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Gender Profiling and the Dialectics of African Female Writing: A Deconstructionist Analysis of Amma Darko's *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*

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Abstract

African female writing, which is replete with gender issues, has continued to shape and arouse gender discourses and debates, especially on gender representation. This debate, no doubt, is at the core of African female writing. African female authors have, therefore, always expressed their opinions on the way female characters are projected as mere appendages, stereotypes and objects of/for sexual exploitation, especially by African male authors. This presupposes that African female writing has always anchored on gender representation to redeem the perceived ill projection of African female characters. This study, in attempting to examine the issues on gender profiling, uses the deconstructionist theory to argue that stereotyping is a core condiment of literature, as every literary piece is a manifestation of stereotypes. Accordingly, the study reveals the dialectical position of African female writing by arguing that African female authors, in attempts to challenge their male counterparts for poorly representing their female characters, also end up in stereotyping, not only male characters, but also female characters; hence the dialectics of African female writing. Using Amma Darko's *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*, therefore, the study argues that gender representation or stereotyping is, in fact, a manifestation of artistry that both African male and female authors leverage on. The study holds that since literature thrives in controversies, literary writings are couched in ambivalence in projecting social issues within any social milieu.

Keywords: Gender profiling, stereotyping, deconstructionist theory, dialectics, ambivalence

Introduction

One of the concerns of African female writers is against the frequent projection and depiction of female characters in most African male writings. This has further advanced earlier propositions and arguments on gender issues among African writers. In other words, the concept of gender and gender profiling or identity in African literary writing has not only become a subject of concern; it has, indeed, provided the grounds for African literature to thrive. This is due to its ability to offer a new perspective in the interrogation and dissection of characters within the purview of gender analysis. For instance, Oluwayomi (2012:151) argues that the abnormalities in patriarchy in the African society seem to have privileged the male gender over the female, thus, delineating "the society along gender lines, thereby assigning certain roles and responsibilities to a particular gender". Again, on this premise, Muhammed (2012:115) claims that "whereas, women are supposed to be pivoted to the literal survival of community and societal norms, the societal imposition on women makes their self-

will to become insignificant". For Alkali (2012:18), however, "Gender politics is an on-going phenomenon, the salt in our sauce, the delicious aroma of a hot spice wafting in the air".

Arguably, one of the views of African female writers hinges on the claim about the ill treatment and projection of female characters in African male writing; hence, the claim that "African female writers have always been preoccupied with gender issues" (Afolayan, 2012:147). This somewhat corroborates Alkali's (2012:12) claim that "Feminisim is history in the making, and feminist literature, like other literatures before it, is a protest literature"; hence, her view that "African women writers are therefore enraged by the poor imaging, or complete neglect of the true African woman" (2012:14).

In view of the foregoing, one may further contend that African feminist writing could be seen as a reaction against the (mis)representation of female characters by African male writers. This, one could argue, has significantly enriched the corpus of African literature, as it has not only sparked debates, but has continued to reveal that even African female writers implicitly profile, not only their male characters, but also their female characters. This, therefore, presupposes that character or gender profiling or stereotyping is, indeed, an indication of a writer's creative ingenuity. This implies that literary writings could be said to be reflections of tissues of gender stereotyping and profiling of which *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* are a part of. The study, which seeks to contend that gender profiling or stereotyping is, in fact, an artistic expression, challenges African female writers who hold the view that female characters are often projected unfairly by African male writers. Accordingly, the study argues that, since gender profiling could be seen as an expression of a writer's artistry, even African female writers profile not only male characters, but also female characters in the same manner they accuse African male writers of; hence, the dialectics of African female writing and writers. The study adopts the deconstructionist theoretical perspective to highlights its argument and advance its proposition.

