

## **The girl-child as a victim: Perspectives in Amma Darko's *Beyond the horizon***

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### ***Abstract***

*It is observed that the well-documented issues of oppression and discrimination have been an age-long tradition which affects the life of women, generally. The issues of forced marriages, sex trafficking, domestic and sexual abuse have seriously penetrated the society at large. They pose severe threat to the female gender. The researcher, having observed that no scholar had given needed attention to the tragedy of the girl-child in Ghana as portrayed by Amma Darko, sought to do just that. The study is thus carried out to ascertain the extent of gender induced burden on the girl-child and its adverse and far-reaching psychological implications on the female gender. As a result, this study examines Amma Darko's *Beyond the horizon*. This work makes use of objectification theory. The theory is, basically, the act of seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman as an object. In the core concept of this study, objectification connotes a patriarchal structure that evaluates the female as a means of (objects for) Gratifying sexual needs as well as object of economic exploitation, satisfaction of certain self-desires and*

wants usually sexual and economic satisfaction. In order to critically analyse the status of the girl-child as a victim of societal oppression and objectification, excerpts from the novel, *Beyond the horizon* are contextually discussed to show the extent to which these experiences and harsh reality often affect the female victims psychologically. Patriarchal Culture is identified as being the main cause of these ordeals, and therefore, needs to be revisited as it silences women and hinders their self-actualisation in the society.

**Keywords:** girl-child; objectification; patriarchy; victim; sexual objectification

## **Introduction**

Fiction, like every other literary genre, is created within specific social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. It has been established that literature does not exist in a vacuum, and that every writer's attempt is to portray the realities of his or her environment. For example, women in Africa carry the double yoke of gendered poverty. In more urbanised settings and in the diaspora, the factors of neo-colonialism and racism are additional weights impeding the wholeness and evolvment of the African woman. Since it is imperative that the literature of a given milieu addresses the issues prevalent within its specific context with the aim of bringing about positive change, the critical exploration of works of literature such as Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* would, arguably, involve an intrinsic appraisal of the social and literary dimensions that inform such a work. This literary principle is applicable to African feminist writers who actively demonstrate varying degrees of social responsibility in their works by exploring pertinent issues of feminist concern.

Interestingly, the representation of women, that is, the delineation of women's roles, the examination of women's plight, and the portraiture of fictional female characters in African fiction is invariably a reflection of the situation of women in the African context. This is because the image of women in literary texts is inextricably linked to the status of women in the social context, that is to say that these writers' literary works are more or less reflective of their social context.

Women in Africa have for a long time been conditioned by culture, tradition, and the philosophy of dominant religions. The oppressed position of women is woven into the fabric of societal structures, hidden under the cover of patriarchal traditions and norms, therefore making it difficult to detect and tackle. The plight of women in most African societies concurs with Simone de Beauvoir's observation on women's status in society when she affirms that, "the woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject; he is the absolute – she is the other" (16). This is true, because women in Africa have been voiceless, repressed, and recognised only as appendages to men and not as actualised humans in their own right. The responsibilities and limitations of being female in a male-dominated society are therefore realities that are constantly in the consciousness of every African woman. In postcolonial societies such as the Nigerian society, women, as Elleke Boehmer rightly notes, are "doubly or triply marginalised. That is to say, they are disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, social class, and in some cases, religion and caste" (224). Unfortunately, this situation classifies women as "second Class Citizens" as aptly posited by Buchi Emecheta,

which became the title of her second novel *Second Class Citizen* published, in 1974.

Within the literary context, African literature and criticism have been a male preserve and a means of projecting and maintaining male dominance. Lloyd Brown observes that “interest in African literature has with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers” (3). The women of Africa are the other voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. The ignoring of women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless and a rather unfortunate one at that. Although Lloyd’s observation is over two decades old, it remains relevant today as shown by critics such as Anne Adam-Graves and Carole Boyce Davies, Florence Stratton, and Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi who have explored the misrepresentations of the image of the African woman in male-dominated African fiction and contested the exclusionary literary practices that relegate women writers to the periphery. The portrayal of women in the traditional and male-dominated literary corpus is decried for its perpetuation of a literary history characterised by either marginalised or stereotyped female characters. The image of women in the literary works by African men has always been formed solely on the traditional roles of marriage, motherhood, and feminine subservience as dictated by the patriarchal society. Through the feminist lens, patriarchy is considered a main factor at play.

