mixed up real fast. Then things can get complicated"

(p.335).



Minny's warning helps us to understand the import of the excerpt from Edna Buchanan's poem cited on the page before the prologue:

Sex gets people killed; put in jail; beaten up; bankrupted and disgraced; to say nothing of ruined—personally, politically and professionally.”  
Looking for sex can lead to misfortune and if you get lucky to find it can leave you maimed, infected or dead. Other than that it swells.<sup>52</sup>

Pa's search for sex makes him financially bankrupt. It ruined his professional life, disgraced him and caused his death. Even though Pa realized that his unrestrained sexual enjoyment with Aggie constitutes a breach of his marital vows, he still gives vent to his sexual drive and cause his wife untold frustrations. This couple is simply referred to as Pa and Ma. Probably this is Darko's way of telling her readers that every father and mother can go through these problems. By ominously referring to them as Pa and Ma, Darko makes them to symbolize married couples all over. In this way, her lessons are not just for the couple. These lessons must be learnt worldwide. It is interesting how two genres, poetry and prose, speak to each other. It is also interesting to note that the same woman that generates life (baby) can also generate shame and death.

Okleme (2003) also captures this motif so well in his poem “Woe To Man”. The last three stanzas seem like a further evocation of Edna Buchanan's poem cited in *Faceless*.

Necessary to man  
For the gratification of a natural need  
And the fulfillment  
Of the External father's dream  
Bane and antidote concocted  
Into one perplexing framework:  
Delightful and attractive to watch  
But capable of the most decimal wreckage

Trite though it may seem

---

<sup>52</sup> Buchanan, Edna. “The Corpse had a Familiar Face”. Cited in Amma Darko's *Faceless*, p. 20

The etymology is as true as ever:  
Woman: WOE – TO – MAN!  
Proven by the unfolding events  
In the greatest nation of the world. (p.21)

The role of sex in our lives is so ironic. It is something that is necessary, gratifying, life- giving yet capable of destruction. It is no wonder that both male and female writers continue this discourse in their works. Indeed in all the novels under study much discursive space is given to this universal theme.

Darko in *NWF* deploys the sexuality of the temptress Aggie to articulate the changing position of the contemporary African woman. Even though we still witness the stereotypical portrayal of the woman as a whore and temptress, there is a disturbing side to this portrayal. We are made to understand that for women like Aggie, sex becomes a powerful tool in their hands—a weapon used not to fight patriarchy but used, albeit shamefully, to collaborate with patriarchal structures to bring untold hardships on older women. Hélène Cixous (1998) has observed that:

Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. They have made for women an anti-narcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have construed the infamous logic of anti-love. (p.1455)

This is the discovery Aggie makes—a discovery fuelled by greed and carried out mercilessly:

Along the way, she made a discovery. To be desired felt very powerful. To be desired by a married man meant that the man had found his wife guilty of her inability to nourish his sexual hunger. It meant that the man no longer desired his wife to fulfil that task. It meant that his emotions were now in disharmony with those of his wife and that the man now preferred to depend on her to nourish his sexual demands. And that was overwhelmingly pleasing and deliciously powerful. (p.326)

The above extract illustrates a blunt attack on a woman's desire to exploit another woman by a female writer of Africa. Darko shows that materialism can fuel so much greed in women that it can blind them from seeing that they are collaborating with patriarchal structures to oppress their shared gender. This engenders female subjugation and encourages men to abuse women. However, the Aggie's will have to suffer for the sins they have committed. Aggie's marriage to Idan is characterized by tension and haunting dreams and these powerfully combine to rob Aggie of her joy. It is ironical that Aggie cannot keep Idan for herself, irrespective of her sexual prowess. Her husband's extra-marital affairs teach that sex alone cannot ensure blissful marriage.

In characterizing Aggie and her exploitative nature, the novelist resorts to particular linguistic registers that reveal that Aggie is a parasite. In the extract below, there is no mention of the word parasite, yet the effective use of language registers the attributes of a parasite in the reader's mind.

She created the ultimate equation of sexual power and control over the men who, needing nurturing, the fulfillment of their fantasies and release of their built up tensions, became entangled in her web. Once they did, and she sank her claws into them, she made maximum use of them for worshipping and falling prey to her sexuality. Whenever she didn't necessarily want a man, but succeeded in her need to have the man desire her, the exhilarating effect it gave her was more than the climax of the act of lust itself. (p.326)

The word 'web' probably suggests that Aggie is being likened to a spider. In that case then the men she feeds on are like flies. The benefit she derives from her parasitic activities is power. What Shakespeare wrote of the gods could as well be written of Aggie, as far as using her sexuality to entrap men and to 'kill them' is concerned: "As flies to the wanton boys/ Are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport."

Aggie enjoys it when men pant and even die for her. Aggie then is analogous to the wanton boys. They find so much pleasure in tying a beetle to a thread and causing its death by flying it at a dizzying height. This act is enjoyed by the wanton boys because it makes them feel powerful just as Aggie feels powerful once she succeeds in making a man desire her even against his will.

Apart from Aggie's sexuality which constitutes a major trial for Ma, the fact that society is indifferent to the plight of the woman whose husband is neck-deep in an extra-marital affair is also a trial on motherhood. Darko explains:

But in this society where polygamy is a norm, how is a wife to receive adequate sympathy and understanding for a pain she may be suffering as a result of a husband's unfaithfulness? . . . A woman needed God's intervention in times like these to remain sane. (p.283)

We understand then why Ma prays fervently for God's intervention in her case. It is a very traumatic situation for a wife or a mother to sense that she is no longer desired by her husband. The cause of Ma's mental illness is rooted in Pa's unfaithfulness. At a loss as to how to get love from her husband, Ma begins to pray until she realizes that Pa's lack of interest in her has gained root. Loneliness and an acute sense of neglect render Ma vulnerable and sensitive. The more she leans on her imagination, the more she blames her plight on her husband's lasciviousness. Pa's unbridled affair with his mistress, Flower, results in his death. Having sapped Pa dry of all his money, Flower announces her intention to end their relationship. Pa considers life without Flower as a dead life. To ensure that Flower stops taunting him as a poor old man, Pa elects for a premature death by committing suicide on a mango tree in his house.

Leaning on philosophy, Eustace Palmer attempts to teach us how not to get into trouble. In "African Jekyls and Hydes: Benjamin Kwakye's Study of Double Personalities in *The Sun* By



*Night*”, we gather from Eustace Palmer’s argument why Pa commits suicide and why Ma ends up with mental illness. Palmer contends:

Philosophers will tell us that the secret of life is to be able to keep both impulses finely balanced in perfect equilibrium, for giving our deepest impulses, desires and inclinations (which frequently involve the erotic) their truest vent might lead to danger, disease, destruction, the flouting of convention and tradition and even murder and death.

On the other hand, adhering completely to the rational, the conventional and the traditional might mean denying oneself the possibility of enjoying true love and might lead to repression, total dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Every human individual must recognize the existence of both forces within his or her own being and try to discover how to regulate them.<sup>53</sup>

Pa’s inability to control his sexual drive makes him consider a life without Flower as worthless; this makes him commit suicide. Ma’s obsession to strictly perform her wifely duties even in bed, pushes Pa in the direction of Flower for sexual fulfillment. For Pa and Ma, their inability to regulate each one’s potential force constitutes a major flaw.

Like a psychiatric doctor, Darko also takes us through some of the steps a mental patient goes through before he or she finally deteriorates. Below are the selected excerpts that point to Ma’s gradual decent into psychosis:

Initially Ma’s prayers were silent. She would go down on her knees in front of her bed and pray quietly to God and beg God to please erase the pain in her heart. (p.338)

Ma’s prayers from then on took on a hoarse and angry tone. Sometimes it became so muddled up she wondered to herself what exactly it was she was praying to God about, and what she wanted. Each new day became more confusing. Observing from the real world Kweku and Cora noticed Ma become increasingly disoriented. (p.342)

---

<sup>53</sup> Palmer, Eustace. “African Jekyls and Hydes: Benjamin Kwakye’s Study of Double Personalities in *The Sun By Night*”. In Abioseh, Michel, M. Ed. *Journal of African Literature Association*. Vol. 1, 2007, p.134

The emotional instability of Ma which psychosomatically manifests itself in persistent uncoordinated prayers, takes on a special dimension as a manifestation of her difficulties, anger and presumed guilt.

*NWF* has a socio-political function. Through a careful intense analogy, the observant reader can link the ills of patriarchy to the ills of globalization. This understanding will further expose to the reader the link between sexual exploitation and neo-colonialism. Just as Pa's refusal to play his sexual role with his wife contributes to Ma's psychosis, so has the IMF's command to Ghana "to refuse" to employ graduates into the Civil Service for two years brought untold stress not only to unemployed graduates but to their parents as well. Darko demonstrates in *NWF* that, to a large extent, fiction reflects the tensions at work in the larger society.

Inter-disciplinary research has gained popularity in contemporary times. Indeed, it is interesting to find out that literature speaks to science and vice versa. Having identified a kind of sequential decline in Ma's mental health due to marital problems, we paid a visit to Ankafu Psychiatric Hospital where we were privileged to interview the psychiatrist-in-charge of the hospital as well as the clinical psychologist. Suffice it to say that we were overwhelmed by the striking similarities in their answers—as though they were re-echoing what Darko has written. The whole interview is captured in appendices 1 and 2. However excerpts from the interview will be cited to better explain Ma's condition.

Dr. Armahlou is the chief psychiatrist at Ankafu Mental Hospital. His answer to our question as to whether he attends to cases where a wife becomes mentally ill because her husband is obsessed with other ladies, and whether this proves that for women, the major cause of mental illness is unrequited love or unfaithfulness on the part of the husband, is in part, as follows:

Indeed we record more cases of mental ill health in women than in men. For instance in 2011, the total number of women suffering from “Organic Mood Disorders” was forty-seven as against thirty-nine for men. It would be of interest to you to note that most of the mental illness that affects women results from unrequited love. Unrequited love occurs when a man betrays the love of his wife or mistress and goes in for another woman, usually a younger woman. Ultimately such women whose husbands have betrayed their love may suffer what we in mental health refer to as ‘Mood Disorders’.

