

The Monster in Patriarchy: A review in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon, The Housemaid and Faceless*

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"A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband.
Her duty is perfect obedience".

(El Saadawi: *A Woman at Point Zero*, 46-47).

Abstract: Women are not supposed to speak in typical traditional and patriarchal societies. While their husbands address them, they must remain silent to the end of the talk and execute what they are told with no complain and restraint. Women are therefore assigned roles which make them citizens of second zone and living at the margin of society. Cultural and traditional norms of their different community allow their desires being ignored and put aside. Women face subordination, oppression and abuses of all kind all over the time and have to cope with them. This is the true reality of women in patriarchal societies depicted in novels. One of these female writings is found in Amma Darko's novels. Amma Darko's narrated involvement in the women's cause throws up further debates on the role of the female writer in the reshaping of society in terms of gender inequalities. The present paper reviews the novelist's radical perspective in *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) and *Faceless* (2010). Men presented as being monsters in these three novels are women's most feared enemies to combat and slain. The paper also critically explores male dominance as a cultural feature that maintains women under yoke and submission.

KEY WORDS: Patriarchy, culture, women, submissiveness.

Résumé:

Les femmes sont supposées ne pas prendre la parole dans une société traditionnelle de type patriarcale. Pendant leurs maris leur parlent, elles doivent rester silencieuses jusqu'à la fin et exécuter promptement les ordres. Dans cette société, les femmes sont assignées à des rôles spécifiques qui les rendent marginales et citoyennes de seconde zone. Les cultures traditionnelles ne prennent pas en compte leurs désirs et souhaits. Les femmes sont confrontées tout le temps à l'oppression et les abus de toutes sortes et doivent supporter sans mots dire. Ceci est la réelle vie des femmes dans les sociétés patriarcales décrites dans les romans d'auteurs féminins. Amma Darko fait partie de ces romancières. A cet effet, cet article vise à montrer le caractère radical de l'écriture à travers *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) et *Faceless* (2010). Les personnages masculins présentés comme monstres dans ces romans sont les pires ennemis que les femmes doivent combattre et dé(con)struire l'article explore également le pouvoir patriarcale comme étant un fait culturellement enraciné qui maintient les femmes sous son joug et dans la soumission.

Mots clés: patriarce, culture, femmes, soumission.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most human societies on earth are structured around relatively stable patterns that establish how social interactions will be carried out. One of the most important social structures that organize social interactions is called status which is a category or a position occupied by an individual of that social group. All societies in the world rank their members in this status. The stratification ranks these members either in a high prestige status or a low prestige one. In male dominated societies, men are ranked on the top followed by women and children to make the pyramid complete. Individuals rank on top share the same traits which their male descents biologically and socially inherit. This status associated with a role gives the total right to men to subjugate the others. This kind of rule is named patriarchy which is simply defined as rule of men in society. It therefore provides some stereotypes which imply oppression of the subjects considered as being inferior.

To reject this form of rule, many women deconstruct it in their texts. They subvert men's roles in society by giving them debasing ones and construct the fiction plot which revolves around female protagonists. The roles they give to these female characters are the most important ones. Women who write this category of novels are called feminists and their wish is to inverse the trend by putting their female counterparts at top or at least sharing the same rights and opportunities as males. In this way, their writings often provide with their personal experience or that of women they encounter in real life. Among other African feminist writers, we have Amma Darko whose three first novels *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) and *Faceless* (2010) emphasize male characters' behaviour and women's implicit contention in patriarchal societies. The novelist portrays some of her male characters as being extremely violent, sexist and dangerous whereas others are irresponsible and completely self-imposed to help their busy and earn-little wives.