Theoretical Framework

Deconstructionist theory, pioneered by Jacques Derrida, is a critical approach that challenges the stability of meaning, language, and hierarchical structures. This framework questions traditional binaries such as presence/absence, speech/writing, and truth/fiction, demonstrating that meaning is always deferred and never fully present (Derrida, 1967). Deconstruction has significantly influenced various fields, including literary criticism, philosophy, and gender studies, particularly feminism. Feminist theorists have engaged with deconstruction to challenge patriarchal structures embedded in language, literature, and society (Spivak, 1993).

By deconstructing the binaries that uphold gender hierarchies—such as male/female, rational/emotional, and culture/nature—feminist theorists utilise Derridean principles to expose and destabilize the power structures that privilege masculinity over femininity (Cixous, 1976). This theoretical framework explores how deconstruction intersects with feminism, highlighting its impact on gender discourse, identity, and literary criticism.

Judith Butler (1990) applies Derrida's *différance* to gender, arguing that gender identity is not innate but rather a performative construct that is constantly reiterated. Butler deconstructs

the binary opposition between "man" and "woman," showing that these categories are not essential but socially imposed. In *Gender Trouble*, she argues: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (Butler, 1990, p. 33).

This aligns with Derrida's concept that meaning is never fixed but always deferred, meaning that gender is not a stable essence but a series of performances that are constantly subject to change (Derrida, 1976). By applying deconstruction, feminists critically examine how patriarchal power structures are reinforced through language, literature, and societal norms. This approach reveals the instability of gender categories, critiques essentialist notions of womanhood, and highlights the exclusion of marginalized voices (Spivak, 1988).

Considered as a suitable theory to interrogate the dialectics of gender profiling, the choice of deconstructionist theory is in order to challenge traditional binary oppositions such as male/female, reason/emotion, speech/writing, which have historically reinforced gender hierarchies in African literature (Derrida, 1976). Similarly, it evokes the questioning of "woman" as a fixed identity, thereby revealing how African female writers grapple with the existentialist representation of African women as either submissive victims or strong matriarchs. Furthermore, in examining gender profiling in literature, deconstruction plays a significant role in showcasing how both male and female authors depict women in stereotypical roles; hence, deconstructionist theory does not only expose how these narratives are dependent on unstable and contradictory discourses, thereby reinforcing the dialectics that characterise the views of most African female writers, with respect to female-character representations.

Gender Profiling and the Dialectics of African Female Writing

In *Faceless*, one may observe that the profiling of characters, both male and female, serves as a means to associate them with particular traits, either to win the sympathy of the reader or arouse his criticism. It seems, however, that whichever position one takes, *Faceless* appears to be more concerned with the negative depiction of its male characters. So, in doing this, it probably presents its female characters not only as novices, but as being subdued by the instruments and elements of patriarchy. Interestingly, one could argue that *Faceless* gives an evocative description of male characters, as not only emotionally bankrupt, but also morally empty. For instance, the male character, Poison, typifies this, as can be gleaned from the conversation between Fofo and Odarley, where Odarley affirms that "Poison doesn't go raping girls like us…when he wants it, he beckons, and the hi-life girls flood to him in their numbers…" (*Faceless*, 8-9). Although Poison is described as a rapist, one could contend that through a subtle contrast, the female characters have also been projected as somewhat loose. This means that in a bid to describe Poison who represents other male characters as morally depraved, there is an implicit and subtle description of the female characters as also morally questionable; hence, the statement that whenever Poison "wants it, he beckons, and the hi-life girls flood to him in their numbers" (*Faceless*, 8-9). It is also worthy to note that the toxic name ascribed to the male character, Poison is not only sarcastic, but demeaning, as it could be interpreted to be a subtle description of all male characters who are projected as dangerous and toxic. The name Poison, therefore, becomes a metaphor to describe the attitude of all the other male characters.