Dr. Armahlou’s answer above corroborates the cause of Ma’s mental illness. It is Pa’s extra-marital affair with Aggie also called Flower, which results in Ma’s ill health. The symptoms of mood disorders talked about by Dr. Armahlou are also similar to those cited in *NWF*. Dr. Armahlou explains that women who suffer mood disorders act according to their imagination. From this point, victims resort to prayers which progress from mild to vociferous invocations. Then they usually complain of hearing commanding voices and obeying such voices; “This is what we call “Transference”. It happens when the mental patient transfers her anger from the one who caused her depression to anyone or anything that is associated with the disorder. In this case, there is an expression of anger or violence and a burning desire to kill or maim or destroy that person or object.

Indeed Ma’s actions support this. Cast in the form of a flashback, Darko graphically captures the power of the “commanding voice”:

She was in the bedroom and in the same bed she had once shared with Pa and little Randa when the voice sounded inside her head. It wasn’t angry. It was venomously bitter. The sheer force of its barging into Ma’s head, hurled Ma out of the bed onto her feet and to stand at attention. It never sounded so loud and distinct. It ordered her out of the bedroom into the yard. She was alone in the house. Following the orders that the voice was issuing in her head, Ma surveyed the compound, taking in all the varied and beautiful flowers that were in plentiful bloom. Then she turned like a Zombie back into the house and into the kitchen and stood before the drawer containing the assortment of knives. She took an instant liking to the smooth sharp meat slicer . . . Then urged by the voice, she moved to the first flower pot, with budding lilies. It had been one of Pa’s

favourite flowers. They had both loved and been in love with the flowers. Pa used to say that flowers were God's ultimate expression of His divine handiworks . . . The knife was in Ma's hand and the voice was screaming blood . . . Ma's hand closed around the flower like the head of a fowl about to be slaughtered to the gods. 'Whoosh' the voice sounded. 'Whack!' it yelled. 'Whack! Whoosh! Whack! Whoosh! Whack! Search! Blood! Look! Sniff! Blood! Blood! Blood! . . . ' One after the other, the blooming flowers fell. Lilies, roses, hibiscus, all till there was nothing more left to slice off. And still Ma found no blood . . . The voice became enraged. It burst forth inside Ma's head. 'Squeeze! Squeeze out the blood! Squeeze!' Ma's feet came crushing down on a rose . . . Crush! Crush! Crush! One after the other the flowers succumbed completely and lay bare on the ground humbled and defeated. Still no blood. Failure. The voice began to taunt. 'Failure! Failure! Failure!' Ma began to wail. She flung away the meat slicer and stumped on the carpet of flowers, not feeling the thorns and continued to wail. It was in that state that Cora, on her return with her little sister Randa, found Ma. Flower. Pa never gave Ma the middle name: Flower. (pp.168-171)

This rather long extract typifies Darko's mastery of the use of descriptive language. Darko herself tells us in her acknowledgement that she visited the Accra Psychiatric hospital a couple of times because she needed to research in order to write NWF. Darko's ability to use literature to underscore a scientific truth proves that literature and science are, after all, not embattled adversaries. Writers can collaborate with scientist and come up with solutions to illnesses such as mental illness. However before we discuss Darko's own contribution to solving mental illness rooted in marital problems, we will first discuss the literary beauty of the extract cited above. The force of the commanding voice which urges Ma to butcher all her flowers is described in a picturesque manner. The voice is not just "bitter" but "venomous", signifying its poisonous effect. Its sound is so 'loud' and 'distinct' so as to "order her out of the bedroom into the yard".

We read that as Ma holds on to the knife, the voice is "screaming". The absence of blood causes the voice to become "enraged". Finally, the voice decides to 'taunt' Ma, calling her a "failure". The efficacy of language is poignantly felt as Darko carries us along with her in her literary attempt to invest a voice with the attributes of a human being endowed with the power to tease



and torment. The voice is personified. It is first a voice and then it metamorphoses into a tormentor taunting its victim. In fact, the voice itself is endowed, for it “became enraged” when blood comes from nowhere.

To equate the power of the voice with a human being’s power is very frightening. No wonder Ma reacts like a “Zombie”: “Then she turned like a Zombie back into the house and into the kitchen and stood before the drawer containing the assortment of knives” (p.169). The simile used in this extract suggests that at this point Ma is comparable to a robot whose movement is dictated by the switch of a button.

Through the effective use of language, Darko is able to transform a mere voice into a human being full of emotions and having the capacity to taunt. This is a very clear illustration of the symptoms of one suffering from mood disorders. The extract also exhibits the use of repetition. The word ‘blood’ is repeated a whopping twenty-two times. It is as though these pages are soaked in blood. The repetitive use of ‘blood’ emphasizes both Ma’s desire to visit vengeance on Flower (Aggie) and the power of the commanding voice with its persistent orders.

These pages are also replete with exclamation points. As many as twenty-eight exclamation points can be counted on these pages. The abundance of exclamation points indicates the urgency of the commanding voice; no wonder Ma has no choice but to obey. By and large, this extract, painfully, yet beautifully, describes what psychiatrists refer to as “Transfer”. Indeed it is Ma’s hatred for Flower (Aggie) which she transfers to the natural flowers in her garden. The reason for this transfer is explained to us by Darko: “Pa never gave Ma the middle name; Flower” (p.171).

Ma's desperation with her failure to see blood epitomizes her descent into a mental inferno. It is at this point that her suffering becomes concretized. Hitherto, Ma's incessant prayers and her disoriented outlook necessitate her being sent to a psychiatric hospital where she receives treatment. However, once her condition degenerates, her children, instead of sending her back to the psychiatric hospital, choose to send her to a prayer camp where she is subjected to shaving, fasting, caning and neglect.

In fact, what distinguishes *NWF* from the other three novels is that in *NWF*, Darko projects the suffering of women in such a way as to cause fright and cathartic pity. The sight of the mentally-ill women, Ma inclusive, at the prayer camp, symbolizes a devaluation of motherhood: Darko's description has a chilling effect;

The frail old woman stank of urine. She must have wet herself several times while chained . . . They tiptoed to the next figure, also bald and huddled on a mat with no pillow. The ankle was chained . . . They moved on to the next figure, and the next, all women, all old and bald, all frail and chained, all haggard and stinking. (p.28)

Then they come to Ma, and Darko's description of torture is blood-curdling:

The ninth figure was asleep in a fetal position; as if subconsciously yearning for the warmth and security of a womb, having received too much lashing in the world. Kweku suffered a sudden violent bout of dizziness, and broke out in sweat. (p.28)

This passage underscores the toll that infidelity in marriage and the trials of motherhood have taken on Ma. Darko's hyperbolic authorial comment ". . . having received too much lashing in the world" emphasizes the pain caused Ma by the Pa-Aggie affair. Dr. Armahlou succinctly reveals the crude methods that some prayer camps resort to in their dealings with the mentally ill. In condemning their modus operandi, Dr. Armahlou argues: "I am a Christian myself but do not

sanction prayer camps that flog mentally ill patients in the name of healing. These mentally ill patients are human beings and they need to be loved and cared for in a better way.”

Dr. Armahlou’s argument reveals that he is against these prayer camps that maltreat mentally-ill patients in the name of healing them. Had it not also been for the ingenuity of her children, Ma would have ended up dying. The unfortunate happening in *NWF* is that Cora and Randa are deprived of the much-needed direction from their mother because Ma becomes psychologically incapable of mothering them. The story of Ma has a telling effect on Randa and Cora. Indeed, Ma’s story demonstrates that the trials of motherhood have devastating consequences on daughters. Adrienne Rich’s argument that “the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy” is profound and to the point.

Especially poignant in *NWF* is the way in which Cora and Randa end up. These two daughters in misfortune strategize to punish Aggie for causing the death of their father and for disturbing their mother’s mental stability. Darko tells us that Cora suffers a near “broken heart” because of Ma’s mental illness. Her intended marriage to her sweetheart, Nana Afful, is cancelled because Nana Afful’s family would not sanction their son’s marriage to a lady whose mother is mentally ill. The danger of stigmatization is writ large in this context:

So for Pa’s suicide and Ma’s mental illness, Cora paid with a suicide of her own. A gruesome and emotional suicide. Cora never recovered from that break-up with Nana Afful. She lapsed into deep depression and let herself go. It affected her so much that she was compelled to quit full-time teaching and help Ma run the shop. The rumours and gossip that circulated about them were cruel and biased. Ma was mad, they said. Cora had also suffered a broken-heart and lapsed into deep depression. And if the rumours and gossips about how Ma landed where she was anything to go by, then, was Cora also not en route to ending up where Ma had? It was in the family. (p.124)

Darko clearly disassociates herself from those rumour-mongers and condemns stigmatization. Her description of the behaviour of these rumour-mongers as “cruel and biased” is also her condemnation of the tendency on the part of people to cast daughters in the mould of their mothers. It is not clear why Randa is obsessed about fighting her mother’s number one enemy, Flower. However, we glean from the novel that Ma’s trials starts with the birth of Randa. Pa’s accusation that Ma has fallen in love with Randa might suffice as the reason for Randa’s decision to join forces with Cora to ‘fight’ flower: “ ‘My wife has fallen completely out of love with me and fallen in love all over again with little Randa!’ he said” (p.327).

Ma’s children strategically adopt a five-fold plan calculated to punish Aggie and rob her of all joy. Their first plan is to redeem their mother from the shackles of the prayer camp. They achieve their goal with the help of a journalist, a farmer and his son. From the prayer camp they send their mother home where she continues with her medication. However, Ma’s children are determined to punish Aggie and finally to arraign her before Ma. The Kweku-Cora strategy at dealing with the trials of their mother is carried out in two phases. Each phase will be discussed and analyzed to ascertain whether they are successful and to bring out the repercussions of their actions.

First, Cora, masking her appearance with a huge Blonde Afro wig, attacks Idan, Aggie’s husband. Cora deliberately collides into Idan in the corridor of his office and feigns apology which shocks Idan. Thereafter, she calls Idan’s office and speaks to him in a rude manner. All this is calculated to get him annoyed so that the next time she goes to see Idan in his office, he would refuse to see her because of her uncultured behaviour. This incident torments him because



he has this strong feeling that this blonde Afro-wigged woman is up to something sinister. Darko conveys to the reader Idan's anguish:

THE BLONDE-AFRO-WIGGED woman plagued Idan. The feeling that she was after him for something was nagging him. He knows her from nowhere, but did she know him from somewhere? As far as he was concerned, she had bumped into him or they had bumped into each other in the office corridor. She tried to get him interested in her. Love at first sight? Lust at first bump? What would make a woman stoop so low as to force herself on a man who obviously didn't want her and humiliate herself to that extent? (p.70)

Darko demonstrates her mastery of the use of suspense. The unanswered questions in this extract point both to Idan's confused mind and to Darko's ability to arouse the curiosity of readers.