The patriarchal oppression of the female gender also appears in the form of gender-based violence (GBV), which includes rape, wife battery, domestic abuse, emotional assault, among others. This menace has been ravaging mainly the female gender

in Africa. Unfortunately, this monster is a product of the society as it is wrongly structured by patriarchy, where the male gender has the utmost power, authority and privilege over the female. This natural injustice against the African girl-child (the female) is what Amma Darko's writings seek to tell us about her country, Ghana, which is seen as a microcosm of the African continent. Thus this research will highlight the dehumanizing way the girl-child is being treated as a result of cultural practices and the traumatic effect on this particular gender where religious beliefs and traditional norms of the society is patterned by patriarchy. This study is, therefore, undertaken to examine the tragedy of the girl-child as depicted in Amma Darko's *Beyond the horizon*.

### **Objectification theory**

According to Catharine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, objectification is the consequence of gender inequality that is constructed by the patriarchal society (McKinnon, 57). For Judith Herman, objectification is understood as treating or regarding a person "as an object, something for use" (Judith Herman 57). In short, by combining the above assertions, objectification is understood as a product of a patriarchal system that regards women as objects of sexual gratification. Women as sexual objects means that they are first and foremost "object" and not human. Evangelia Papadaki in an article, "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification" defines objectification as "seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman as an object" (5). When a woman is treated as an object, she has no feelings, opinions or rights of her own. In objectification, a person is owned by another which means the person owned lacks autonomy, self-determination, dignity, and treated primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses.

Apparently, sexual objectification is the treatment of women as sexual object, to be valued only for sexual gratification of men. It also occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire (Sandra Bartky 5). As women are objectified, especially as their sexuality is the main focus about them, young girls grow up thinking that their sole purpose in life is to appeal to a man and please his every desire even to their own detriment. This affects their orientation and development and brings about the persistence of self-objectification. According to Rachel Calogero (312), "self-objectification occurs when the objectifying gaze is turned inward, such that women view themselves through the perspective of an observer and engage in chronic self-surveillance". In justifying the above statement, Carole Heldman, a feminist blogger writes thus:

Women who grew up in a culture with widespread sexual objectification tend to view themselves as objects of desire for others. This internalized sexual objectification has been linked to problems with mental health (e.g. clinical depression, habitual body monitoring), eating disorders, body shame, self-worth and life satisfaction, cognitive functioning, motor functioning, sexual dysfunction, access to leadership and political efficacy. Women of all ethnicities internalize objectification, as do men to far lesser extent (2).

She goes further to make an interesting observation between the two classes or terms, "object and subject". She states that, "if one

thinks of the subject/object dichotomy that dominates thinking in Western culture, subjects act and objects are acted upon. Subjects are sexual, while objects are sexy.” As subjects, one has right to their own choices, actions, activities and responsibilities, while as an object, one is docile and inactive. As subject one is entitled to their sexual rights and freedom, the choice and right to be promiscuous as is the case with men, but becomes a stigma for a woman. Being sexual, as a subject, gives one the right to act upon, to desire and demand sex; but as an object, for a woman, she is acted upon, and she is suggestive of sex. She has no voice or mind of her own, and no choice or option but to comply. This is a clear manifestation of dominance of women by men. Their role is merely to succumb to the pleasure of men at all time. The woman is made to believe that she is only useful in bed, and her body does not belong to her but to the man (men) and no matter her level in life, the society still regard her as a slave, an object to the man.

This study, thus adopts this theory as a framework for understanding the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body. This theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer’s perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This framework places female bodies in a societal context with the aim of illuminating the lived experiences and mental health risks of women and girls who encounter sexual objectification. Although sexual objectification is but one form of gender oppression, yet it is one that factors into – and perhaps enables – a host of other oppressions women face in the society ranging from employment discrimination and unequal economic opportunities to sexual violence, domestic abuse and trivialization of women’s work and accomplishments.