Indeed, the name, Poison, as it is projected, does not only send deafening fear into the minds of the young girls; it is pathetic to see how, even older women tremble at the mention of it. This, no doubt, indicates how very helpless women have been projected in the hands of men, who they see as very uncaring and wicked. Thus, the name Poison is nightmarish to the young and old women. For instance, Maami Broni uses the name to threaten her fellow woman, Maa Tsuru, against her insistence on the whereabouts of her daughter, Baby T. Maami Broni's response, rather than allay the fears of Maa Tsuru, heightens it further, as she realises that her daughter has been kept in the custody and under the watch of the 'dreaded' Poison. Maa Tsuru's fear becomes visibly palpable as Maami Broni mentions this about Poison: "he said to tell you he is keeping an eye on your younger daughter too" ... if you give him any problem again about Baby T, Fofo would not be left alone…" (*Faceless*, 142). The image of Poison painted here is that he is mean and without compassion. This is the same image attributed to other male characters.

For instance, just like Poison, Onko is another male character who is projected as a rapist, who does not exhibit any sense of remorse. He does not feel any way disturbed; having lured and raped the twelve year old Baby T; an action which confirms how, "the initial trace of shame and remorse had completely disappeared from *his* face" [emphasis, added]. Even when Maa Tsuru confronts him for violating her daughter, he unapologetically says, "I love her". For, while he blames this shameful act on the devil, instead of taking responsibility, he further denigrates not only Baby T, but also Maa Tsuru, by offering her money, so she can "just drop the matter" and "forget it ever happened" (*Faceless*, 138-140). Against the backdrop of the events, it can be inferred that women are treated as items that can be bought and silenced with money. This presupposes that, as inferred, men use their economic power as a means to perpetually subjugate and silence women, who are depicted as being less economically advantaged and/or buoyant.

Accordingly, to further show how very 'badly' women are treated and perceived, even young boys are imbued with the mindset to believe that female children are always to be viewed as second class citizens, while the male child is seen as superior. This is brought to the fore in the discussion between little Ottu and his mum, Kabria, when he launches "into a self-promotion campaign" of the status of the male child in contradistinction to the female child. He refers to the special place a friend of his occupies in his house; being the only male child of a family with six children. Ottu further affirms that, "by coming as a boy", his friend "earned his mother plenty of respect and ended her pains". This sounds surprising to Kabria, who holds a counter view that "every child ought to be precious to the parents, be they even ten or twenty" (*Faceless*, 13). It is obvious here that the society is cast as one that does not value the female child; it is a society that is projected as unapologetically patriarchal and chauvinistic; placing the male child above the female child. Similarly, in order to further buttress this, a woman who does not give birth to a male child is meant to pass through societal-afflicted pains, not just from the hands of the men, but also from her fellow women.

This could be gleaned from Ottu's self-projection of the male child, when he tells his mother that, "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" (*Faceless*, 13). The feeling of

male superiority is, therefore, what is instilled into the child from the cradle. Interestingly, this is sometimes championed by some female characters, as demonstrated in the character of Ottu's friend's grandmother, who also holds the view that a male child is superior to a female child. As observed, therefore, Kabria begins to enjoy some moments of relief (after giving birth to Ottu, who comes as a male child, after two other female children), while experiencing moments of self-acclamation and intimidation in the hands of Ottu, who, from a very highly chauvinistic disposition, sees himself as her saviour. This is enunciated thus:

> Her last child, Ottu, was their only son. And what an attitude Ottu carried upon his little shoulders for being an only boy… Ottu chose to come as a male, only to realise upon his descent into Kabria's life that, indeed, he had done her big favour with his decision to the good Lord, because she had two daughters already and was desperate for a son …(*Faceless*, 12).