The rather unusual form of the first sentence reveals that Darko is intentionally highlighting Cora's wig. It is so out of place for an African woman to wear a blonde Afro-wig because blonde wigs are for Caucasian women. Thus, the wearing of the blonde Afro-wig in itself constitutes some kind of mischief. This probably explains Darko's decision to capitalize the adjectival phrase "THE BLOND AFRO-WIGGED" which describes the wig Cora wore. This unusual wig, coupled with the unusual behaviour of its wearer, causes fear and panic in Idan. Darko's choice of words such as; "plagued" and "nagging" illustrates Idan's confusion. No wonder he asks four successive questions to which no answer is provided.

The effect of this situation on Idan reveals that he is not only scared but baffled. Cora's strategy having yielded some results, urges Randa on to pursue Idan. In similar fashion, Randa also emerges from nowhere, lies flat beside Idan's car pretending to have been knocked down by Idan. This incident portrays Cora and Randa as daring sisters. Cora's first plan thus ushers in plan number two:

He continued to hum, concentrating ahead. Then it happened, swift and sudden. And Idan was certain that all he did was blink, because he didn't take his eyes off the road one second. The pretty, well made up, svelte young female figure must have literally materialized from nowhere. Because one second she wasn't there and the next she was there, flat on the parking ground beside his car, which meant one thing only: he had knocked her down. He jammed the brake, flung the door open and flew out of the car to her. She was already up when he got to her, and she was picking up her stuff that had spilled out and ramming them back into her hand bag. 'Oh God! Oh God! Lady! Are you hurt?' he wailed. 'I am sorry, Sir. I am so sorry!' She cried back. 'Please forgive me. It was entirely my fault. I wasn't looking, My God; I have caused you such an inconvenience. Please forgive me.'

Idan was flabbergasted. He had just knocked her down and there she was rather apologizing and taking the blame. What graciousness. (pp.72-73)

Although each of them (Cora and Randa) puts up a different show, they both render unexpected apologies which make Idan feel silly and confused. To think that he had knocked a young woman down, which makes him speed out of his car 'like a bird in flight only to be apologized to, makes Idan flabbergasted.' Unfortunately, he does not see through the ploy.

A third ploy is put up by Randa to get him hooked to her. After alighting from Idan's car, Randa feigns dizziness. Darko's description of the whole incident reveals Randa at her acting best:

The spell broke when she saw her stagger, obviously gripped by a sudden bout of dizziness. He gained back the sprint in his legs and dashed to her. He caught her by the arm just before her legs gave way. She sank into him. Her body almost weightless, made a pillar of his. 'Young lady, you are coming with me!' he declared, 'you are not well and I am not letting go of you even if you scream.' . . . (p.75)

Darko carefully describes Randa's ploy and its effect on Idan as a means of cautioning men to be wary of women who use pretence to control men. Darko deserves our commendation for exposing and illustrating what Kari Dako and her colleagues refer to as ". . . the interwoven survival strategies of fertility, sex, subservience, and exploitation . . ." (p.276). Indeed, Idan's inability to see through Randa's ploy results in his being infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. His

fondness for Randa causes a lot of pain in Aggie's heart, especially when Randa's perfume begins trailing Idan anytime he comes home.

In order to torment Aggie the more, Randa executes the fourth strategic plan. Disguised as Destine, Randa joins the ladies of MUTE as an undergraduate researching the works of MUTE. From this angle, Destine haunts Aggie with her past. The smell of Destine's perfume causes Aggie to worry the more. Destine even slips a note to Aggie with the word, "NEMESIS" written on it. Then she pretentiously explains the meaning of "nemesis" to Aggie just to coerce her to confront her past. It is only through a series of questions that Aggie realizes that Destine, whom she had told her troubles to, is the same person as Randa who has totally captured the attention of Idan. However, the harm had already been done because Randa's association with Idan results also in Aggie being infected with HIV/AIDS as well.

The fifth ploy to punish Aggie is carried out by Kweku and Cora. With the aim of causing Aggie's father to divorce Aggie's mother, Kweku and Cora disguise themselves and engage the services of a fake prophet. Their mission is simple—this prophet, called Abednego, is to go to Harvest F.M and give a message from God to one of the ladies of MUTE whose father is married to two women. This woman is Aggie. Indeed all that the prophet has to do is to publicize the fact of Aggie's father's sore. This ploy is calculated to embarrass Aggie and cause her father to divorce her mother so as to deepen Aggie's worries.

This fifth ploy is carried out further by Cora who pretends to be a teacher researching the life of Aggie's father, called Ntifer. Her closeness to Ntifer creates suspicion in Aggie's mother and the first wife. However it is the message she gives Ntifer which makes Aggie's mother go after her (Cora). According to Cora (teacher), the prophet has sent her a message which enjoins that Ntifer

leaves his second wife and receive sacrament in his (prophet's) church before Ntifor can experience healing. Sensing a ploy, Mena Penyin takes up the issue into her own hand and chases Aggie out of their compound with a pestle. The extract below teaches the benefit of female bonding:

While Aggie and Kakraba struggled to recover from their respective shocks and inquire about what happened, Mena Penyin panted furiously, 'I would have crushed her head if she hadn't bolted. That was what I would have wanted to do. Crush in her brains!' 'Who?' Kakraba shouted, 'Penyin, who?' 'Did someone come to steal something from here?' Aggie also managed at last to recover her voice. Penyin snorted, 'A thief? A thief would have deserved a pestle all right, but the small one would have sufficed. This woman is worse than a thief. She deserved the largest pestle in this house. One blow was all she could have needed to be on her way to her maker. Look at the dissension she almost caused this household with her nonsense? I would have shown her what proper nonsense was if she hadn't bolted.' To Aggie's surprise, her mother burst into laughter . . . Then her laughter infected Penyin and she also saw her anger melting. She let go the pestle, which hit the ground with a thud, clapped her palms together and convulsed into laughter, swaying her torso to and fro. (p.305)

The above extract is a very good attempt at illustrating the essence of female-bonding. Aggie's stepmother's conduct is completely in line with the womanists ideology propounded by Mary E.M. Kolawole. Kolawole maintains that womanism, unlike feminism, highlights femaleness but rejects the manipulation of those traits that hold women down. She contends:

Those who reject feminism are looking for alternative terminologies that are relevant to their specific cultural experience. The most dominant concept acceptable to those rejecting feminism as a term of reference is womanism or African womanism. (p.196)

Kolawole then spells out the tenets of womanism:

Womanism does not deny the natural biological God-given traits and characteristics, but rejects the manipulation of such traits to hold woman down. It seeks to enhance woman's strength in positive, wholesome ways by highlighting and not effacing femaleness. But this does not call for dogmatisation. (p.196)



Cora's ploy is seen by Mena Penyin as an attempt to 'hold' Mena Kakraba 'down' because it is Mena Kakraba who has borne children for Ntifor. Mena Penyin's actions help us to understand the spirit of Kolawole's assertion that:

African women's self-identification focuses on positive collectivity. It also endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood and motherhood with no apologia. Consequently the average African woman's exaltation of marriage and family values and assertion of feminine outlook are important canons of African womanhood. (p.197)

Immediately Mena Penyin realizes that Cora's actions are geared towards causing the disintegration of their family, she cries out for justice by chasing Cora out with a pestle. Kolawole's position explains Mena Penyin's actions better: "Nonetheless, these women are crying out for justice where these values and traditions are abused or when the ideals of African culture are perverted in the patriarchal structure" (p.197).

Mena Penyin's actions stop Ntifor from divorcing her rival, Mena Kakraba. Her actions show that she would not allow anyone to join that patriarchal structure that enables a husband in a polygamous marriage to divorce a particular wife once he feels he has no need of her. Mena Penyin's actions speak volumes of her knowledge of her cultural norms. Indeed African culture frowns on a man who divorces one of his wives just because he wants to receive the Holy sacrament!

Darko's account of how a co-wife fights for stability and peace in the family is very commendable. We see Darko as a womanist activist who, using the narrative technique as her axis, teaches women how to fight gender oppression, both from patriarchal structures and from their shared gender.

The story of Ntifor and his wives, like the many stories that are found in *NWF*, demonstrates Green's contention (1991:293) that ". . . when a writer talks about narrative within narrative, she unsettles traditional distinctions between reality and fiction and exposes the arbitrary nature of boundaries."

The Ntifor and his wives' story demonstrates Darko's use of various stories to speak about the trials of motherhood. Aggie's mum, Mena Kakraba, nearly suffers a divorce because of her status as a second wife. In fact, it is her ability to bear children for Ntifor that warrants her position as second wife since Ntifor's first wife, Mena Penyin, could not bear a child. As a mother, Mena Kakraba makes Ntifor a proud father. Yet Ntifor almost divorces her because a prophet had said that he had to divorce his second wife so he can receive "communion" during ecclesiastical celebrations. Ntifor's action explains Nnu Ego's question in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*: "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?"<sup>54</sup>

Indeed Ntifor's actions reveal that Mena Kakraba's value only lies in her childbearing abilities. She is, to use Emecheta's expression, Ntifor's appendage. The strong resistance put up by Mena Penyin demonstrates a paradigmatic shift from the hackneyed perception that wives in polygamous marriages are envious of one another. Indeed, the bonding between Mena Penyin and Mena Kakraba teaches other wives in similar relationships to come together and fight against unfair patriarchal habits. Kolowale's understanding of the import of contemporary writing by women illustrates the following point: "Women writers are now attempting to recreate new myths and archetypes to enhance positive depictions." (p.200)

---

<sup>54</sup> Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood*. London, Heinemann, 1979, p. 186

By fighting on behalf of her co-wife, Mena Penyin, like Cora and Randa, is able to strengthen Mena Kakraba. Had she allowed Cora's ploy to materialize, Mena Kakraba would have ended up probably as a mental case. This story of how Ntifor's wives sack a potential imposter from their compound adumbrates one of the new ways of capturing female-bonding in Africa. With this story, Darko has been able to deconstruct and recreate the hitherto despicable stereotype of the African woman who uses her sexuality to exploit people's husbands. Rather than enjoy the disavowal of the second wife, the first wife, Mena Penyin, picks a pestle and chases Teacher (Cora) out of their compound. Even though she has no child of her own, she deems it right to ensure the sustainability of her rival's marriage to their common husband and would not tolerate any intruder who wants Mena Kakraba out of the marriage. This is one rare episode that demonstrates that female-bonding is a potent force in women's fight against patriarchy.