### **Discussion: Plight of the girl-child as a socio-cultural victim in *Beyond the horizon***

Amma Darko, through the protagonist in *Beyond the Horizon* writes, “I only know that a girl grows up, is given to a man by her parents and she has to please the man, serve him and obey him and bear him plenty children...” (86); this quotation underscores the hegemonic ideology of many African societies, and the way a woman is constituted as a subject through the process of interpellation. According to Louis Althusser, it is through interpellation that an individual is constituted as a subject. Interpellation is successful only when that individual recognises and adopts the practices embodied in that ideology, thus believing her actions are predicated upon her *own* ideas, which of course, unknown to her, are subsumed in ideology (168).

In Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara is both the protagonist and the homodiegetic narrator. Even though the story is told from a first-person point of view, we still get to see how her subjectivity emerges through the various interpellations of marriage. The initial narration is presented through a flashback at the opening of the novel, where Mara is sitting in front of a large oval mirror and reflecting on what is left of her life (1-2). In the flashback, Mara briefly foreshadows her sexual objectification when she intimates the reader that she is a pawn, slave, and property of a pimp (3). 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 stranglehold on women that it enslaves them culturally and economically. It emphasises their otherness and

subordinate position. Put this way, in *Beyond the Horizon* Akobi, his father, and Mara's father symbolise this powerful rule in which women's consent are not required at any level of decision. The rule of these three 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)

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:

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 in patriarchal society, but rather a pleasure to be gratified, an order to be complied with to satisfy the man's libido. 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 is aghast and in the conversation Vivian expresses the shock:

‘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).

For the woman, obedience and respect must be hers in order to avoid being crushed as her husband exploits so much of 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 thus:

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 pleasure, even of just momentarily, then it was my duty as his wife to fulfil them. (Darko 12-13)

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 Darko's personal experience of male violence in society. 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. As the narrator puts it:

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 with 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 oppression which annihilates its victims and makes them unable to talk back or walk out of it.

The discourse above in the narrative brings to the fore the power relation of the male 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 observes that “phallic domination has been all the more strategic in power relationships, not only because it is based on a mobilisation of the subjective foundations of masculinity and femininity but also because it has direct, close connections with the general economy of sexuality” (21). 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 characterise 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.

In his seminal essay entitled "Ideology and Meanings", John Fiske stresses the significance of communication as interpellation (7). In his view, all communication "interpellates or hails us in some way." And because communication is usually a two-way traffic, it places the addresser and the addressee in a social relationship. Thus, implicit in Mara's reply is her recognition of herself as the addressee; in so doing she adopts the subject position in this ideological construction. Mara could have resisted her interpellation but she does not. Instead, she lets herself to be constituted as a subject in the practice of arranged marriage. Her subjectivity makes her naturalise this practice, just like her mother, whose elation over her daughter's forthcoming marriage reflects her own subjection to the dominant practice of marriage; and by her hailing Mara with this good news she becomes, unwittingly, the familial ideological apparatus through which her daughter is finally constituted. Already interpellated, Mara, as a matter of "common sense" accepts the dominant ideological marital norms. Her "ideas" of marriage thus establish her subjectivity in patriarchy such that the anomalies in marriage appear normal to her. For instance, Mara puts it thus:

... many things that happened in my marriage appeared to me to be matter-of-course things that happened in all marriages and to all wives. I didn't see much difference from my parents' marriage either, so why should I think differently because I was living in the city? (12)

The above sentence reflects her strong interpellation as a wife, as well as links her “consciousness” to the practices inherent within the hegemonic ideology. Mara becomes a subject that reproduces the ruling ideas and practices as her statement here shows, “...after all, mother had taught me [Mara] that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being” (13). This statement brings into focus Lauretta Ngcobo’s thesis on the ideological position marriage takes on in many African societies. “A little girl is born to fulfil this role,” Ngcobo argues, because “she has been prepared from the earliest age possible for the role of motherhood that she will play elsewhere, away from the family home” (534). Mara incarnates this role, her interpellation into the marital ideological practices appears so successful she begins to rationalise every misdeed of her husband, even when she is quite informed that he is “a bad husband” (17).