II. DISCUSSION

Almost all female fictional writings present their female characters' ordeals in the hands of male characters in society. Amma Darko's novels, *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* fall in that classification of fictional works. These three novels propel the novelist in the category of radical feminists like Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo and before these two African writers we have Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1949). These two Europeans women's early writings are still heralded and have actively contributed to the rise of feminism in the world. That of the African American woman Alicia Walker is also to be mentioned as she was concerned by her counterparts' economic survival, ethnic and racial discrimination. Her work in the field act to make the difference between African and African-American women's ordeals and those of white women. She elaborates her theory not exclusively based on gender, but also on race and social status. In her analysis, she provides black women's program of liberation despite that fact that black women organize themselves differently to resist patriarchal politics on the African continent as well as in the United States of America. Ideology is not an evidence-based logic, but a theory which lines of reasoning cannot be acknowledged by all. This is one of the reasons why some people are still reluctant to adopt it. During a show with Trevor Noah, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains that the negative connotation comes from the fact that people misunderstand its meaning and take "a feminist as being crazy woman who shits men and does not shave"¹. She further posits that everyone should love to be feminist and help reverse the prevailing tendency which considers women as being inferior to men.

Thus, literarily defined as rule of the male head of a social unit, patriarchy is the common enemy, the common monster feminists all over the world want to fight and slay as the little David slew the giant Goliath to free his people in the biblical narrative. Amma Darko establishes her trademark by portraying her male characters in a scope which gives them all power over women. These male characters consider their women as being inferior to them and therefore cannot take the same roles. This is what happens to women in patriarchal societies. This male rule has a strangle hold on women that it enslaves them culturally and economically women. It emphasizes their otherness and subordinate position. Put this way, in *Beyond the Horizon* Akobi and his father symbolize this powerful rule in which women's consent are not required at any level of decision. The rule of these two male characters underscores all forms of oppression to glorify their selfish interest. The protagonist shares that:

I remember the day clearly. I returned from the village well with my fourth bucket of water of the day when mother excitedly beckoned to me in all my wetness and muddiness, dragged me into her hut breathlessly told me the 'good news'. 'Your father has found a husband for you,' [...] 'a good man!' (Darko, 3-4)

The excerpt shows that only fathers have to right to marry or not their daughters to any man they want without taking beforehand their consent. The decision meets no opposition from the other members of the family. In that sort social setting, the other members are not worth consulting. Mara's mother complies with the rule with no contention. The above passage explains the submissiveness of the woman and the following sentence sums up all: "Your father has found a husband for you, a good man!" (Darko, 4) since in African culture no daughter dares to refuse the choice made by parents particularly in terms of marriage. In patriarchal settings, marriage links two families of the same tribe or sharing the same cultural values. So the final decision for a family to unite with another cannot be left to young people while very seasoned ones are still alive. Besides, young men educated in and within that environment take on the same features. For example, when Akobi wants to have sex with his wife, he just orders the woman to come and with no other words, he enters her sexually. The woman admits with surprise that:

¹ The Daily Show with Trevor Noah while presenting Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions" (2017). London: 4th Estate.

He was lying on the mattress, face up, looking thoughtfully at the ceiling when I entered. Cool, composed and authoritative, he indicated with a pat of his hand on the space beside him that I should lie down beside him. I did so, more out of apprehension [...] Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. (Darko, 22)

In this light, sex is not a two-way affair convenience in patriarchal society, but rather a pleasure to be satisfied, an order to be complied with and then a unique delight: that of the man. Sometimes, the protagonist does not know the reason why her condition should be so miserable with her man. Thus, instead of improving, it worsens and violence intensifies from frequent slapping and kicking to domestic rape. Mara recognizes that:

So I don't know why he slept with me.

'He is a man, Mara, and when he has a risen penis he will sleep with anything that has a vagina and leave the regret for later,' said Osey's wife. [...] Why did he do it with me if he didn't want to? (Darko, 86-87; italic is mine).

For the woman, obedience and respect must be hers in order to avoid being crushed as her husband exploits so much her innocence to wave his intricate web of authority. Women like Mara think that violence and submissiveness are part of their karma. She surrenders mentally that:

It was natural that after I had woken up first at dawn, and made the fire to warm up water for Akobi, and carried a bucketful of it with his spongebag to the bathhouse for him, and returned to wake him up to tell him his bath was ready-it was natural that I also had to stand outside while he bathed just in case some soap suds should go into his eyes and he should need me. Moreover, *it was me who always carried back the buckets* and the bathing accessories and saw to the drying his towel ready for next morning since he hated wet towels touching his skin.