It is the bond that exists between Mena Penyin and Mena Kakraba which ensures that each becomes the other's keeper irrespective of their status as co-wives. Of importance also is the way in which Cora gets her punishment. Even though she is not hurt by the pestle, the fact that she has to run for her dear life and hide is eloquent testimony about the fear that grips her.

In her recounting of Ma's children's strategy at dealing with their mother's enemy, Darko injects an element of poetic justice in her narrative. A discussion of the effects of their "actions" will reveal that even Kweku stands to suffer for joining his sisters to punish Aggie. Ironically, we never hear of these children blaming their father for his neglect and emotional abuse of their mother. This is a disturbing silence in Darko's narratives just as we observe in *The Housemaid* in which we witness Tika's silence about her father's wrongfulness in divorcing his first wife and marrying Tika's mother. All these children are so bonded by the patriarchal philosophy that they

look elsewhere for that woman who caused their father(s) pain rather than blame their father(s) for indulging in extra-marital affairs.

Randa's success at causing havoc in Aggie's married life is short-lived as she has to live with HIV. A copy of the T and T newspaper which carries the story of the cause of Pesewa's suicide links Pesewa's death to Dam, Randa's boyfriend. According to the T and T newspaper report, it is Dam who infected Pesewa's second wife with HIV:

The story was about the young man suspected of infecting the second wife with the HIV virus. He paraded as a businessman. He was rich, had hordes of girlfriends and was indeed a male prostitute. Since he got wind that his story was due to appear in the T and T to blow his cover, he had disappeared. His picture had been published to enable all those who have sex with him to go and test for the AIDS virus. (p.229)

Dam's activities were unknown to Randa who had always believed Dam's lie that he is the son of an affluent businessman. The newspaper's report of the reason behind Dam's disappearance explains why Randa cannot reach Dam even on his phone. The scary aspect of the Dam story is that it shows that it is difficult to identify an infected person just by his or her looks. Though Dam is on the run, he may still be spreading the virus, not only to wealthy women but to 'naïve' girls as well. The headache has to do with how we can flush out the Dams from our system before they add to the increasing number of infected persons. This is another instance of literature coming face to face with reality. Even though it is difficult to judge a person's HIV/AIDS status just by his/her looks, we are cautioned by Amma Darko to be wary. Each time a good-looking young man calls for a girl's or a woman's attention, the story of Dam should help the girl or the woman to smell a rat, to suspect that another Dam is waiting to continue the spread of HIV. Randa's reaction to the news of Dam's HIV positivity is graphically rendered by Darko:



Randa sat there numbed. She couldn't speak. She wanted to say something. She tried to but her jaw couldn't budge. The numbness invaded her whole body. She attempted to raise one leg. It failed her. Then suddenly, like a light switch turned back on a click, the energy flooded back in huge waves, overpowering its space. She yelled. Elsie held her. She yelled again. And yelled again. There was a horrendous weight in her chest. It felt like a tractor was testing its rear wheels on it. The pain was excruciating. It burst forth from her chest and descended to her left arm. She began to sway. Elsie noticed what was happening. She screamed and rested Randa on the bench. Then she sprang up towards Maa Cherie's salon howling for help. (p.229)

In order to effectively describe the effect of the news of Dam's HIV infection on Randa, Darko uses simile to compare Randa's pain to the pain one feels when a tractor moves on one's chest. By concretizing Randa's pain, Darko is able to create in us pity and fear—two important feelings needed to enable readers to watch out lest they fall into the same ditch. Randa also refuses to go back to campus for fear of being stigmatized for being HIV positive.

This same pity grips us on the occasion of Aggie's visit to Ma. From the conversation that ensues between Aggie and Ma, it can be gleaned that both of them experience a kind of spiritual healing symbolized by Aggie's cries and Ma's request for a bunch of beautiful yellow roses:

'Flower,' Ma called when Aggie was almost in the door way. Aggie nearly toppled over. She began to cry. Ma's face was still buried in the pillow. She neither raised her head nor opened her eyes. 'Tell my children I want to smell some flowers. Tell Kweku to bring me some flowers. I want to smell the delightful perfume of a bunch of beautiful yellow roses.' (p.367)

Ma's request, captured in the epilogue, ends the story; and what a way to end a story full of betrayals, frustrations and fears! Readers are given the chance to be part of the creative force. The rest of the story that borders on Randa and Aggie's awareness of their HIV status and how Cora and Kweku deal with that of their younger sister, is left to the fertile imagination of the reader. Ma's renewed love for flowers indicates that if abused mothers synthesize reason with feelings and forgiveness, they can achieve total healing of their psychic pain.

Although Ma's trials are painful ones, she is able, partly because of the psychiatric drugs she takes, to recover from the trauma and shock she suffers due to her trials. Her encounter with Aggie brings her much relief, especially as the tears in Aggie's eyes speak of pain and remorse. In this sense, Ma is a prophet since her malediction materializes. However, it is her ability to forgive Aggie that makes her stand out as a role model.

The bitter irony is that Ma's children will suffer pain because of Randa's HIV status. Even though their actions bring Aggie face-to-face with Ma, they are the losers in the sense that their pursuance of Aggie results in an irredeemable embarrassment—Randa's HIV/AIDS status. Amma Darko's advice to all who seek vengeance through rough ways is captured by the yellow inscriptions on the bus that takes Cora to Aggie's hometown. The inscription reads, "Vengeance is God's" (p.116). Cora's neglect of the import of this Biblical instruction nearly caused her death and revealed the HIV status of Randa.

Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from *NWF* is that female-bonding can be a key weapon to fight patriarchal structures. The gelling of Mena Penyin and Mena Kakraba proves this point. A close-knit family of four—Ma, Kweku, Cora and Randa are now faced with a huge burden. Randa's HIV/AIDS status is tragic. Little did she know that her beloved fiancée is a pimp. This feeling of betrayal is not as traumatizing as the awareness that like her sister Cora, people will casually conclude that misfortune is in the family again. It is too much a tragedy to be borne by one family alone. Pa commits suicide, Ma is a mental case, Cora has no husband and suffers depression and now Randa is sure to follow Cora in the depression trail. Ma will surely know about her beloved daughter's HIV status and will probably connect it to Randa's obsession to fight her mother's number one enemy. This will bring her untold misery. It is only Kweku who is

‘healthy’ and free yet he has the arduous task of consoling not only his mother but his sisters for a long time to come.

The frightening lesson we glean from the tragic end of this family is that the trials of motherhood can rid the joy of a family. The canker of betrayal that shrouds this family also makes them losers by the very nature of their gains. It is no longer a healthy family because ‘socially’ they are not healthy because they will be scorned at. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health does not limit good health to only physical health but also to mental health and social health as well. According to the constitution of WHO, health is “the state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>55</sup>

The fact is that Ma’s society considers her mental illness and Cora’s depression as a curse on the family. And now with Randa’s HIV status, the rumours will deepen and this family’s mental and this rumour mongering constitutes a kind of disease on this family’s mental and social state. Therein lies the tragedy of this family. The repercussions of Pa’s betrayal of Ma’s Trust has so much rippling effect that it casts a blanket of doom on this family.

*Not Without Flowers*, Darko’s fourth novel ends tragically not only because Ma and her children lose by the very nature of the gains they make but also because it injects some kind of fear in readers. Ma’s children’s determination to rescue their mother from the trials of motherhood rather deepens their woes. The trials of motherhood, if not handled carefully can result in tragic circumstances. The complex nature of the trials of motherhood demands carefully mapped out strategies to solve these trials. This is the lesson Amma Darko teaches so well in *Not Without Flowers*.

---

<sup>55</sup> Longley, D. *Health Care Constitutions*, London, Cavendish Publishing Ltd., 1996, p.1

## CONCLUSION

Essentially, this thesis which seeks, among other things, to equip mothers with knowledge and skill at dealing with the trials of motherhood has been approached through the trend analysis of Amma Darko's four novels. In these novels, Amma Darko has challenged those prevailing views of motherhood held by her Ghanaian society. With succinct descriptions and picturesque portrayals, Darko has illuminated our understanding of the myriad of trials which denigrate mothers. There is a conscious effort at recreating the hitherto failed mother whose daughter swears never to mirror their image or imitate them. Images of archetypal mother figures like Mama Kiosk, Naa Yomo, Kabria and Dina are foregrounded in a sub-soil of the symbolic. These mother figures represent what it means to be a mother with regenerative potentials. Their attitude towards their children helps their children to appreciate motherhood. These are mothers whose determination to nurture daughters sets in motion a catalyst for self-discovery and a holistic definition of African motherhood. These novels provide readers with a wealth of information about how to mother badly and, even more importantly, how to mother well. In our view, these novels are a must read for anyone born of a woman.

In an era where women feel constrained about their motherhood status, and where some daughters are even "dodging" from becoming mothers, these novels offer hope. A reading of these novels teaches daughters how to transcend the trials of motherhood. Ironically, it is through motherhood that all women can transcend the trials of motherhood and take control of their lives.

Indeed, Darko is of the conviction that the solutions to the trials of motherhood lie in mothers' ability to share their experiences and synthesize feeling and reason. This study reveals that when biological mothers and non-biological mothers join forces to train and care for daughters,



mothers can literally walk through their trials without feeling victimized or helpless. We refer to this group of mothers (biological and non-biological mothers) as a community of mothers. This community of mothers' interactions with daughters should inject into women a tangible commitment to participate in the on-going life of their communities and country with the view of speeding up the course of development. Especially in an era of HIV/AIDS, women cannot just look on as individual mothers struggle, albeit woefully, to provide for the needs of their daughters. A community of mothers is the panacea for mothers' frustrations at not being too well resourced to provide for their daughters' needs. Apart from contributing to making available the material needs of daughters, this community of mothers would provide emotional support for daughters and equip daughters with strategies to resist the manipulation of patriarchal structures. This is what is needed to curb the transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus. The four ladies at MUTE (in *Faceless*) provide us with convincing proof that a community of mothers, well-informed and resourced, can help solve most of the trials faced by mothers.