To shed more light on Mara’s subjectivity, she counters Mama Kiosk when the older woman mentions that her husband is meant to buy something for her, as is legally expected of every husband. But Mara opposes her and insists that her husband does not need to, after all he is the man (13). Notice the article “the”, and not “a” man; this goes to show how deeply her subjectivity has taken root in patriarchal ideology. Her husband is not *any* man, but *the* man, the dominant subject to which she must submit. Consequently, Mara’s subjection turns her into the property of her husband. Her consciousness as “property” is manifest in her recognition of the culture of submission in which she has to operate, although this contradicts Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s argument that “a woman’s body is her inherent property” (547). Through Mara, we witness how this culture of submission can have an insidious hold on the consciousness of a subject,

from the way she validates her position to herself that since her mother worships her father on a daily basis (14), it would make no sense for her to deviate from this dominant norm. She goes on to justify her position: ‘I did see all these things as normal...For me, not obeying and worshipping Akobi would make me less of a wife’ (16), and no doubt, less of a concrete individual. Invariably, her essence is subjected to how well she can play her role as a subject to a dominant subject, that is, her husband. Mara signifies the image of the “ideal wife”, which Ngcobo discussed in her essay, entitled “African Motherhood – Myth and Reality”. The ideal wife, because she is defined through her relationship with her husband, her “commitment entails [even] the sacrifice of her own interests” (538). In Mara, we find this archetype. Althusser has reasoned that in ideology men do not represent to themselves their real conditions of existence but rather their imaginary relation to those conditions of existence which are represented to them there (164).

It is within this imaginary consciousness that Mara is wont to believe that her pregnancy would herald something of worth in her marriage, to a subject who obviously means ill for her. So when she tells Akobi that she is pregnant, all hell is let loose, and he boils over and deals her series of slaps (17). Had Mara not been a subject caught up in patriarchal ideology she would have seen it coming, expected such a raw display of abuse from him, because it is clear to every other character but her. Mama Kiosk, her confidante, has often tried to forewarn her about Akobi, that he is “a bad man” (17), but Mara prefers to disregard this warning, simply because she is not ready to let anyone, not even Mama Kiosk, ruin her marriage (14). Ideology so shaped her subjectivity that she couldn’t see her husband for who he really is; a brute. Yet it is this desire to cling to her marriage at all cost –

when textual evidence shows otherwise, that the marriage is a sham, a scam, from the onset – which further motivates Mara into accepting and expecting the beatings every day (20-21). In this way the ideological mechanism of physical abuse has made Mara to “conform to the behaviour patterns that are acceptable” (Cousins 106) to her husband.

Mara’s explanation for her husband’s infidelity further reveals she has so internalised the subjectivity of the familial ideological apparatus, she sees nothing wrong in her husband’s unfaithfulness, mainly because she has been brought up (by patriarchal ideology that pervades the familial space) to tolerate polygamy (41). As a matter of fact, ideology functions in the family to imbue members with subjectivities that represent and reproduce the dominant ideological rituals and practices within the household – more so the family is foundational in the naturalisation of society building norms. Besides, the familial ideological configuration is unique and highly-structured, wherein “the subject to-be will have to ‘find’ ‘its place, i.e. ‘become’ the sexual subject (boy or girl) which it already is in advance” (Althusser 176). It is apparently against this background that Mara starts to grieve over her husband’s immigration to Europe, having already been inserted into the familial norms and rituals of a house-wife. In her words, she “had grown wholly attached to Akobi’s unfairness, to his bullying, to the strength he possessed over me” (44). Likewise, her acknowledgement that she “just was so used to being the servant” (44) exemplifies her inertness in the marriage ideology, even though she could have well resisted being subjected to Akobi. Her whole subjectivity is definitely structured in this position of servitude. She just could not see that his acts of infidelity (even when they are pointed out by Mama Kiosk) constitute outright betrayal (45).