It was natural, too, that when he demanded it, I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat while he slept all alone on the large grass mattress since, after all, mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure. And if demands like that were what would give him please, even of just momentarily, then it was my duty as his wife to fulfil them. (Darko, 12-13, italics mine)

The gloomy scenes of violence show the magnitude of female tragedy, the brutality and immorality of male power. The precision of the story here encapsulates Amma Darko's personal experience of male violence in society. In patriarchal societies, what makes it perpetual is that women are educated to accept their second rank and think that it is ordained by a divine and invisible hand. Male attitude toward women is enhanced by some religious and social beliefs such as Bible and Qu'ran among others. The Bible highlights that women must keep silence in public and at home "Let a woman learn in quietness, in entire submissiveness. I allow no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to remain in quietness and keep silence in assemblies"². In the Islamic world, women are not spared from these restrictions as their identity is well hidden by their hijabs, veils, dresses and other physical and social constraints. The Qur'an puts a serious emphasis on dress implying decency in a world of interaction between members of the opposite sex. In that part of the world, dress code is part of that overall teaching especially to women. As for the social belief, it is encoded in traditional cultural norms. For example, tradition requests women's obedience and total subservience while being beaten to let men assert their power just because they are men (Darko, 12). The authority men have over their wives can also make them look like monsters. The narrator points out that:

I got a slap in the face '[...] I received a knuckle knock on my forehead. He grabbed my left ear between his thumb and forefinger and, with my body slanted halfway towards him, my ears burning hot in pain, walked slowly and steadily with me back into our room. By the time he released me my left ear had gone numb' (Darko, 19).

The homodiegetic protagonist recounting her own story with the pronoun 'I', waits every time to be used and abused by men since she has no choice to stop the carnage (Darko, 1). She lives in a society which gives her no right to contend her situation. In that kind of society, women suffer in silence and finally think that violence is part of their existence. According to bell hooks, this form of language is the language of

²1Timothy 2:11-12. Online Bible New version International, 2015.

“oppression”³ which annihilates its victims and makes them unable to “talk back” (Idem) or walk out of it. Society compels them by conditioning their mind since their childhood. According to bell hooks, women and girls are silenced and seen as having no future in speaking while boys and men are encouraged to become preachers (hooks, 6) and that women and girls could be threatened with the label of madness for speaking too much (hooks, 7) or even for daring to ask for speech. For example, when Nwoye’s mother asks if Ikemefuna will be staying long with them, Okonkwo bellows to her. “Do what you are told woman’, when did you become one of the *ndichie*⁴ of Umuofia?” (Achebe, 12). Just like bell hooks proves it, Amma Darko demonstrates that there are many differences between the treatment of men (boys) and women (girls) in regard to speech and other rights in patriarchal societies. This is what power looks like in male-oriented environment. Men shape themselves as mob boss and use as well the rhetoric and the psychological state of mind which go with it. The phenomenon is entrenched in most African settings that even some governmental authorities (men and women) use the same language to tear up other women’s expectations to see it ends. For example, Ottu, Kabria’s only son thinks that his parents do not treat him the way they should do. When he sees how other boys are treated like king in neighbouring family, the little boy argues before his parents this way: “Mum, you don’t understand [...] he is also the only son. Just like me. And his grandmother said he is special. Veeeeeery special. [...] “Yes, You see, by coming as a boy, he earned his mother plenty of respect and also ended her pains. [...] ensued that my friend’s mother continued to bear more and more children till she bore a son” (Darko, 13). Moreover, while Okonkwo wishes that Ezinma were a boy as she has the spirit in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 35-6; 52), Nnu Ego desperately wants a male child to enhance her social status in *Joy of Motherhood* (Emecheta, 140). More, Nnu Ego tells her daughters to give up their lives by being forced into early marriage to generate income for their brothers: “But you are girls! They are boys. [...] When your husbands are nasty to you, they will defend you” (Emecheta, 197).

The discourse above in the narrative brings to the fore the power relation of the male’s phallus, which makes him the ‘subject’, to the female’s, who is regarded as the ‘Other’. In most African societies the validation of a man’s masculinity lies in the power he wields in subduing the woman. This power relation is regarded as monstrous throughout feminist ideology. Examining the place of the male genitalia in power discourse, the theorist Achille Mbembe (2001) observes that “phallic domination has been all the more strategic in power relationships, not only because it is based on a mobilization of the subjective foundations of masculinity and femininity but also because it has direct, close connections with the general economy of sexuality”⁵. To validate the power they wield, Akobi and Osey resort to exploiting their wives to make money, an attitude which is similar to that of the governments exploiting the mass in African postcolonial countries. Masculinity is therefore not valued unless performed by biological male. Hence the male body is imbued in our culture with certain traits that characterize maleness or masculinity: the human norm of male supremacy. Consequently, it is this supremacy that embodies all the male characters in Amma Darko’s novels.