Thematically, Darko's novels demonstrate a clear consciousness of women's problems. In *Beyond The Horizon* the pathetic story of an abused wife and mother is portrayed. Told through the tearful eyes of a "dying mother", Mara, whose husband marries her just because he can feed off Mara's sale of her body, *BTH* teaches us that patriarchy does not only dominate women; it can also have a blinding effect on women and make them its involuntary agents.

In *The Housemaid*, a daughter's attempt to exploit and traumatize her mother for having "killed" her (Tika's) father, teaches us why daughters sometimes refuse to mirror their mothers' image. We are cautioned to ensure a solution to this "daughter's attempt to punish her mother" if we are interested in procreation.

In *Faceless*, a mother's painful awareness of the restrictions brought upon her by patriarchal structures does not prevent her from treading cautiously with unscrupulous men. *Faceless* is a novel that criticizes mothers who use the exigencies of their biology as an excuse to bring forth children they cannot nurture. All irresponsible fathers and mothers constitute a trial on motherhood and in *Faceless* Darko challenges mothers to be wary of men who are irresponsible. The determination of the ladies of MUTE to ensure the proper rehabilitation of Fofo, the street child, points to the need for a community of mothers whose primary concern it will be to ensure the proper training/nurturing of daughters.

*Not Without Flowers*, Darko's fourth novel, deals with the trials of a mother whose frustrations over her husband's extra-marital activities becomes the cause of her mental illness. Ma's children's obsession to visit vengeance on their mother's rival, results in Ma's last daughter's awareness that she is not only HIV positive but has unknowingly spread the virus to her mother's rival and her husband as well. The novel's resolution demonstrates that a mother(s) can overcome pain and anxiety once she is able to synthesize feeling with reasoning and forgiveness.

Just as the trauma of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism loom large in the works of the early male luminaries of African literature so does the politics of mothering and the role of women in speeding the process of development loom large in the works of Amma Darko.

One of the reasons for the appeal of Darko's novels is that even though in each novel we encounter women who fail as mothers, we still can see women who have consciously worked at motherhood and have succeeded. The lives of Mama Kiosk, Naa Yomo, Teacher, Kabria, Dina, Aggie, Vickie, Mena Penyin and Mena Kakraba, and even Ma, illuminate our understanding of what it means to mother well. Indeed the key lesson that these mother characters advance

regarding the trials of motherhood is that it takes more than a mother's biological ties with her children (especially daughters) to ensure the proper nurturing of children. All the good mothers cited above see mothering as an act of nurturing tomorrow's mothers and fathers—an act they dare not toy with because it is so basic to humanity.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Government through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; and policy makers ought to fund writers and encourage writers of fiction to engage with reality so as to expose challenging situations in our society and suggest alternative solutions. For instance, lessons from Amma Darko's novels have well-positioned us to skillfully address challenges such as streetism, irresponsible parenting, HIV/AIDS infections, psychosis, mother-on-daughter violence etc.

There is the need to promote a debate on the benefits of "Community of Mothers". Sourcing inspiration from the four ladies of MUTE in *Faceless* who, though not related to Fofo the street child, rallied around her and mapped out various strategies to set her on the road towards rehabilitation. Their actions inject a change in society's awareness that non-biological mothers can function as alternative mothers to daughters in need of responsible mothers.

Mothers and their daughters should bond with one another; sharing their experiences, discussing their strengths, challenges and aspirations. Working towards surmounting their challenges is a sure way towards gelling with one another and nipping mother-on-daughter violence in the bud.

Authorities in academia, medical practitioners, social anthropologists and activists, religious leaders etc. need to engage in inter-disciplinary research into the current trends of mothering. Their findings can be the basis for generating a kind of trainer-on-trainee workshop where lessons on proper mothering are imparted. These trainees then will organize durbars in their communities and tutor women on the fundamentals of mothering. Their *modus operandi* will be akin to that of our



hospitals which render ante-natal and post-natal training for expectant mothers. Effective monitoring would ensure conformity in delivery which will guarantee success.

A healthy mind, they say, lives in a healthy body; *Mens sana in corpore-sano*. A routine exercise programme needs to be followed by mothers so as to release stress. A forty-minute walk on a daily basis can help mothers maintain a healthy mind.

“To err is human, to forgive is divine” goes the saying. Women need to practise instant forgiveness. Patronizing the feelings of hatred, anger and unforgiving results in a life of stress. Forgiveness yields inner peace to the abused and releases the abuser. Mothers need to confront issues rather than internalize them. It is recommended that the ‘abused’ wife or mother must seek the company of a friend or two to go and confront her ‘abuser’ in a non-violent and productive manner that will ensure peaceful co-existence.

Women need to analyze all forms of non-formal education such as proverbs, folktales, unsolicited and solicited advice to would-be brides as well as certain religious doctrines viewed as inimical to women’s progress. The language of culture and religion is not sacrosanct; it is formulated simply to sustain the dominant view of life. Any analyses that point to any shift in the original idea behind the establishment of such language use, call for a revision. In this sense, the approach with the most potent is for the community of mothers to first of all educate their members and then move on to hold consultative meetings with traditional rulers and all stakeholders to come to such an agreement that will ensure a revision of any cultural or religious strictures.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

“African Agenda”, Issue vol. 9. No. 4. 2006. Ed. Yao Graham, Cornelius Adedze et al. Africa: Third World Network. [www.twnafrica.org](http://www.twnafrica.org)

“Superstition and Witchcraft in Africa.” Submitted by International Humanist News, 23 November, 2007.

Agonita, Rosemary. *History of Ideas on Women: A Source Book*. New York, Thomas Hobbes, 1997

Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Anowa*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition. London, Longman, 1995

———. *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition. London, Longman, 1995

———. *The Girl Who Can*. In Yvonne Vera (ed.), *Opening Spaces: Contemporary African Women's Writing*. London, Heinemann, 1998

Andrea B. Rushing. “Images of Black Women in Modern African Poetry”: An Overview in Roseana Bell, Bettye Parker and Berverly Guy-Sheftall, eds., *Sturdy Black Bridges*. New York, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979

Antobam, Kofi. *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*. Leipzig, Koehler and Amelag, 1963

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. By Leon Golden, Commentary by O. B. Hardison, New Jersey, Princeton Hall, 1968

Asante, Kete Molefi. *The Afro-centric Idea*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1987

Bâ, Mariama. *Une Si Longue Lettre*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979. Translated as *So Long a Letter*. Trans. Modupe, Bode Thomas, London, Heinemann, 1981

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York, Manchester U.P., 2002

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. H. M. Parshley. Ed. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953

Bhaktin Mikhail, Cary Emerson and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981

Bojczyk, Kathryn. E, Lehan, Tara. J, Mcwey, Lehan, M., Melson, Gail, F and Kaufman Debra, R., *Journal of Family Issues* 2011:32:452. <http://jfi.sagepub.com/content/32/4/452>

Boyce-Davis, Carol. *Maidens, Mistresses and Matrons: Feminine Images in Selected Soyinka Works*. In Ngambika: *Studies in Women in African Literature*. Trenton, N.J., African World Press, 1986

Brazelton, Berry T. *Infants and Mothers*. New York, Delacorte, 1981

———. *Working and Caring*. New York, Addison Wesley, 1983

Bretherton, I., and Munholland, K. A. Internal Working Models in Attachment Relationships: A Construct Revisited. In J. C. Cassidy and P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of Attachment Theory, Research, and Clinical Application* (pp. 89-111). New York: Guilford Press, 1999.

Buchanan, Edna. "The Corpse had a Familiar Face". Cited in Amma Darko's *Faceless*, Accra, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2003.

Bungaro, Monica. "Mothering Daughters and the Other Side of the Story in Amma Darko, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nozipo Maraire." In *New Directions in African Literature*, Vol. 25. Ernest Emenyonu Ed. Trenton, N.J, African World Press, 2006

Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Traditions*. Garden City, N.Y, Double day, 1957, [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), accessed on 25 November, 2011

Cheikh, Anta Diop. *Black Africa*. Trenton, Lawrence Hill, 1987

Chirabi, Driss. "*Succession Ouverte*" (*Heirs of the Past*), New York, French and European Publications, 1979

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Reproduction of Gender*. U.S.A., University of California Press, 1978

Chuckwuma, Helen. "Igbo Mythic Schema" in *Critical Theory and African Literature*. Ed. Ernest Emenyonu. Ibadan, Heinemann, 1987

Cixous, Hélène. *The Laugh of Medusa* in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*; Ed. David H. Richter, 2nd edition. Boston: Bedford Books, 1998

*Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of English*. London, Harper Collins Publishers, 2009

Connell, R. W. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Dako, Denkabe and Yitah. "Pawns and Players: The Women in Amma Darko's Novels" in *Sex and Gender in an Era of Aids: Ghana At The Turn Of The Millennium*, eds. Christine Oppong, M. Yaa, P.A. Oppong and Irene K. Odotei. Accra, Ghana, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Trenton N.J, The Women's Press, 1988

- Darko, Amma. *Beyond The Horizon*. London, Heinemann, 1995
- . *The Housemaid*. London, Heinemann, 1998
- . *Faceless*. Accra, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2003
- . *Not Without Flowers*. Accra, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006
- Debold, E, Wilson, M, Malavie, I. *Mother-Daughter Revolution: From Betrayal to Power*. Massachusetts, Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1993
- Donovan, Josephine. "Towards a Women's Poetics", in S. Benstock, ed., *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987
- Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood*. London, Heinemann, 1979
- Firestone, Shulamite. *The Dialectic of Sex*. New York, Bantam, 1971
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990
- Fowler, Roger. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Dell, New York: W. W. Norton. 1983
- Gills, John. *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual and the Quest for Family Values*. New York, Basic Books, 1996
- Glenn, N. Evelyn. *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency*. New York, Routledge, 1994
- Green, Gayle. *Feminism, Fiction and the Uses of Memory*, Sings, Vol. 16, No. 2. Winter 1991
- Hay, E. L., Fingerman, K. L., and Lefkowitz, E. S. The Experience of Worry in Parent-Child Relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 14, 2007, pp. 605-622.
- Henwood, K. L. Adult Mother-Daughter Relationships: Two Phases in the Analysis of a Quantitative Project. *Feminism and Psychology*, 7, 1997, pp. 255-263.
- Head, Bessie. *A Question of Power*. London, Longman, 2009
- . *Maru*. London, Heinemann, 2008
- . *The Collector of Treasures*. London, Longman, 2008
- . *When Rain Clouds Gather*. London, Heinemann, 1995



Horne, Banyiwa Naana. "The Politics of Mothering: Multiple subjectivity and Gendered Discourse in Aidoo's plays." In *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*, Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Gay Wilentz eds., Trenton, New Jersey, African World Press, 1999

Irigaray, Luce. *Sexe et Parenté*. Paris, Minuit, 1987

Iris, Berger and E. Frances White. *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: Restoring Women to History*. Bloomington, USA, Indiana University Press, 1999

Jagger, Alison M., *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983.

