

Solidarity amongst Women in Combating Racial and Gender Discrimination in Ammah Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*

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Abstract

*This paper explores the concepts of gender and racial discrimination in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, emphasizing the intricate relationship between women's resistance, oppression, and identity. The paper explores textual analysis to interrogate the stories of female characters who deal with the combined issues of gender and race in a patriarchal culture. This analysis is anchored on postcolonial counterdiscourse. The study shows how Darko's depiction of women's experiences promotes a larger conversation on female solidarity that goes beyond racial and sexual inequalities by examining significant scenes and character interactions. The results highlight how crucial cooperation and solidarity amongst women are geared towards combating systematic prejudice. Darko's novel is a potent narrative that promotes a unified front among women while also challenging the social systems that sustain injustice. By highlighting the fight against oppression as effective when various women undermining their race or sexual orientations unite in solidarity, this paper seeks to contribute to the larger discourse on intersectionality and women's empowerment. To enhance the conversation about social justice and equality, the paper concludes by urging a reconsideration of*

feminist frameworks to incorporate the complex identities of women.

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Most certainly my trials as a woman writer are heavier and more painful than anything I have to go through ... You feel awful for seeing the situation the way you do, and terrible when you try to speak about it. ... Yet you have to speak out since your pain is also real.

-Ama Ata Aidoo

Introduction

The emotional toll of negotiating a patriarchal literary legacy and the moral need to give voice to gendered suffering are the two burdens that African women authors bear, and this poignant statement by Ama Ata Aidoo captures both of them. Many female African writers find their stories in this tension, between speaking and quiet, between suffering and defiance. They bear the responsibility of confrontation as well as the burden of creation; calling attention to injustices, recovering histories that have been suppressed, and opposing structural and cultural violence. The literary reactions of African women writers to social injustice and gendered oppression are examined in this article, with a focus on how their stories, which are based on individual and societal suffering, become acts of resistance, reconciliation, and change. By doing this, it places their work in a larger context of feminist

resistance, where telling stories itself turns into a means of solidarity and survival.

Beyond the Horizon by Amma Darko deftly captures the historical unity of women in their fight against gender and racial inequality in a post-colonial setting. The story highlights the sociocultural, economic, and sexual exploitation of African women, exposing the ways in which patriarchal systems uphold their oppression (Nutsukpo, 2020). Darko's female characters, who are frequently portrayed as strong and connected, represent a collective awakening that encourages sisterhood and support amongst themselves, which is crucial for their empowerment. Given that it opposes the conventional male-dominated narratives that have historically silenced women's voices, this solidarity is essential (Gbaguidi, 2018) (Zanou et al., 2017). Darko redefines the position of women in post-colonial African culture by demonstrating the transforming power of female relationships and promoting education, financial independence, and physical autonomy as means of achieving emancipation.

Women's experiences in *Beyond the Horizon* illustrate the intricate interaction of interlocking oppressions between subjection, racial discrimination, and gender discrimination. Given that racial prejudices exacerbate gender discrimination, women, especially those from racially oppressed groups frequently endure compounded discrimination, which is not just additive but multiplicative. According to intersectionality, social status factors like race and financial hardship have a tremendous impact on how diverse women report and perceive gender and racial discrimination (Ro & Choi, 2009). A nuanced understanding of women's lived experiences within particular

socio-cultural contexts is also necessary due to the structural nature of these oppressions, which emphasize how racial discrimination informs gender subordination (Benelli et al., 2006) (Chantal Allela-Kwevi, 2023). At the end, combating these interconnected types of discrimination necessitates an all-encompassing strategy that acknowledges the particular difficulties encountered by women at the nexus of gender and race, especially under neoliberal frameworks that increase their precarity (Tomaselli, 2023).

Postcolonial-Counter Discourse

The way post-colonial counter-discourse functions is dynamic rather than static. Wilson (1985) argues that the theory generates textual strategies that continuously "devour" its "own biases" while simultaneously revealing and eradicating those of the prevailing discourse. This has been effectively demonstrated in several ways by the works that form the basis for his argument. All perceptions of women as weak, subservient, docile, timid, and objects of male-dominated literary texts have changed the perspective via the development of textual and intellectual exchanges that aid in absorbing, revealing, and eliminating prejudices directed toward the dominant or "Other." While some female characters have embraced a less radical position such as Mama Kios, others have taken an extreme one like Darko's adoption of the former posture.