Ideologically positioned in servitude, Mara indulges herself in a false consciousness thinking that if she sets about transforming her appearance her husband would treat her less brutally; it is this false consciousness that makes her swear an oath to herself that, “I would transform myself so much that even Akobi wouldn’t be able to recognise me on return until I told him: Behold! here is your Mara who stands before you!!” (46). So Mara transforms herself into a modern woman for Akobi (47).

One function of ideology is to instil an illusory consciousness in the subject, which is why the subject would naturally perceive herself as a free agent and participate *freely* in the social practices of society (Althusser 168). In Mara’s case her transformation proportional to her desire to surpass her husband’s lover in looks and style. She starts wearing dresses instead of clothes, even querying herself for having not done that earlier (49). John Fiske illustrates this statement better. In explicating the presence of ideology in everyday practice, he uses a pair of high-heel shoes to describe how it interpellates women as subjects:

... wearing [a pair of high-heel shoes] is an ideological practice of patriarchy in which women participate, possibly even more than the ideology would require. Wearing them accentuates the parts of the female body that patriarchy has trained us into thinking of as attractive to men – the buttocks, thighs, and breasts. The woman thus participates in constructing herself as an attractive object for the male look, and therefore puts herself under the male power (of granting or withholding approval). Wearing them also limits her physical

activity and strength – they hobble her and make her move precariously; so wearing them is practicing the subordination of women in patriarchy. A woman in high heels is active in producing and recirculating the patriarchal meanings of gender that propose masculinity as stronger and more active, and femininity as weaker and more passive. (Fiske 6-7)

By successfully actualising her “imaginary” model, that is, the kind of glittering woman she imagines her husband would adore, she is able to reconstitute her subjectivity, but she only succeeds in re-positioning, or, more precisely, rearranging herself within the ideological patriarchal system; that is, from a site of inaction to a vantage point of agency. Yet her reconstitution and agency all take place within ideology, since all practices are constituted within ideology (Althusser 169).

Believing herself to be a free agent now, Mara begins to participate in the social practices of ideology. Instead of putting her feet down as a wife in the home of her husband’s new wife, she decides to play along with him, taking on the role of a sister-in-law (97-103). Mara is not a stranger to tolerating her husband’s philandering. Her philosophy in this regard is encapsulated in her avowal: “I would be Akobi’s hidden wife, so that harmony would prevail in the marriage, something I saw as my duty and responsibility as the wife to ensure” (26). By taking up this role, she becomes complicit in her own subjection and, worse still, opens herself to further marital subjugation, as is enacted in the scene where she is “ordered” to do all the household washing henceforth by hands, instead of her insisting to use the laundry machine (108).

Besides, she could very well have exposed Akobi's duplicity, but she has these "ideas" – predetermined already by ideology – that by playing along things would sort themselves out naturally, and she would win her husband back. This sentiment by Mara represents what Althusser meant by "absolute guarantee", whereby everything will be all right provided that the subject recognises what she is and behaves accordingly (Resch 210). These ideas also actuate her willingness to sustain this lie, see this charade through, with the belief that in helping him she is equally helping herself, to keep her marriage going (104-5). Someone who is not already hailed successfully by the marriage ideological apparatus would not play such a role convincingly; neither would she withhold from her husband's "second" wife her true identity, when it seems the right thing to do.

Not unexpectedly, her subjection in ideology positions her for the practices of sexual objectification. It is ideology that actually lays out the groundwork for her interpellation into this practice, and her first experience of it is in the scene where Akobi, after failing to assault her, motions for her to lie down next to him; although Mara has given us a hint of the practices of sexual objectification in the beginning of the text, when she tells us about pretty women "waiting to be used and abused by strange men' (1). However, Mara explains her first experience this way: "Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, he 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" (22).