Jenainati, Cathia and Judy Groves. *Introducing Feminism*. Malta: Gutenberg Press, 2007.

Kolawole, Mary E.M. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton, N.J, African World Press Inc., 1997

Lewis, M. *Altering Fate: Why the Past does not Predict the Future*. New York: Guilford Press, 1997.

Leach, Penelope. *Children First: What Our Society Must Do – and Is Not Doing – For Our Children Today*. New York, Alfred Knopf. 1994

Longino, H. E. "Pornography, Oppression and Freedom: A Closer Look" in *Take Back The Night: Women in Pornography*. Lederer et al, eds. New York, William Morrow and Company, 1980

Longley, D. *Health Care Constitutions*. London, Cavendish Publishing Ltd., 1996

Luescher, K., and Pillemer, K. *Intergenerational ambivalence: A New Approach to the Study of Parent-Child relations n later life*. *Journal of Marriage and the family*, 60, 1998, pp. 413-425.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London, Heinemann, 1969

*New Living Tranlation*. 2nd Edition. Carol Stream, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers Inc, 2007

Ndebi, Okey. *African Commentary*. Amherst: Mass, 1991

Nnaemeka, Obioma (ed). *The Politics Of (M)othering: Womanhood Identity and Resistance in Nwapa Flora's Efurū*. London, Heinemann, 1966

Oakley, Ann. "Subject Women: Where Women Stand Today – Politically, Economically, Socially and Emotionally." Great Britian, Martin Robertson Company Ltd., 1981, p.86

———. *Woman's Work: The House Wife, Past and Present*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1974

- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: Africa Women and Patriarchy*. New York, Orbis Books, 2004
- Ogot, Grace. *Island of Tears*. Nairobi, Uzima, 1980
- Ogundipe, Leslie quoted by Adeola, James. *In Their Own Voices*. London, Heinemann, 1990
- Okleme, S. K. *Reconciliation and Other Poems*. Setsu Educational Books: Kumasi, Ghana, 2003
- Onwueme, Akaeke Tess. *The Reign of Wazobia*. London, Heinemann, 1988
- Palmer, Eustace. "African Jekyls and Hydes: Benjamin Kwakye's Study of Double Personalities in *The Sun By Night*". In Abioseh, Michel, M. Ed. *Journal of African Literature Association*. Vol. 1, 2007, p.134
- Peterson, V spike and Runyan Anne Sisson. *Global Gender Issues: Dilemmas in World Politics*, Colorado: West View Press, 1993
- Rapoport, Rhona S. et al. *Fathers, Mothers and Others: Towards New Alliances*. London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Publishers, 1977
- Riche, Andrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York, W. W. Norton, 1976
- Ruddick, Sarah. "Maternal Thinking". *Feminist Studies* 6, No. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 342-367.
- Ruth, Sheila. *Issues in Feminism*. California, Mayfield Publishing Company, 1995
- Ruth, Sheila. *Feminist Activism: Historical Context*. In Susan. M. Shaw and Janet Lee ed., *women's Voices, Feminist Visions*. California: Mayfield Publication Company, 2011
- Saadawi, El Nawal. *The Circling Song*. London, Zed Books, 1989
- . *Searching*. London, Zed Books, 1991
- . *The Circling Song*. London, Zed Books, 1989
- Sarpong, Peter Akwasi. *Ghana in Retrospect*. Tema, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974
- Shaw, Susan M. and Lee, Janet, ed. *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. California, Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001
- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. London, Virago, 1986
- Sofola, Nwazulu. *Wedlock of The Gods*. London, Evans Brothers – Africa List, 1972

Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horsemen*. London, Eyre Methuen, 1978

Sprinkle, D. H. *Systemic Assessment*. In M. Cierpka, T. Volker, and D. H. Sprenkle (Eds.), *Family Assessment: Integrating Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 211-230). Ashland, OH: Hogrefe & Huber, 2005.

Sutherland, Afua. *The Marriage of Anansewa*. London, Longman, 1990

Taine, Hyppolyte. *From Introduction to the History of English Literature*. In W. J. Bate (ed.) *Criticism. The Major Texts*. New York, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc. 1952

Todorov, Tzevetan. *Literature and Its Theorists: A Personal View of Twentieth Century Criticism*. Trans. Catherine Porter, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987

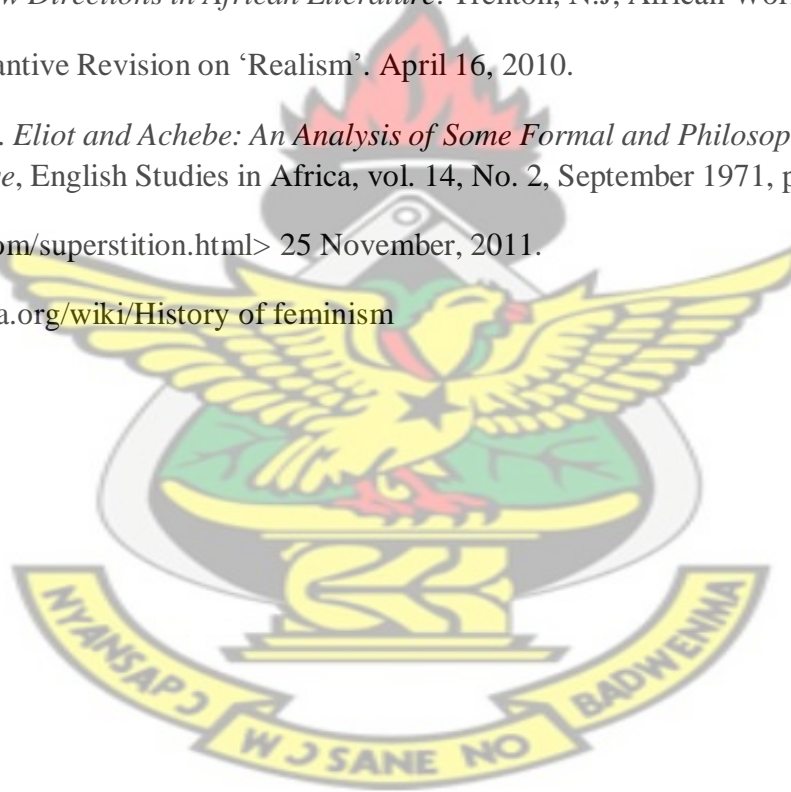
Uko, Iniobong I. "Transcending the Margins: New Directions in Women's writing." In Ernest N. Emenyonu ed. *New Directions in African Literature*. Trenton, N.J, African World Press, 2006

Wikipedia. Substantive Revision on 'Realism'. April 16, 2010.

Wilson, Roderick. *Eliot and Achebe: An Analysis of Some Formal and Philosophical Qualities of No Longer At Ease*, *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 14, No. 2, September 1971, p. 222.

[www.bartleby.com/superstition.html](http://www.bartleby.com/superstition.html)> 25 November, 2011.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_feminism)



## APPENDICES

### 1.1. MOOD DISORDERS IN MOTHERS/WOMEN – CAUSES, SIGNS/EFFECTS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF ANKAFUL MENTAL HOSPITAL.

*On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2012, We paid a visit to Dr. Armahlou, Chief Medical Officer at Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital and Dr. Sagoe, Clinical Psychologist at Ankaful Mental Hospital. The purpose of our visit was to interview these two Doctors and to learn from them the causes, effects and possible solutions to mental illness caused by mood disorders.*

The interview with these two doctors took place in the context of a much wider research project on the trails of motherhood. Topics explored included: the causes of mental illness in women, the signs and effects of mood disorders, why women are more prone to suffer mood disorders, alternative search for healing, and the general precautions women need to take to avoid experiencing mood disorders. By the end of our interview, husband/partner infidelity presented itself as a major cause of mood disorders in mothers/women. Below is a transcribed interview that took place between P.A. (Philomena Abakah) and MDC (Medical Doctor) Dr. Armahlou, Medical Officer in charge.

**P. A:** The fifth chapter of my PHD thesis borders on women/mothers who become mentally ill because they suffer neglect from a husband or partner who has gone in for a much younger woman. Do you medicate/treat such cases at this place? (Ankaful Mental Hospital)

**MDC:** Yes, that's basically why we are here. Indeed we record more cases of mental ill health in women than in men. It would be of interest to you to note that most of the mental illness that



affect women results from unrequited love. Unrequited love occurs when a man betrays the love of his wife/mistress and goes in for a much younger woman. Ultimately such women whose husbands have left them suffer what we in mental health refer to as Mood Disorders.

**P.A:** What is Mood Disorders?

**MDC:** This is a medical term for a serious level of depression. Usually for women, it starts with a relationship (between a man and a woman) when the husband goes in for another woman, usually a younger woman and neglects his wife. The wife may suffer depression upon realizing the truth and this leads to a feeling of dejection and depression. In fact, it is one of the main causes why women attend psychiatric clinics.

**P.A.:** What signs and/or effects do women who suffer mood disorders portray?

**MDC:** First of all, they act according to their imaginations—most of the time they are very wrong in their own conviction. Secondly, they complain of hearing commanding voices. Thirdly, there is the urge to obey the commanding voice(s). Then there is what we term “Transference.” This happens when the mentally-ill patient transfers her anger from the one who caused her depression to anyone or anything associated with that person. In this case, there is an expression of anger/violence and a burning desire to kill, maim or destroy that person or object.

**P.A:** Most prayer camps claim to have the power and the skill to heal people with mental illness. It is common practice to find people with mental illness at various prayer camps. Some of them are chained whilst others have their hair shaved. What are your views about prayer camps vis-à-vis the ability to treat mental illness?

**MDC:** Usually when someone is mentally ill, his or her relatives consider it to be a spiritual problem. Usually the first point of call is the prayer camp. And I dare say that in most cases, the illness worsens. This is because most of the prayer camps apply unhealthy methods in dealing with mental patients. I have visited most of these prayer camps and I will tell you their mode of operation.