Amma Darko uses her literary works to bring to light what permanently and covertly happens in patriarchal households. This particularly rough and tyrannical attitude of Akobi is also depicted in male characters such as Poison, Kwei, Nii Kpakpo and Onko in *Faceless*. These characters symbolize patriarchal wickedness and the irresponsibility of men who embody it. As far as the character Poison is concerned, this onomastic name lays emphasis on the toxicity of the boy raised by his brutish stepfather. Poison’s stepfather enjoys beating the shy and reclusive child to satisfy his masochistic and Machiavellian sexual fantasies and to express his domination over him. Here, the novelist does not go in detail to unearth the causes of the stepfather’s violence, which is rather a writing technique. She uses freely synecdoche, a technique which functions in a way that parts are made as a whole. A synecdoche or allegory is a metaphor that usually teaches a lesson. For example, William Golding’s *Lord of The Flies* (1954) is an allegory which criticizes civilization’s conflict and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *River Between* (1965) condemns the Christian missionaries’ deviation of in the former British colony of Kenya, the unchanging land of Kikuyu.

No real motivation justifies the consistency and the regularity of violence in Poison’s stepfather’s case. What counts is the whole satisfaction which comes out of the beating. As a result, the long-lasting beatings create a perversion in the boy’s mind as depicted by Amma Darko. Poison’s stepfather makes of Poison a mini version of himself who is rather more dangerous than him. The effect of the murderous act on Baby T is catalytic. Poison needs a sin to enhance his lethality just like Okonkwo to increase his social position in

³ Hooks, b. (2015). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. New York: Routledge, p. 1.

⁴ Ndichie means witch in Igbo language.

⁵ Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. California: University of California Press. Print, p. 13.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the young Epa in Leonora Miano's *L'Intérieur de la nuit* (2005). Baby T's death counts as the ultimate act which transfers the complete venom to a boy raised in and for violence. This sole male character Poison depicts the value of sin in a town named after the biblical narrative about Sodom and Gomorrah in the book of Genesis (Genesis 19).

Besides, while Amma Darko describes Poison's high capacity of lethality, she sheds light on Kwei's animosity toward his pregnant and innocent wife, MaaTsuru. Kwei, the bully thinks that he has nothing to do with his wife's pregnancy and orders a quick abortion. Failure to comply with this order, Kwei, the self-made gynaecologist, pounces several blows on her belly and then runs to *akpeteshi* station to urge his friends to call him *Dr.* (Darko, 124). This rather brutal incident proves so much that Kwei is not mere than a wolf in sheep clothing and can be more at his place in bush. Kwei stands for some male characters' irresponsibility to take part in the welfare of the family and by extension in the community's well-being. The irresponsible attitude is also seen in Efi's father. This male character is always drunk and absent-minded when his word is required for the welfare of his family. Efi's father is described as being useless and "fast asleep on a wicker mat inside the hut" (Darko, 40). Efi's grandmother treats him as being stupid and not worth defending: "You have the guts to take a stand for your husband against me? That stupid drunkard? It is his bad luck that has caused all this" (Darko, 72). Efi's father's uselessness appears so obviously that even "the gods would rather listen to a woman than a drunkard (Darko, 73) during a libation ceremony. The narrator alludes that libation is not a woman's affair, yet when men are physically unfit for the job, it is better women do. This male character and Kwei share the same meeting place for their alcohol dependence despite the fact both events do not occur in the same novel. *Kill-Me-Quick* station (the place where the local whisky is sold and drank) justifies both male characters' economic status. They are broke and drunk. By contrast, Adade, a university graduated releases his tension with his friends around bottles of beers. He comes back late with no excuse to his wife. This definition of manliness is associated with the development of stereotypes which people of the same social group share in common. For example, men must rise their voice against their wives to reprimand them whenever their orders are not rightly implemented. They are not expected to take part in the execution of the house chores not to show their compliance to their wives' desires.