It is important to keep in mind that post-colonial counterdiscursive techniques involve building hegemonic discourse, comprehending and exposing its theoretical underpinnings, and demolishing these assumptions from the cross-cultural viewpoint of the imperially oppressed "local."

Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, explicitly questions British control over people, places, cultures, and languages (Rhys, 1966, p. 23). Similarly,

Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* deconstructs patriarchal, colonial power systems to condemn racial prejudice and masculine chauvinism.

Using the experiences of her female characters as a prism to examine repressive social institutions, Darko creates a postcolonial counter-discourse in *Beyond the Horizon* that opposes the dual powers of gender and racial discrimination. In addition to emphasizing how intersectional these challenges are, the text also shows how powerful female unity is in overcoming them. Darko makes a strong case for group action as the most efficient way to combat the structural factors that uphold inequality through her depiction of women who band together in their struggle against marginalization. Darko also makes a substantial contribution to the larger conversation on intersectionality and women's empowerment by highlighting the intricate, multidimensional reality of these women's lives by implying that female solidarity may act as a catalyst for societal change.

This paradigm is important not just from a literary standpoint but also in discussions of social justice, equality, and international initiatives like SDG 5 that try to address these systemic oppressions. Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* effectively reaffirms the continued significance of literature in influencing international debates on equality and human rights by examining resistance and solidarity. SDG 5 is the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) that particularly addresses women's freedom and empowerment.

In addition to ensuring women and girls' full involvement in public, political, and economic life, this objective seeks to eradicate all types of violence and discrimination against them. In addition to being a basic human right, SDG 5 acknowledges that gender equality is a prerequisite for a society that is inclusive, peaceful, wealthy, and sustainable.

Patriarchal Resistance, Power Abuse, and Feminine Subjugation

The main character, Mara, in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, shares her experience of growing up in Naka village and her journey to maturity. Mara's story of being married off to Akobi as a young lady describes how at a very young age, and without her permission, her father married her off:

Once before I started to walk my road all on my own, I believed my mother. But that was before I was given away to this man who paid two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewelry and two bottles of London Dry Gin to my family, and took me off as his wife from my little African village, Naka, to him in the city. 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, and breathlessly told me the 'good news'. 'Your father has found a husband for you,' she gasped, 'a good man!'" (Darko, 1995, pp.3-4).

This experience demonstrates the helplessness women are subjected to in the face of patriarchy in certain African settings, with no voice of their own in matters that affect them directly in a society where men decide their lots. It also demonstrates that the fate of the female has been defined for her both by her father, and later, by her husband who are both males exercising and abusing their power over the maiden without her consent. Mara also tells of her ordeals in Accra and Germany. She is depicted as a person and an object of trade in the capitalist systems of Africa and Europe. This is succinctly captured in the conversation between Akobi and Mara:

There is a certain job that almost all the African women here do. But you are still a little too green for it, so we need a little more time to prepare you for it.' 'What job is that?' I asked. 'When the time comes for you to do it, I will tell you,' he said. 'Meanwhile we'll fix you up with something else while we prepare you.' 'The very next week I found myself working as a housemaid for a German family. I worked three times a week and sometimes at weekends if the Madam demanded it. Akobi took the money I earned, as payment for the roof he and Gitte had provided over my head, for my food and transport, for the investment in my trip from home, and for the cost of setting me up for my coming big job (Darko,1995, p. 106).

The aforementioned excerpt illustrates how Mara, an African woman living in Germany, is objectified by her Nigerian husband, who is now wedded to Gitte, a German lady. It

demonstrates how she is being molded into an article of commercial value and has no say in determining either her future or her destined end. In this instance, the German woman is depicted as superior to the African lady. Here, Mara fills the dual roles of housekeeper and provider for her husband and his German wife. By extension, she is the slave of first a chauvinistic husband who feels he is male, and therefore stronger, and again, she is being racially looked down upon by the German woman with whom she should be an equal and in solidarity with against patriarchal abuse of power and subordination. Domestically enslaved, she is still required to pay back all of her out-of-pocket payments to Akobi, her husband, and Gitte, as well as other utility bills.

The next part of this analysis will interrogate Mara's introduction to complete objectification and enslavement as a tool for financial gain. Here, Darko presents the gory picture of the sexual exploitation and abuse of women by men. Mara asserts: Something was in the wine I had drunk. It made me see double and I felt strange and happy and high ... so high that I was certain that I could fly free. Then suddenly the room was filled with people, all men, and they were talking and laughing and drinking. And they were completely naked! There must have been at least ten men for what I saw were at least twenty images. Then they were all around me, many hairy bodies, and they were stripping me, fondling me, playing with my body, pushing my legs apart, wide, wide apart. As for the rest of the story, I hope that the gods of Naka didn't witness it (Darko,1995, p. 111).