For, while the female characters are given that sense of inferiority, the male characters are depicted as very powerful. In other words, what determines the 'superiority' of the male child is not his age, but his gender. It is, therefore, in this light that Ottu sees himself as superior than his mother, as he brags about his role in her life; constantly reminding her of ending her pains and earning respect for her. He proudly points out that, "Mum, do you know that I cut short your problems by coming as a boy and earned you respect?" (*Faceless*, 13). Shocked by this display of chauvinism, Kabria subtly challenges the air of superiority that male characters arrogate to themselves. She becomes a channel and conduit for preaching equality and balance in gender roles. This, she does, by letting her son, who is a symbol of the new generation know that any structure that places one gender above the other does not mean well for the society. One could infer that there is a subtle protest against the patriarchal structure; hence, her advice to Ottu to see his two sisters as also special. Kabria could, therefore, be considered as a symbol of reconciliation and transformation. She could be said to be an advocate of gender equality. She does not only transform, she also corrects the faulty foundations of the old order (patriarchal tradition) by allowing Ottu (the new generation) to know that he is special, not "because he was a boy"; for, he "would have been equally special had he come also as a girl" (*Faceless*, 14).

In another fashion, it could be observed that *Faceless* presents the woman, not only as disadvantaged due to her gender, but also as one whose travails and ordeals in the hands of men has made her see herself as inferior. She has lost confidence in herself as a woman, so that she resorts to bleaching her skin in order to probably gain favour from men. An illustration of this is the showcasing of the owner of the salon who "had bleached her skin from head to toe", which has made "our uncanny Creator to unleash His fury in grand style upon her" (*Faceless*, 59). The tone in the description of this woman who seems to have altered her skin colour in order to attract men does not only reveal how inferior she sees herself, but could be said to be biting, as well as highly couched in sarcasm. There is, therefore, a vivid criticism of women who, in the bid to fit into the fashion in the society, resort to altering their natural features. This is captured thus:

> …Having endowed the African *woman* with ample melanin to withstand 'until calleth' the harsh rays of the African sun, the Creator least expected this woman, who had dared to interfere with His plans, to have bleached herself, so she ended up fair from face to ankle, dark at the feet, which refused to

> succumb to the dictates of her bleaching soaps and creams…she was a multi-coloured parody of nature's handiwork … Her perfume clashed with the odour of skin whose entire outer protective layers had been gradually and persistently peeled away… [Emphasis, added] (*Faceless*, 59-60).

In another instance, in order to arouse the sympathy of the reader, female characters are cast as being molested, abused and neglected by the male characters. Furthermore, it appears that most male characters are cast as absentee fathers, who are never present to cater for their families. They leave the running of the affairs of the family to the women, who are mostly depicted as economically impoverished and disadvantaged. The male characters are obviously projected as irresponsible and only good at putting the women in the family way, without taking responsibility for fathering the children. To pinpoint this, the hairdresser, who is also the owner of the salon, confirms that, "not one *cedi* do I get from the man who fathered my little girl. The only thing that man ever gave her was his last name. It cost him not a *pasewa*" (*Faceless*, 61). As observed, men are not only depicted as irresponsible and absentee heads of the family, they ensure that, their names are imprinted on the children they have abandoned. Kabria also confirms the prevalence of irresponsible men in the society, as she expresses her surprise at the hairdresser's exposition of the father of her two children, thus: "you too were cursed with a foolish and irresponsible man?" (*Faceless*, 62). Kabria's statement could be considered as a clear indication of the society's perception of men and a revelation of how women are neglected.

Similarly, as deduced, one could contest that men are considered a curse, not only to the women, but also to the society in general. Accordingly, despite this neglect and abandonment, the woman is expected to 'stay' within the boundaries of her marriage, as expected by her absentee husband and the society. This is brought to the fore by the woman who affirms that, "…you know how it is with our tradition…because he hasn't come to formally divorce me, I am forced to continue to wear his ring and stay married to him. Yet he is gone…" (*Faceless*, 62). So, as observed, tradition is projected as a tool used to keep the woman perpetually in bondage, while the man enjoys unlimited freedom. For instance, the ring on the woman's finger could be interpreted as a symbol of her subjugation and bondage, because; it restricts her from 'moving on' with her life; hence, her statement that, "I am forced to continue to wear the ring and stay married to him" (*Faceless*, 62).