The above passage represents Mara being sexually objectified. The "wordlessly" denotes absence of rapport, just as the whole love-making portrays Mara as essentially an instrument for the objectifier's purposes. As it were, she is not "human"

enough to be offered any form of intimacy, not fit enough to be cuddled after lovemaking. In fact, she is good enough only for the fulfilment of male pleasure; she is nothing more than a sex object. This subjection of Mara calls to mind Groothius's comments about a woman being a pawn in a man's world, a sex object to be used accordingly to masculine dictates (qtd. in Elijah Baloyi, 4). Even in this context, Mara is constructed as the subject, while her husband personifies the dominant subject. Mara's ideological positioning is that of the "subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting [her] submission" (Easthope, Anthony and McGowan, Kate 57). Another instance of Mara being sexually objectified is on the train when Osey, her husband's best friend, tells her that she is "not a bad-looking chicken" (66). Before then we see Osey take Mara to a cinema in town. There, she is "tricked" to watch a pornographic film, an exact reproduction of sexual objectification ideology in material form (61). Mara's experiences of sexual objectification are much more pronounced in Europe, where both her husband and his friends objectify her severally. Over there, she is confronted by a poster of a ravishingly beautiful white woman, a cultural artefact of sexual objectification. Mara describes this woman as:

... a blond, in a slip, sitting on a stool with legs wide apart, eyes cunningly slanted, tongue calculatingly out and the tip upturned between snow-white teeth, just touching the upper scarlet lip seductively. Further down, the forefinger just grazed her genitals. (68)

Reading the poster through Althusser's ideological framework we can perceive that the poster is laden with highly suggestive sexual undertones. We can also sense the presence of ideological "meanings", which are meant to hail the viewer, who in turn responds accordingly and positions him- or herself within the social construction of sexual objectification. "Interpellation," as Fiske explains, "can position us in an ideological category that may differ from our actual social one" (7). Although Mara is repulsed by the poster at that point, it is ironic and rather telling to note that she is eventually inserted into sexual objectification practices and she becomes much like the "ravishing woman" in the poster. Recall her own imagery in the beginning of the text when she says she is dressed "just in brief silky red underpants" (1). Furthermore, there is a scene in which Mara is objectified by her husband's friend when he takes her to his wife's flat and introduces her: "This here is Akobi's bundle" (71). Her objectification by Osey's statement is not implied, but overt and significant, for it equates Mara with something inanimate, thus consigning her to a state of "fungibility", that is, the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects. Of course, Osey could have said, "*This is Akobi's wife*", or "*This is Akobi's woman*," – although the latter statement hints at illicit relationship whereas the former embodies Mara's status as a wife. His statement clearly objectifies Mara. Akobi, on the other hand, is used to objectifying her. An instance of this is in the scene where he rapes her. Prior to this brutal act, Mara pictures herself as a cheap whore (83). The scene is depicted below:

Then, very rigidly and businesslike, [he] ordered as loud as the loud music would allow, "Remove it quick quick," pointing to my trousers .... Emanating an aura of no-

nonsense and time-is-too-precious-to-waste-on-you, he signalled with his right forefinger that I should kneel; which I did, still in my sweatshirt. (83-4)

From these examples above we can see that Mara is constructed as a subject through various processes of interpellation; we can also see the role of social institutions which help to facilitate her subjection to the ruling patriarchal ideology. And because she is subjected to a dominant subject (man), it comes as no surprise then that she sees herself as Akobi's property (7), and internalises the notion that a girl is brought up to please and serve a man (86).

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, we can conveniently assert that *Beyond the Horizon* successfully evokes the phallic symbol as an instrument of oppression (victimisation) against women. Society and particularly that of Africa 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*, 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 applied by male characters raised with patriarchal values.

The novelist makes the breach in the shell of patriarchy with her 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 writings have “elicited sophisticated readings that represent a variety of ideological perspectives and to some extent, divergent positions in feminist, deconstructive and post-colonial criticisms” (iv). Culture as being the main cause of these ordeals has, therefore, to be revisited as it silences women and hinders their full participation in society. Patriarchy, thus, becomes a tool subjecting women (girl-child) to tragic experiences.

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