They make these mental patients bath with cold water very early in the morning. The idea behind this is that the spirit responsible for madness hates cold water; and so they will flee from the patients. Ironically, this worsens the situation because it increases the feeling of dejection and worsens their illness. The mental patients at these prayer camps are also flogged. They believe that flogging can make the evil spirit leave. This further worsens the situation because mental patients need not be abused. Flogging makes them violent and causes them to either retaliate violently or feel utterly dejected. It may affect their appetite and even cause them to withdraw from fellow human beings. The flogging is usually done at dawn and this makes the mental patient angry the more because he /she may not have had sufficient sleep and is probably hungry too. The anger is so great that such patients undergoing this treatment can harbour tendencies to kill or destroy anyone who comes near them. No wonder they are chained.

In fact the environment of these prayer camps is questionable. In most cases the mental patients are kept in the bush. The idea is to irritate the spirits responsible for madness and cause them to leave. However, this has no basis. Mental patients need to be kept in a serene environment. You see that the dominating colour at Ankafu here is mild yellow. It helps calm them down. Mental patients usually complain of hearing voices, seeing dwarfs and wanting to associate with trees. If you keep them in the bush, you are only causing them to go and look for the source of the voices

and dwarfs. The more their expectations are not fulfilled, the more agitated they become, leading to further deterioration.

This explains why most mental patients brought to us from prayer camps have to go through a longer time of treatment because their illness would have deteriorated. In such instances, the best thing is to quarantine them. Indeed, such patients are not even given parole because they need to be monitored closely by medical personnel.

**P.A.:** What is Parole?

**MDC:** Oh! Parole is when a medical officer in charge of psychiatric patients allows a patient to go home to his/her people for a visit – maybe to celebrate Easter or Christmas with the family and come back after the celebration. It is a way of gradually reintegrating the patient into the society again.

**P.A:** You sounded passionate about prayer camps.

**MDC:** Yes, because they usually worsen the plight of the mentally-ill patients. I am a Christian myself but I do not sanction prayer camps that flog mentally-ill patients in the name of healing them. These mentally-ill patients are human beings and they need to be loved and cared for in a better way. I have been to so many prayer camps in Ghana trying to convince the priests or those in charge to collaborate with the mental hospitals so as to ensure proper healing methods. Look, we are prepared to give them medicine to calm them down and treat the illness. They can be at the prayer camp, but the proper thing must be done. There will be no need to chain them, flog them or make them bath with cold water at dawn. All these worsen the situation. We are there to

give professional treatment; unfortunately these priests in charge of prayer camps fail to partner with us.

But hey, it is not a pessimistic case, I am happy to tell you that the Mental Health Bill has been approved by Parliament and will be passed; once this happens, my colleagues and I will closely monitor these prayer camps. The Bill will help us to regulate their activities and those found guilty will be prosecuted at the Mental Health Tribunal.

**P.A:** Do you have cases of men suffering from mood disorders.

**MDC:** Hm! We have a few. Men usually do not come here. It's women who usually come here.

**P.A:** Any reason for this?

**MDC:** Most men who suffer neglect due to infidelity on the part of their wives usually leave the marriage altogether and marry another woman.

**P.A:** The genetic make-up of women: can it contribute to our disposition to suffer mental illness more than men?

**MDC:** Well, it's not so clear; research is still ongoing to ascertain this view; however, it is realized that women usually internalize issues. Women usually are trained to keep things in them and so they find it difficult to confide in friends or relations. Thus they tend to suffer stress and depression the more. Talking about a problem is therapeutic. It helps to get it off your chest.

**P.A:** Can a mental patient be healed?

**MDC:** Yes, it depends on how soon the patient seeks medical attention. If he/she takes the prescribed drugs it helps very much. I must admit that in some few cases treatment can be for



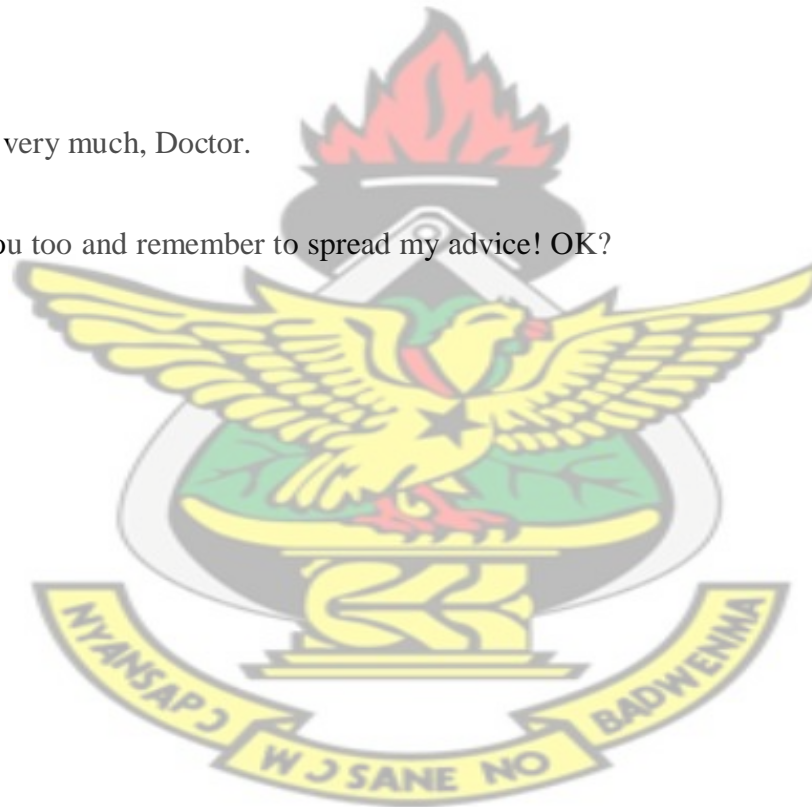
life. In most cases, however, treatment is carried on for three years for those with major mental illness and six months for those with minor mental illness.

**P.A:** Any advice for women or mothers whose husbands or partners are going in for younger women and neglecting their own wives/partners?

**MDC:** I advise that every woman must have two or three friends she can trust. When such issues happen, confide in your friends. Remember I said that talking about it is therapeutic. Or talk to your pastor or your children. You can get good advice to help you go through the neglect without a mental illness.

**P.A:** Thank you very much, Doctor.

**MDC:** Thank you too and remember to spread my advice! OK?



## **1.2. MOOD DISORDERS IN MOTHERS/WIVES WHOSE HUSBANDS NEGLECT THEM FOR YOUNGER WOMEN: EFFECTS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.**

*Our interview with Dr. Sagoe, clinical psychologist at Ankafu Mental Hospital was made possible by Dr. Armahlou. He first made us aware of the need to talk to Dr. Sagoe since women who suffer mood disorders have to see Dr. Sagoe first before seeing him.*

Preamble: Following our interview with Dr. Armahlou, Medical Officer in charge of Ankafu Mental Hospital. It became necessary to interview Dr. Sagoe, the clinical psychologist at Ankafu Mental Hospital since he sees to patients who come to Ankafu Mental Hospital with mood disorders that have not developed into serious mental illness. It must be said that based on a patient's situation Dr. Armahlou can refer him/her to Dr. Sagoe or vice versa. The meeting took place at 11am, 4th April 2012 in Dr. Sagoe's Consulting Room.

**P.A:** Good morning Dr. Sagoe! Thanks for accepting to have us interview you. It's all about wives/mothers who suffer mood disorders because their husbands have left them for much younger women. Do you have such cases here?

**Dr. Sagoe:** As we speak, we have a very precarious situation. In one of the wards we have a wife (mother) who is suffering from mood disorders because the husband neglected her and went in for a much younger woman in her early twenties. The woman is in her late forties. The young woman in her early twenties is in another ward, due to what is popularly called broken heart. So we have two women suffering from mood disorders because of one man's behaviour.

**P.A:** Does the husband/Sugar Daddy visit them?

**Dr. Sagoe:** Yes, and when we talk with him you realize that it is so difficult for him, having two women in the same hospital--a wife and a girlfriend. Well we are still counseling him.

**P.A:** Why will a man neglect his wife after say ten to twenty years of marriage?

**Dr Sagoe:** This is a very huge question and I will like to look at it from two angles, from a man's consideration of his loss of youth and ability and from a woman's consideration of a husband's neglect of her emotional needs. At age 45 onwards, most men begin to loose their youthfulness. It is really a challenging time for men. Some men at this stage realize that they are not so energetic in bed. It can be very stressful and some men adopt some behaviours to "prove" themselves. Some try to prove their "sexual power" by taking on younger women (woman) to satisfy that inner ego.

Some men will buy new cars and will start to engage so much with fashionable clothings and haircuts. Others will devote much attention to exercise not just for their own health but to relive their youthful stage.

For women, most of the time, between the ages of 30-40 they feel that their husbands are fed up with the marriage as they do not see their husband being emotionally attached to them. They feel like they have selected the wrong husband and so they start imagining that the husband is seeking pleasure with another woman elsewhere. This makes them irritable, nagging and generally unhappy. The home is tensed up and most married men at this time will like to stay out longer hours.

**P.A:** Any reason for this behaviour?

**Dr. Sagoe:** Research points to a fact that for women, to be loved is more important whilst to be admired is more important to men. Also men generally want to keep their masculine roles and to be appreciated for that. Wives who always compliment the masculine role(s) played by their husbands usually gain their husbands attention and love. Indeed, the way to a man's heart is to make him appreciate himself.

It takes men forever to grow/mature. Women seem to mature faster and accept the burden of ageing much easier than men. Most men expect their wives to always look young and attractive. If they find out that the wives are ageing, they may look for young women/attractive women because to them, it makes them feel the essence of youth.

**P.A:** What advice will you give to wives so that they can “keep” their husbands and prevent them from straying into the hands of younger women?

**Dr. Sagoe:** First of all, let me say that our culture does not teach us to love ourselves unconditionally. Every individual must know that happiness comes from within. Believe you are beautiful and admire yourself in the mirror even if this is for five minutes each day. Appreciate an emotional bank account and increase that account.

**P.A:** What is emotional bank account?

**Dr. Sagoe:** That is, make yourself happy by appreciating yourself, your work, your family and appreciating God for making you who you are. Also communication is a key. Communicate to your husband that you are looking attractive for him alone. Spice up your life – inject variety in all aspects of your life – cooking, sex life, the way you serve your husband's table, your dressing etc. It draws attention to you always. Every night try to talk with your husband about issues that



can make him feel relaxed. Discuss football (if he is interested) or bring up any interesting discussions.