To further enunciate the display of the irresponsibility men, as opposed to the total submissiveness of women, the situation painted by the woman, whose story, one could say aligns with that of Fofo during one of Syl Po's morning shows, could be contemplated. Thus, while presenting her own experience, she paints a very sordid picture that would attract questions concerning the morality of men in the society:

> Take it that I am the oldest of five children. Our father is jobless, yet whatever money comes his way, he wastes it on booze. He beats us up indiscriminately, our mother included. We are all completely intimidated by him. Like my two siblings after me, who are also of school going age, I don't go to school. There is no money. We three older ones go out onto the streets everyday to make money for our upkeep…what money we make on the street and give to our mother to run the house, our father bullies out of her to waste on booze. Yet, in spite of all this, mother is carrying yet another

> child. And I am certain it is not the last child she will be carrying… (*Faceless*, 182)

The picture painted by the woman, no doubt, is contrastive, as it further reflects how men, as opposed to women, are viewed. For instance, while men are seen as highly irresponsible; abandoning their fatherly duties to their wives and children, the women are projected as obediently submissive; not being wired to challenge the excesses of the men, but to keep procreating for them, when they probably do not understand what fatherhood entails. This indicates that a woman would rather accept to bear children for an unworthy man, than to be seen to be without a man in her life. This again reveals how the society has defined and conditioned the life of the woman; hence, the probability for the silencing of her voice. For instance, Maa Tsuru is projected as weak, subjugated and defeated. Men take her for granted and repeatedly exploit her weakness for their selfish gains. On the other hand, Fofo's character is in contradistinction with that of Baby T. For, while Fofo could be said to have typified the radical feminist spirit, as she is able to stand and fight for her rights, Baby T, like her mother, gets easily lured, deceived and manipulated. This is revealed in her relationship with Kpakpo, Poison and Onko.

Furthermore, it does appear that *Faceless* probes the concept of marriage, while possibly advancing its merits, as it gives a vivid contrast between two marriages: one, between Adade and Kabria; and the second, that of Maa Tsuru. For, while the marriage between Adade and Kabria is projected as somewhat ideal and successful, it appears there is a subtle criticism against the marriage of Maa Tsuru that is characterised by continuous twists and turns. Maa Tsuru is noted to have been involved with several men, who do not value her dignity as a woman. As presented, her association with Kwei produces Baby T, who never has a father's name attached to her name. Similarly, Kpakpo deceives Maa Tsuru into believing that he will get married to her, but this does not come to fruition. Within this context, it becomes obvious to note how Maa Tsuru is projected as uneducated and lacking in exposure; hence, her ordeal in the hands of several men. Despite being pregnant for Kwei, she still suffers domestic violence in his hands. The only crime Maa Tsuru possibly commits is being pregnant for Kwei, who boastfully beats her up to express his anger and lack of readiness to cater for their child. Also, while Kwei is depicted as a very violent man, Maa Tsuru is described as totally subservient and docile, as she does not see the need to even resist his battering, considering her physical condition. This is graphically illustrated, thus:

> Maa Tsuru had just opened her lips to ask what was amiss when she felt Kwei upon her. He pounced on her like a cat on an unsuspecting mouse and began a viscious [sic] pounding spree. He pounded Maa Tsuru with his fists, landing blows anywhere and everywhere and on every part of her pregnant body. The daylight went out of Maa Tsuru. She began to bleed. Kwei grinned. He pulled her up by one arm, held her by the back of her neck and pushed her out of the house. Then he returned to *Agboo Ayee* and told all there that, with immediate effect, they had better start calling him Dr. Kwei, because he had singlehandedly and very effectively terminated an unwanted pregnancy (*Faceless*, 124).

It is obvious from the graphic description above, that men are depicted as not only violent, but also lacking in humaneness. Kwei, who is a representation of this, sees nothing wrong in his action; rather, he boasts and prides himself as a 'Doctor', who has "singlehandedly and effectively terminated an unwanted pregnancy". Similarly, it is not only Maa Tsuru who is projected as subservient and docile in this matter; her aunt, is also noted to have "refused to go anywhere near Kwei's home, let alone go and confront him about what he had done". Worse, her uncle who often boasts of going to confront Kwei, gets drunk to stupor and remains face-flat in his vomit all through the day (*Faceless*, 124).