All these features together prove that Adade, like other male characters, simply falls into his culture sneer which makes him cataleptic of his wife's call for help. This cultural norm insidiously associates male desire to help their wives to femininity and weakness. In Leonora Miano's *L'Intérieur de la nuit* (2005) Eke, the male character, is presented as being someone who loses his phallus because of his being too helpful to his wife. The narrator argues that: « au cours des trois derniers mois de sa grossesse (sa femme) avait dû garder le lit, transformant son mari en femme »⁶. Eke becomes a woman at home because of his strange behaviour in a patriarchal society. The female narrator furthers her commentary this way: « L'autre jour, Eké ne s'est pas contenté de l'accompagner à la source. Il est allé à sa place ! Comme une femme ! » (Miano, 17). People perceive him as being a woman because it is usually a woman who is relegated and marginal.

In *The Housemaid* (1998), male weakness befalls the frail Tika's father and Nsorhwe the short, plump, plain-face, spotted belly, square head. On the one hand, all these adjectives deployed to qualify the bank manager reveal the physical trait of the character. Nsorhwe is so repugnant that even the devil can flee at his sight. He is so ugly that no woman can ever be interested in him. However, Nsorhwe has been twice with Tika due to his money and helps her get load for her business. He is considered as being "the perfect bait" (Darko, 77) because of his wholeheartedness to accept all compromising point in order to avoid trouble. As a matter of fact, this all-forgiving male character takes on two children he is not biologically responsible for (Darko, 84). Surely, Nsorhwe's case symbolizes a man in a desperate need for love and recognition from his community and is trapped in the affirmation of his manhood. He now wants society to know that he also can achieve what biology denies him to have though biological unfitness has nothing to do with physical ugliness.

The other point is that to be father is not just a matter of intention, but a matter of decision and fitness between a man and a woman. This particular male character makes sure that he can afford his intention as he has

⁶Miano, L. (2005). *L'Intérieur de la nuit*. Paris: Plon, p. 19. Translated into English as "Dark Heart Of The Night". Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. The author seems not to agree with the title and foreword in the English version of *L'Intérieur de la nuit*. She thinks it sounds like Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* and the story narrated is far beyond what she portrays in the French one. She recommends the Nebraska University to remove it. This is why our references are mainly taken from the French version. My translation: "During the last three months, his wife kept herself in bed, transforming her husband into a woman." "Eke does not only follow her to fetch water, but also goes there himself. Like a woman!"

the means and determination not only by accepting the offer from the young woman and also by enrolling the children in a very prestigious school. By contrast, Owuraku does not want to lose his self-esteem in front of easy made money by a woman, Tika. This male character makes an interesting point about the male pride as being deep rooted in a social ideology which considers men as being exceptionally exonerated of mistakes. As a result, Owuraku cannot cope with his girlfriend's treacherous tendency.

On the other hand, the novelist portrays Tika's father as being marginal and defeated. His waning libido (Darko, 18) hastens his physical loss. This weakness allows his second and young wife to overtake like Mary in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950). Mary like Tika's mother, Sekyiwa enjoys order, authority and impersonality. The emphasis made by the narrator about Tika's father's sexual weakness stands for patriarchal authority death in the house since a risen phallus (penis) symbolizes of threat to women. As the dead penis cannot fulfil Sekyiwa's libidinal longings, she starts lurking for young, good-looking male gold diggers" (Darko, 18). Sekyiwa, tough illiterate, succeeds in breaking the myth which has long time relegated women to second rank. The female character mystifies her husband by obliging him to see to her wish to have a sophisticated shop filled with textile prints. She does not wait to mourn the old and weak male character. Standing against the status quo signifies standing against tradition, culture and even religion. This is why Amma Darko gives a voice to women like her to hold the ground socially, economically and even politically. Feminist works such as those of Amma Darko increase women's empowerment, which is the ability for women to exert control over their own destinies in deconstructing masculinity. According to *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, "deconstruction is best described as a theory of reading which aims to undermine the logic of opposition within texts" (London: 1996, Blackwell, 4). Actually, deconstruction aims to show how texts unravel themselves, particularly displaying how the privileged item in a binary pair can be reversed and subverted. The technique is mostly used by feminists and Marxists in their writings.