Darko's text delineates a form of writing back to the maledominated world similar to the case of "The Empire Writes Back," through postcolonial counter-discourses. Chasen (2010) lends weight to this view by stating that Darko's historical narrative illuminates the actions and processes that are sacred to Mara's growing understanding of her predicament across international boundaries. As a result, Darko's remarkable spirit of resistance, which manifests itself after the story, is considered a crucial component of her feminism because it demonstrates her attempt to give the oppressed female persona some measure of dignity and reject the doomsday predictions made for her by the men in her life. In this case, the men are to blame for Mara's sad state of disappointment. As this episode depicts:

The situation was this: the three of us were watching a video film that showed me completely naked, with men's hands moving all over my body. Then some held my two legs wide apart while one after the other, men, many men, white, black, brown, even one who looked like Chinese, took turns upon me. All this was captured clearly on the video film. And this was what Osey and Akobi blackmailed me with so that I agreed to do the job at Peepy" (Darko,1995, p. 115).

This is also why reviewers like Nzegwu (2003) has described one of the novel's qualities as "the subversive," as in the horrific, the breaking of entrenched beliefs, and the unflinching recounting of Mara's experience. This is why Frias (2002) argues that Darko's story is a reconstruction of the African prostitute

narrative, as Mara can find herself by achieving emotional and financial independence via a display of some inner power.

While Mara's rediscovery in *Beyond the Horizon* is not complete, she is nevertheless able to progress in her battle to regain her shattered dignity. Using a flashback technique, Mara bemoans her failure to restore her damaged image and sense of self as follows: "I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – what is left of what once used to be my image" (Darko,1995, p. 1).

In Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara is compelled to leave her husband, Akobi, who profits from her prostitution by transferring all of her earnings into his account. Mara decides to be resistant after becoming frustrated and bored with her life in Germany. Mara is able to rediscover herself and achieve financial and emotional independence when she opposes patriarchy. Though Akobi reiterates, "But Mara, Mara, oh Mara, even if you don't want to, you will still have to. For an illegal nigger woman like you, there is no other job in Germany, Mara. If you don't get a housemaid job then there's only this (Darko,1995, p. 114). Regrettably, Mara at this point in time decries that; "...I was made the property of a good-looking dark-haired man who owned a sex nightclub called Peepy" (Darko,1995, p. 114).

Darko's Interrogation of Gender and Sexual Inequality The notion of gender and sexual inequality is one of the most significant differences between male and female literary works. Labovitz (1986, p. 44) highlights the fact that patriarchy plays a significant role in the women's narrative as well as the heroines' negation of male power. Mara's husband, Akobi, who is popularly known in Germany as 'Cobby,' contends that, "Our African

women work even harder than us men, Gitte. ... They brought up like that, to work, work, work. They love doing it” (Darko,1995, p. 108).

Darko, as discussed in this paper has expressed this subordination as portrayed in her novel, along with the horrifying image of women's oppression and the agonizing experiences of women being treated like objects of commerce by men. Women have had transnational and transcultural experiences up to this point. As a result, every woman participates fairly in this act of male chauvinism both domestically and internationally. Mara's statement about Gitte, the German lady who is Akobi's wife in Germany, further supports this argument, as she asserts thus: 'Gitte is not the reason,' I stressed to Kaye, 'his dream is the reason. Gitte is as much a victim of it as I am' (Darko,1995, p. 116).

In Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara, who is Akobi's wife, is likewise presented as a quiet, obedient wife. When she arrives in Germany and learns that her husband has another wife, she decides to remain silent but is forced to live in an awkward apartment with him while posing as his sister. Both are portrayed as obedient housewives who are ready to help their husbands. Eventually, Mara breaks through her barrier of quiet and begins speaking up in both public and private situations, not just for herself but also for other women. Mara also survives her fate in Ghana where she was reared by Mama Kios, and returns home in Germany where she immigrated. *Beyond the Horizon* by Darko depicts this type of metamorphosis. The main heroine, Mara, cycles between the tranquility of her home and the social situations, constantly renegotiating who she is in each.