It is worthy to note that, whereas gender profiling in *Faceless* seems to be graphically captured, one may observe that the intensity with which this is projected in *Beyond the Horizon* is provokingly disturbing. Although both the male and female characters are projected in bad light, it seems the intensity with which the male characters are projected is strikingly devastating; hence, one may argue that in *Beyond the Horizon*, male characters are cast in such a disdainful manner, to the effect that they are seen as responsible for all the woes, pains and anguishes that the female characters encounters, as occasioned by their insatiable quest for materialism. It, therefore, appears that the text seeks to deconstruct and demystify the existing patriarchal mores by its projection of men as irresponsible, worthless and wicked husbands and fathers, so as to incite or elicit a new social order. For instance, the image painted of Akobi does not seem to be a desirable one; it seems that he does not have any good side, as he is depicted as a wicked husband, an irresponsible and selfish father, who subjects his wife to untold hardship, even in her pregnancy. As an irresponsible father, he relinquishes the responsibility for the upkeep of his child to his wife, making her know that he cannot cater for them (*Beyond the Horizon*, 17).

Similarly, the profiling of Akobi as enunciated is one who, despite his educational background, still acts in a manner that places him as very unintelligent. For, even though he is "the first child of Naka to earn a Form Four General Certificate", the only befitting job he can do is that of a messenger clerk; an indication that reflects his unintelligent status. He is depicted as not intelligent enough to secure a very good and decent paying job; hence, his frequent visits home to borrow money from his father (*Beyond the Horizon*, 6). Instead of becoming a pride to his family, despite working in the city, he, therefore, becomes an economic burden. In fact, Akobi is not projected as a solution; instead, he is cast as a problem. For instance, he typifies Mara's nightmare and dream-killer, who does not seem to see himself as her husband who is saddled with the responsibility to fend for his wife and family. He is, instead, painted as very brutish, manipulative, exploitative and above all, Mara's pimp. In contradistinction, Mara, although, probably admired by other women in Naka, is projected as living in hell. Her marriage is so bitter that it confirms the meaning of her name, which is a biblical allusion that exemplifies a bitter experience. Through her bitter experiences, the character of Akobi is revealed, as shown by Mara, thus:

> When I didn't bring him the bowl of water and soap in time for washing his hands before and after eating, I received a nasty kick in the knee. When I forgot the chewing stick for his teeth, which he always demanded be placed neatly beside his bowl of served food, I got a slap in the face. And when the napkin is not at hand when he howled for it, I received a knuckle knock on my forehead (*Beyond the Horizon*, 19).

Predicated against the foregoing is the image of a man-made pain, afflicted on a fellow human being. In this regard, Akobi becomes the one who afflicts terror and pain on his wife. For, while assuming the status of a 'Lord and Master', he makes his wife appear as his slave; an indication that African men are not only brutally authoritative, but also ruthlessly oppressive. Thus, as exemplified by Akobi's action, these men reduce their wives to the status of their slaves. Obviously, it seems Mara has become used to the sequence of Akobi's terror that she knows the exact nature of oppression or violence that would be visited on her by her husband, should she default in carrying out certain actions. In the light of this, it could be understood that, indeed, Akobi does not show any love to his wife, but sees her as his property and slave. In fact, the picture projected is that of African men as wife-beaters. For instance, it is not only Akobi that carries out this act, another African man and Akobi's friend, Osey, is cast as one who also beats his wife. This is revealed in Mara's narration, thus:

> Osey came around 8 p.m. and straightaway got into a fight with his wife, demanding to know from her where she was between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m … They got into a fight, him beating her with anything that came to hand: coat hangers, books, cushions, bags … It was a funny feeling I had watching them. I mean, Akobi beat me a lot at home, yes, but somehow I identified beatings like this with home. That African men also beat their wives in Europe somehow didn't fit into my glorious picture of Europe (*Beyond the Horizon*, 73).