In this regards, the depiction of Nii Kpakpo and Onko lies in the position Amma Darko takes and the revealing role her female narrator plays in the narrative. Her firm grasp of the perspective on male deconstruction is deployed to recreate the agonising memory, the magnitude of brutality and horror undergone by her female characters. The novelist presents consequently both sexual predators as being as toxic as the chemical product poison to society. Their negative vibration is as harmful and deadly to individuals around them as to themselves. Just like Kwei, Nii Kpakpo is worth all our criticism. He is depicted as being an unemployed and a scammer who lies to the poor woman Maa Tsuru that he works in a big factory and in that way he needs just for a few time somewhere to rest his head until the hard period passes. He settles down in the house and becomes her usual sex provider until her children disturbed leave him the floor. This propels him as being head of the family and therefore gives him full right to make decision.

Apart from being violent and brutal, Amma Darko's male characters use lies as foundation of their relationship with women. They are also infant sexual predators. The narrator recounts that Kpakpo "tiptoed over to Baby T and tapped her on the shoulder, Baby T sprang up [...]. Kpakpo stripped naked in frenzy, filled with an urgency so wrong by Baby T's nakedness. [...]" (Darko, 133-34). Further, Kpakpo uses this position to live as a parasite in the barrack and deploys his strategy by enslaving the young and innocent body of Baby T. The male character's portrayal demonstrates how generally men perceive women as available sex object and easily exploitable. Kpakpo and the other male characters think that women are just worth ending in a kitchen and in bed since they are not as intelligent as men to take control of their lives and understand all around them.

In Amma Darko's narratives, patriarchy is worth criticism since it hinders women from enjoying life the way they desire and automatically privileges men over women so that women have little or no claims to material, sexual and intellectual resources in society. That is, in a patriarchal society women have to struggle to be educated, to have property or to make choices regarding marriage and other aspects of life. For men, these resources are a matter of right and can make choices that affect their lives.

Among others, Onko, a name that sounds like 'uncle' behaves the same way as the rapist and liar Nii Kpakpo in *Faceless*. This means that he is a close member or relative of the family. That fact that Onko is a member of the family implies the girls' reliance on him. He uses this to lay bare of his Machiavellian strategy against Baby T like Kpakpo does to Maa Tsuru. Onko robs Baby T of her dignity the same way Akobi does for Mara and Osey for Kaye. The duo Poison and Onko, two venomous male characters function as mere monsters in society. They simply act like big fishes in ocean which eat off the small ones to prove their power. Women and children's lives revolve around violence and rage of men who do not hesitate to deploy their brawn and claws to claim their space. These male characters' presence sparks off the fire of danger which keeps women under fear and anxiety. In patriarchal societies, phallus appears as a symbol of power and domination and in that sort of societies, women can only be considered as subaltern. Attribute oneself a role which gives that person the

right to control and dictate the attitude of another person is what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie connotes as “The Danger of a Single Story”. It expresses the notion of power over another. She explains this way:

so that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become [...]. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person [...]. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar [...] Stories have been used it disposes and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize⁷.

Throughout her different narratives, Amma Darko portrays her male characters as being narcissistic and dictating a single way of story. Narcissism translates the concept commonly known as “self-love”. Self-love can be explained as ‘egoism’ which is characteristic to men in patriarchal settings. As we know, narcissism involves love; still it is a love for oneself which is also different from that toward another person. The latter is more erotic. This erotic love characterizes Akobi, Osey and Kwei. This love represents the other partner just as a source of pleasure, but not as important as oneself. For example, after Akobi satisfies his libidinal desires with Mara, he orders her to quit the mattress and sleep on concrete floor. Also, he does not hesitate to give her to other men for his selfish economic outcome. Erotic love is completely denuded of respect and real love. This depiction is also different from that of Poison and Macho, both street lords. Both live in a world where they have to prove to others their toxicity and dangerousness to be more respected. Love here can be an expression of weakness. This is why both boys do not go for this feeling. Their love of pleasure is more expression of power over their street subjects mainly females. These boys’ love has much to do with masochistic pleasure explained by Sigmund Freud in his two renowned essays: “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914) and “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) which elaborate on love in many ways not explicitly defined.