Many female authors who attempt to emphasize their femaleness or femininity and individual experiences in their novels, often emphasize power disparities between men and women. As a consequence, female academics and activists have established a literary canon to integrate gender and feminism into both theory and criticism. Showalter and other female critics view this attempt to supplant a tradition as being too controlling and masculine. Whether the issues are the portrayal of sexual difference, (re)shaping masculinity, developing feminine ideals, or the exclusion of female voices from the literary canon, Showalter (1985) asserts that gender has become an analytical concept. This demonstrates that women's literature focuses primarily on women and all that affects them, as well as fighting against anything that goes against this and oppresses or silences them.

By challenging the customary roles that males assign to women, particularly in Africa, Darko makes this point extremely clear. For instance, when Gitte, Akobi's German wife, requests that he prepare food for them (Gitte and Mara);

To this end, “Akobi got up lamely and went into the kitchen. My mouth fell open. I was shocked. Akobi to cook for me?” ... “So Akobi, this my own dear husband Akobi who back home used to reproach me if I was a minute late with his food; who many a time landed me knocks on my forehead with his knuckles if I fetched him too little or too much water in the bowl for him to wash his hands before or after eating; this my very own Akobi it was who, upon his white wife’s commands, trotted into the kitchen. Seconds later,

the clattering of pans and spoons told me that he had commenced his assigned task (Darko,1995, p. 97).”

Mara, therefore, becomes uncomfortable and nervous about this radical reversal of gender roles. She asks Gitte if she would be guided on how to use the gadgets in the kitchen so that she can take over the cooking, but Gitte emphatically says "No!" (Darko,1995, p. 98) to that request.

African women have been indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective. Through its portrayal of its female protagonists as a postcolonial counter-discourse, Darko's novel challenges this tendency of seeing the world from a male perspective. Thus, the social standards of a specific society have an impact on how a girl-child develops her sense of self. This means that distinct gender roles will undoubtedly play a part in the socialisation of females. This is due to the girl's often romanticized role as a creature whose purpose is determined by the presence of another, whether husband, father, or extended family, and those whose core is the home or household. Since these duties are defining traits of a successful woman, this is often done to transform the girl into a great wife or mother. As a result, she adopts an attitude of submission, dependence, and subordination by handing over control to the male folks. Consequently, feminist works deliberately analyse literary representations of gender and girlhood. The source of this is the sex-role stereotyping of children into certain behavioural patterns seen to be acceptable. Men are often portrayed as heroes and protagonists in many macho stories, whilst women are frequently assigned to domestic tasks. It follows that it is evident that

patriarchal values still dominate a significant number of forms in children's literature, even though childhood is generally understood to be a phase of construction. Thus, the social standards of a specific society have an impact on how a kid develops their sense of self. This means that distinct gender roles will undoubtedly play a part in the socialisation of females. This is due to the girl's often romanticised role as a creature whose purpose is determined by the presence of another, whether husband, father, or extended family, and whose centre is the home or household. Since these duties are defining traits of a successful woman, such behaviour is often done to transform the girl into a good wife or mother. As a result, she adopts an attitude of submission, dependence, control, and subordination toward the male folks. As was previously said, Darko's character Mara finds it difficult to accept this gender role reversal.

The female protagonist is not as involved in her community as her male counterpart is often portrayed. After a brief flashback in the first few pages, Darko's main character begins recounting her story: "All I did was to 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 now a wreck" (Darko,1995, p. 3-4). Again, the rhetoric: "Mara, were you never in school?" she asked. "No," I said (Darko,1995, p. 88). Without any official schooling, a voice, or even the chance to meet her spouse, let alone to be heard, she is being carted away to begin life elsewhere without her consent. That explains why she was married off from the community without a second thought. Only her mother took her inside her hut and frantically broke the "good news" to her. She blurted "Your father has found a suitable man for you to marry!" (Darko,1995, 150

p. 4). It is therefore, problematic that this breaking away from family against one's whims is considered a "good news."

The heroine of Darko's text feels unsatisfied with her existence as it is, which inspires her to improve herself. Mara as a subaltern, is shown capable of confronting the powerful in their way. She is successful in defending the rights of women. She could advocate against the oppression and injustices experienced by both men and women. Despite how helpless they may seem, they do speak back, as was previously mentioned and is captured in the following words in another way, Mara, the female protagonist talks back:

Our men brought us here and we are at their mercy. There was a change going on inside me, and Akobi was not seeing it and was still handling me like the poor lowly wife of yesterday. At the same time, he was asking me to pretend to be something that I wasn't. And all this in the presence and under the watchful eye of the keen observer- his wife, my rival. My husband Akobi didn't consider me sensitive and intelligent enough to understand and feel this emotional burden he was placing on me. If he thought me so numb, dumb, and naïve that he could take my feelings and emotions for granted, then how come at the same time he assumed me capable of convincingly playing the role on which his whole fate depended? (Darko,1995, p. 90).