**P.A:** Are there any signs that point to the fact that a man is having an extra-marital affair(s)?

**Dr. Sagoe:** Well we can talk about some signs but research is still ongoing to ascertain which of these signs particularly point to such behaviour. For some men when they start to engage in extra-marital affairs, they are super nice to their wives. This is to cover up their actions. Others can be hostile, arrogant and uncaring because they have met a new lover. Some become very secretive; they do not want their wives to go near their phones, their bags or even their wardrobes least the wife finds out about their illicit affairs.

**P.A:** Do children suffer when their Dad neglects their mother and goes for a younger woman?

**Dr. Sagoe:** Children go through a lot of stress when such things happen. Research points to the fact that girls suffer even the more in such instances. But let me say here that it is not only a father's extra-marital activities that stress children. In this age, most parents do not have time for children. Economic pressure is taking its toll on parents as they have to stay out longer and work even harder to be able to provide for their families. Thus most children experience what we call emotional abandonment. This creates in children lack of self-confidence and makes them vulnerable. Parents must spend quality time with their children. It doesn't mean spend too much time to the neglect of other core duties. It's all about human touch. If even it's for an hour each day, talk with them and if you are close by hug your children. They will feel the warmth and it will generate in them confidence and make them appreciate themselves. This will increase their emotional bank account.

**P.A:** Any advice for those experiencing neglect?

**Dr. Sagoe:** They should seek early treatment else it can develop into permanent psychosis. When people develop permanent psychosis, they act irrationally, they go through spiritual stress like hearing commanding voices, they have sleeping difficulties, they withdraw from people, they lose appetite and indulge in unprovoked tears. Sometimes they have body pains, waist pains, constipation and diarrhea. Importantly, such people cannot decipher between imagination and reality, and this is the cause of their irrational behaviour.

**P.A:** Any advice to wives/mothers to help them enjoy marriage and to prevent them from suffering mood disorders?

**Dr. Sagoe:** I suggest that every woman will see a psychologist once in a year just as it is important to see your dentist or gynecologist once every year. In fact, talking with a psychologist is not only healthy, it is therapeutic as well. Also it is advisable that every woman and even every man must have three best friends. These can be your sisters, brothers, pastor etc. Confide in trusted friends. It helps a lot. It is therapeutic and it de-stresses you. Women and men must not indulge in anger for too long. Do you know that apart from stress, anger can result in goiter? Well, anger destroys and I advice that since anger is a medical concern, one need to move away from any source of anger and try to calm down.

**P.A:** Thanks a lot.

**Dr. Sagoe:** It's a pleasure.

### 1.3. INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR (AMMA DARKO)

*The interview took place at 12:10pm on the 21st of July, 2010 at Amma Darko's office at the Internal Revenue Service – Kaneshie Branch.*

**PREAMBLE:** *All four novels which constitute the primary texts of this thesis are written by Amma Darko. It is very important to engage with Darko to understand the angst behind her writing and her career objectives.*

**Interviewer:** What motivates you to write?

**Amma Darko:** I am a natural storyteller and I love to write about current happenings especially issues that are inimical to progress, be it of people or of the country. The more these things happen the more the passion to address them through writing.

**Interviewer:** You are a government worker, a mother and a novelist. How do you make the time to write?

**Amma Darko:** Obviously, time to write is tight, yet I cannot go through a day without writing. I have restricted myself to this routine. By 6:30am, I am at work. Between 6:30am and 8am (by which time I would have to start work) I write. It would interest you to know that I write with a pencil so that I can easily edit my own work because the story just pours out and needs some polishing up before it gets to readers.

**Interviewer:** In all your novels, you talk about environmental degradation. 'Filth' finds space in your novels and you criticize those who are oblivious to the effects of living in filth. Why do you write so passionately about filth?

**Amma Darko:** When I was growing up, I used to enjoy the sight of water bodies and even marshy areas. Now most of these are covered with filth to the extent that some of these marshy areas have been turned into permanent rubbish dumps. When I see these unfortunate turn of events, it makes me lonely, not just because nature has been interfered with but also because when I complain I don't get others to sympathize with me. It is as though it's no issue at all worth grieving over. It is this sense of loneliness that grips me which makes me express it the way I do in the portrayal of filth and environmental degradation.

**Interviewer:** Are you a feminist?

**Amma Darko:** I cannot subscribe to an ideology I do not understand. So I'm not. To me, women must live through their natural biological traits. Women need to collaborate also with good men to speed up their own progress, that of their families and the country as a whole.

**Interviewer:** As for *Faceless*, tell me more about Kabria and what she represents in the novel. Is Kabria your mouthpiece?

**Amma Darko:** I have been asked this question a number of times. Well, the answer is I do not know. To me, Kabria represents all women who desire to achieve success at home and at work irrespective of challenges. Kabria knows her responsibilities, she knows her weaknesses, she is aware of the challenges confronting her especially with motherhood status and her relationship with her husband. Given the rather disturbing constraint of woman, Kabria's strategy at dealing with her challenges provides valuable lessons for all mothers.

**Interviewer:** Does your own life experiences mirror that of Kabria, given the nagging impression that the character Kabria is created as a role model.



**Amma Darko:** I think the crux of the matter here is not whether I am Kabria or not. I like this character very much myself. I have been asked this same question by a number of interviewers. My only reply is that a character like Kabria deserves to be studied carefully and imitated by any woman who does not want to limit her roles to the kitchen and the bedroom.

**Interviewer:** I see one major theme binding all your novels together. Even though that each of your four novels has its own subject matter, the trials of motherhood and the conflicts bedeviling mother-daughter bonds is a theme that binds all four novels. Are you aware of this theme in your novels?

**Amma Darko:** I have not considered it this way. However, I now realize how true your assertion is. But let me tell you that it is not by chance that the trials of motherhood feature in my novels. I am a mother myself, combining the demands of married life and work and writing, and child care has not been easy. At times, you feel constrained, at times you feel satisfied, at times you are called to blame yourself, yet you have to forge ahead. My last child just finished J.H.S. He keeps going to libraries, internet cafés or visiting friends. Recently, he had a breakdown--malaria etc. When he recovered, he started going out again. When I warned him of the apparent danger, he boldly retorted, “Why won’t I go out. The whole family is out by 6:15am. I’m the only one at home, left with bread and Fanta. I cannot stand boredom so I go out to relieve the boredom.” Well, I felt as though I’m not mothering him well, that I should stay at home with him more than I am doing now, yet I can’t help it but rush to the office and write and work. In fact if I am to choose between writing and work, I will opt for writing because I cannot go through a day without writing. He will understand me later but for now I’m still going to write because writing fulfils me.

**Interviewer:** Do you love to cook?

**Amma Darko:** I do all the cooking by myself. It's a responsibility I love to do. I am so used to my kitchen that even in the night when the lights go off, I do not have any trouble locating the ingredients.

**Interviewer:** In *Faceless*, Sylv Po, the male presenter at Harvest F.M, collaborates with four women to ensure that a street child is set on the road towards her rehabilitation. Why do you choose a man to collaborate with these ladies of MUTE?

**Amma Darko:** Sylv Po is a very likeable character. Indeed when I was writing about him, I had in mind Komla Dumor who used to work with Joy F.M. ( Komla is now working with B.B.C.) His morning shows informed Ghanaians about issues happening in the country. People intently listened to Komla Dumor's talks and analyses of issues. Even young girls selling bread, chewing sticks, etc. by the roadside tuned in their little radios and listened to Komla Dumor. This signifies a very important step towards making Ghanaians aware of happenings in their country. Indeed the phone-in sections enable callers to voice their frustrations, hopes and contributions to the content(s).

**Interviewer:** It's been a while since your 'last' novel, *Not Without Flowers*, was published. Why the delay and what are we to expect?

**Amma Darko:** Well am trying my hands on a new thing. (She shows me a huge manuscript written in pencil) I think we have to inculcate the habit of reading in our children. I am disappointed at the content of the story books in the bookshops. With the exposure that the television and the computer have rendered to our kids, how do we expect them to love reading

tales about Ananse especially the way they are written? I believe that our children can still learn from the Ananse stories; however, there is the need to write them to make its content and style attractive to these children. I have collected a number of these stories and I am re-writing them. Imagine Ananse acting like Harry Potter: I know children will love to read these revised stories but more importantly, they will learn those same valuable lessons that also shaped our values.

**Interviewer:** So you are re-writing Ananse stories. What else are you working on? Any novel to be published?

**Amma Darko:** Yes, am working on another novel. It's about a German woman who married a Ghanaian soldier during the Second World War. Last year, I was invited to a festival of Arts and Culture in Berlin. One of the newspapers carried a story about me and my works in its front page. The following day, an old lady came to my hotel and told me her story. She had once married a Ghanaian soldier who fought at Vietnam during the Second World War. What sealed their relationship was a chocolate from Vietnam given her by the soldier. This lady came to Ghana with this soldier and they had three children. Unfortunately, she suffered abuse from her husband and escaped with her children to Italy. The old lady even showed me the Ghanaian newspaper that reported of her escape. All that the old woman wants from me is to write her story as a story because she has been looking for a writer to tell her story to the world. Obviously, such a story demands of me to do a lot of research. You remember I mentioned chocolate. I had to contact a few friends in Vietnam and in Berlin to get me the name of the chocolate since its production had stopped a long time ago. The old woman has forgotten the chocolate's name but I deem it a very important gift since it sealed their relationship. For the past six months, I have been researching just to get the name of the chocolate. It's only yesterday that

I got a DHL package which among other things gave the name of the chocolate. The package came from one of the old woman's children who is helping me in my research. So you see, it's all time consuming.

Well, am almost through with the writing but I cannot say when the book will come out. But prepare to read a story like this sometime.

**Interviewer:** Your novels have gained appreciable popularity locally and internationally. How do you view this success?

**Amma Darko:** The popularity of my novels has exposed to me clearly the need for more books written by Africans. When I visit our bookshops, I feel disappointed about the inadequate number of novels by African writers. I have set myself a duty to acquire as many works by African writers as I can buy/be gifted with. I have in collaboration with my husband built a library where I intend to store these books and encourage students, lecturers, researchers etc. to come read, discuss and discourse. I am also planning to build a conference centre where writers of African literature can meet with students, members of academia, etc. to dialogue on how to use literature as a vehicle to address pressing national needs.

**Interviewer:** Thanks for your time.

**Amma Darko:** It's a pleasure, but hey, write fast and I wish you all the best.