Osey shares a similar trait with Akobi, who is known for wife-beating. By this, one could deduce that the African man is cast, not only as a wife-beater at home, but also abroad. It seems that for the African woman, as deduced from Mara's bewildering contemplations and the beatings by her husband, it is a usual practice that has been implanted into the psyche of the African woman. So, it becomes strange experiencing the same condition in Europe. It is within this premise that one may argue that *Beyond the Horizon* uses this avenue to advance the proposition that the African man is too rigid and not open to change. This would appear to be supported by Mara's contemplations that "I mean, Akobi beat me a lot at home, yes, but somehow I identified beatings like this with home. That African men also beat their wives in Europe somehow didn't fit into my glorious picture of Europe (*Beyond the Horizon*, 73).

As premised against the background of the foregoing, while the African man is cast in the light of a 'wife-beater', the African woman is projected as wholly subservient and lacking in resistance. For instance, while Osey brags about his actions and feels no sense of remorse in beating his wife, he still expects her, after the beating, to satisfy his sexual urge. He tells Akobi that: "I beat her up just before you came. I beat the sense out of her. Ask your wife… (*Beyond the Horizon*, 75). It seems that being subservient, the woman is made to not only accept the beatings from her husband, but also to satisfy him sexually. Mara's explanation after the beating confirms this: "…Osey pushed his wife into the bathroom, taking with him the cassette which they turned very loud" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 74). It is worthy to note that even Akobi feels sex is a pacifier for his wicked action against Mara, his wife. In other words, like Osey, he resorts to sleeping with Mara whenever he finishes beating her. For instance, after beating her for getting pregnant for him, Akobi not only denies her the comfort she deserves as a pregnant woman who should enjoy sleeping on the mattress, he orders her to sleep on the floor; and after that, sleeps with her. This resonates in her words,

as captured thus, "wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and lay out my mat because he wanted to sleep alone" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 22).

Apart from being a wife-beater, Akobi is depicted as a human trafficker, a sex-trade merchant, and an opportunist, who does not see anything wrong in introducing his wife into the sex trade, as long as he makes his money out of it; and at her expense. He deceives Mara into believing that he is going to live in Europe "for just a year or two" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 34). This, he does in order for him to have the opportunity to sell her property, so as to raise money for his travel. He says to her: "That is why I sold your things…I want to go there and work, to work hard". Akobi, being projected as a mischief, does not see anything wrong in telling lies. He does not only intentionally lie to his wife; he shuns the consequences of his actions by lying in the name of the gods of Naka, just to reinforce his gimmicks, so he could win the already pliable heart of Mara. He says to her: "…I tell you upon the gods of Naka that, …in a year, in just one year, you will see for yourself" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 34). The image of the African man as an opportunist is further advanced as Mara reveals how a clerk demands to sleep with her, before he pushes for the release of her passport (*Beyond the Horizon*, 52). The African man is projected as one who does not do anything for free, as he cashes in on the weaknesses and desperations of the African woman to exploit her. Similarly, like Akobi, who pimps his wife for other men, in order to make money, other African men are said to be in this same trade. Mara confirms that these men pay "to smuggle their wives and girlfriends, who had invalid visas, into Europe", only to be involved in a "very risky, but lucrative business". It should be realised that the business being referred to, is prostitution. It is a business which Mara is introduced into by her own husband (*BTH*, 57).

Similarly, while Akobi seems to be skillful in deceit, Mara is cast as a naïve, inexperienced and unintelligent woman, who does not take out time to question or interrogate every claim her husband makes, as he perpetually cashes in on her naivety to fabricate and concoct lies. In other words, she is easily swayed by the enticing and sugar-coated words of Akobi. For instance, it is possibly on the grounds of her malleability and ignorance that Akobi deceives her into believing that life in Europe is not without hitches, by giving a very false impression of it, as he cunningly tells her: "…Ah Mara, would I lie to you? … Far, far more than possible, I tell you. How do you know, for instance that in Britain the people are so rich that they throw fridges away? And in Germany, they throw cars away?" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 34-35).