Resistance, and Sisterhood Among Women in Solidarity

Mara's exposition in the next few words encapsulates the solidarity and sisterhood bond among women who share common values as portrayed in the novel:

I became the responsibility of Kaye. Kaye was an African woman, too, a stunning black beauty and the wife of the good-looking man who was the owner of Peepy. Kaye herself still partly in the trade, as we say, when time and interest allowed. But mostly she assisted her husband to manage Peppy. Not only did she polish me up splendidly to the standard of Peepy but also soon became my trusted friend when, as she herself later disclosed to me, she realized my naivety, and recognized herself in me (Darko,1995, p.116).

The demand for sisterhood and friendship is consequently rooted in this analysis against the background of the pervasiveness of women's victimization and oppression. This article demonstrates how this novel encourages solidarity among women of African origin who have all experienced the same or other kinds of abuse or harm together with the German lady, Gitte and Kaye and Mara among others like Vivian. Vivian, whose husband beats her up with pressing iron (Darko,1995, p. 128).

Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* describes how women show up for one another undermining their race or sexual orientations. When Gitte permitted Cobby (Akobi) to give Mara a good time alone, it was Gitte that gave Mara her skirt and shoes as stated by Mara in the next excerpt; "So, I did what I could do to make myself look smart, wearing one of Akobi's shirts and a skirt and

shoes belonging to Gitte” (Darko,1995, p. 110). This solidarity is further illustrated in Mara’s words thus:

My heart was pained inside me. It was pained inside me for my own self and for Gitte, too. My situation was bad enough but hers was worse still because at least I knew the truth about what I was to Akobi. Here was Gitte at loggerheads with her family because of the same Akobi, who did nothing but cheats on her. ... We were both weeping. I’m not sure that either of us knew why (Darko, 1995, p. 126).

Before I left, Gitte took out her handkerchief. ‘Here, take this,’ she said. ‘Then we’ll have to meet again, so that you can give it back to me (Darko, 1995, p. 126).

The text under study has gone beyond its boundaries, portraying a woman writer who has taken risks to say the unsayable, which fits into a pattern of postcolonial counterdiscourse. An instance where women writers take advantage of their privilege as writers who had equally undergone these horrible experiences of the awful dehumanization and objectification of women would equally decry that: “Yet you have to speak out since your pain is also real” (Showalter, 1995). So authentic as portrayed in the text used for this explanation. The aforementioned reveals the idea of international, global, and transcultural solidarity. Though it is evident that Darko’s women are silent, it is worthy of note that they are not silenced: hence, they have been “saying the unsayable” as a form of resistance or counter-discourse. The women know when and how to break or counter the “muted” or “dominance” story to a balanced and

objective representation of women in society. Darko's character, Kaye, did so by helping Mara to escape the clutches of Pee at no cost but on, "sisterhood solidarity," (Darko,1995, p. 135). Only after much insistence was Kaye dissuaded and gave in to accept 'Five' as her cut of the deal to escape.

Conclusion

Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* offers a perceptive account that not only challenges the systemic racial and gender discrimination that women encounter, but also highlights the strength of female solidarity in the face of such oppression. By emphasizing the multifaceted and multilayered experiences of the female characters, the text highlights the value of female collaboration in pulling down long-standing social injustices. This study underlines that the fight against racial and gender inequality is most successful when women come together to confront the intersecting forces that marginalize individuals.

Darko's work not only demonstrates but also makes a substantial contribution to the conversation on intersectionality and women's empowerment by providing insightful information about how female solidarity may promote social change. Beyond literary study, these findings have implications that enhance contemporary discussions on equality, social justice, and the international frameworks that seek to address these challenges, especially in light of SDG 5. In the end, Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* is a prime example of the literary genre's ongoing significance in influencing discussions on equality and human rights and reaffirming the need for group efforts to combat interlocking dominations as suffered by Mara, Gitte, Kaye, Vivian

and others in the text. Maya, the greenhorn (the innocent village girl) has been able to rise against all odds, which significantly means “beyond the horizon” of male dominance and other forms of prejudice and sexual exploitation despite all she has been through.

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