More, in the range of narcissistic love, Adade embodies this distinction. This male character loves more his image outside than inside with his children and his wife, Kabria. He does not care his wife drive a car that breaks down every day when she takes their children to school. He never takes them to school to help his wife. His self-imbued person loves to release tension with his friend and come back home very late with no excuse to his wife, the circumstantial baby-sitter. Adade thinks like the other males that his wife is not mature enough to understand his psychological status and that they do not belong to the same social category. Though Adade never challenges physically his wife, he is not too different from Kwei and Kpakpo who fail their social responsibility each as father, husband and lover.

Beside the description of male characters in the three novels, Amma Darko gives way to her own point of view about patriarchy and its destructive machine. The novelist portrays her male characters as being all dangerous, violent and monsters. This is why Mawuli Adjei (2009) insightfully postulates that:

Darko employs a highly subjective female viewpoint which is expressed through verbal violence or language which is deflationary and condemnatory of men, including insults and curses; the caricaturing of male characters; the muting and banishment of male characters; creating assertive female protagonists who defy male dominance in words and deeds; creating female characters who are repositories of knowledge and wisdom and who act as commentators and counsellors expressing the female viewpoint; female counter-forces based on group solidarity; and through authorial intrusion in terms of sympathy and empathy.⁸

This passage points out Amma Darko’s deconstructive approach of her male characters in the sense that she presents against this male patriarchal oppression a counter-version of female characters mores assertive. The novelist portrays some of her female characters as being powerful and authoritative as she knows that women in society are “disproportionately represented in inappropriate urban spaces and are also underrepresented in urban

⁷Adichie, Chimamanda N. (2009). “The Danger of a Single Story”. TED TALK, www.ted.com

⁸Adjei, M. (2009). “Male-bashing and narrative subjectivity in AmmaDarko’s first three novels”, in *SKATE Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. no. 1.p. 50.

development decision-making processes”⁹. Amma Darko’s concern is to review patriarchal positions in fiction to induce change in behaviour in real life. It corresponds to a specific writing because “to write well is more than a matter of ‘style’; it also means having at one’s disposal an ideological perspective which can penetrate to the realities of men’s experience in a certain situation”¹⁰. Hence, the recurring question is whether literature can depict reality with no partisanship. Yet what is important is that part of women’s liberation from oppression is due to the permanent discussion at books and fiction length. This put aside, some strongly think that gender inequality is so entrenched in most African settings that trying to separate will be of no use, but women still try.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* have successfully evoked the phallic symbol as an instrument of oppression against women. Society and particularly that of African is undoubtedly constructed around the power of the phallus, a symbol of male dominance. The relevance of the discourse to the modern day reality cannot be gainsaid given to the fact that novelists start re-appropriating social realities in their writings. In *Culture, Society, and Politics in Modern African Literature: Texts and Contexts* (2002) Tanure Ojaide et al submit that “Starting from the premise that literature is a cultural production of a people, we have come to the understanding that a meaningful discussion on African literature needs knowledge of what factors influencing modern African writers have given rise to their artistic productions”¹¹. Stated this way, we can see that Amma Darko demonstrates the high brutality used by male characters raised with patriarchal values.

The novelist makes the breach in the shell of patriarchy with her radical feminist perspective by portraying her female characters struggling to gain their space and making their way throughout their daily ordeals. In his “Introduction” to *Broadening the Horizon: Critical Introductions to Amma Darko*, Ghanaian poet and critic Vincent O. Odamtten observes that Darko’s writing has “elicited sophisticated readings that represent a variety of ideological perspectives and to some extent, divergent positions in feminist, deconstructive and post-colonial criticisms”¹². Culture as being the main cause of these ordeals has therefore to be revisited as it silences women and hinders the full participation in society.

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⁹Oye’wumi, O. (2011). *Gender Epistemologies in Africa: Gendering Traditions, Spaces, Social Institution, and Identities*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 5.

¹⁰Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, p. 8.

¹¹Ojaide, T & Obi, J. *Culture, Society and Politics in Modern African Literature: Texts and Contexts*. 2002. p. viii

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