In order to school Mara with the right approach to understanding how African men, particularly her husband, operate, Mama Kiosk is introduced into her life. It appears that Mama Kiosk represents the voice of women's revolution, a representation of the radical wing of female revolution. This seems so, as she is not only experienced, but speaks against women's oppression and exploitation. Her association with Mara, therefore, would help bring her into a new consciousness and awareness of her inherent and latent power as an African woman. Mara, who is fondly referred to as a greenhorn by Mama Kiosk always gains some level of self-confidence each time she confides in her. Mama Kiosk, thus, sees every opportunity she has with Mara as a means to inject her with the spirit of revolution, self-assertion and self-dignity. In this regard, she dignifies the already battered and shattered image of the African woman. This is unveiled in her discussion with Mara, whom she tells of Akobi's affair with a lady named Comfort. She reveals to Mara that:

> 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. These men they always leave for Europe and say they'll be back in one two or three years. "I am only going there to work and make money and return" is what they all say, but they go and they never return again. You must forget him! (*Beyond the Horizon*, 45-46).

In a bid to project Akobi as a philanderer and an uncaring husband, one observes a subtle indictment also on the woman as an accomplice in afflicting her fellow woman. For instance, Comfort is said to be having an affair with Akobi, who is a married man. The dialectics here, one can infer, is that, women also partner with men to oppress and subjugate their fellow women. Therefore, one can argue that the projection of male characters as irresponsible does not entirely exonerate the female characters of such a depiction. It seems, therefore, that, for every negative projection of a male character, is a subtle display of a female character as his accomplice, as can be deduced in the relationship between Akobi and Comfort.

This reveals that it is not only men who oppress women; women also oppress women. Through a vivid description of Mara as a 'Greenhorn', which is a metaphor to show her inexperience in matters concerning her rights as a woman, Mama Kiosk reinforces the view that African men, as symbolised by Akobi, are skilfully deceitful, while the African woman is always the victim of their deceits. As a revolutionary voice, she, therefore, encourages oppressed African women like Mara to challenge and confront the deceit of the men. Although Mara is described as a greenhorn, she is, no doubt, showcased as a very industrious woman; a vivid description of the African woman. She exemplifies the multitasking spirit of the African woman, as revealed in her words, thus, "I abandoned hawking eggs and took to frying pancakes for sale at the marketplace in the afternoons because mornings I attended my sewing lessons, while nights and weekends saw me selling sweets and cigarettes in front of the cinema houses" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 47).

Conclusion

Amma Darko's *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* reveal an intricate paradox within African female writing. For, while African female writers critique African male writers for stereotyping women, they often engage in a similar form of gender profiling. Through a deconstructive analysis, it becomes evident that Amma Darko, like her male counterparts, sometimes reinforces certain tropes, particularly in the portrayal of women as victims of patriarchy, economic hardship, and societal neglect. While these narratives expose systemic oppression, they also risk reducing female characters to fixed roles of suffering, resilience, or moral redemption.

Accordingly, Darko's works also challenge and complicate these stereotypes by showcasing the contradictions and multiplicities within female identities. Her characters embody both subjugation and agency, revealing the nuanced struggles African women face within cultural and economic structures. This dialectical engagement suggests that female writers, while attempting to redefine womanhood, are not entirely free from the very gendered assumptions they seek to dismantle.

On the whole, one could contend that *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* exemplify how African female writers participate in the ongoing discourse on gender representation; sometimes mirroring the limitations of male-authored narratives. This realisation calls for a more self-reflective literary approach; one that not only critiques patriarchal constructions of femininity, but also interrogates how female authors contribute to the same profiling they challenge. By engaging in this critical dialogue, one could aver that African literature can now move toward a more fluid representation of gender that transcends both patriarchal and counter-patriarchal binaries.

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