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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Portrayal of Male Characters by A Contemporary Female Writer: A Feminist Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract

This article attempts to explore how male characters are portrayed in four of Amma Darko's prose works, viz. *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998), *Faceless* (2003) and *Not Without Flowers* (2007). Drawing on feminist linguistics, this paper takes the view that the way men are depicted by Darko in her prose fiction overtly counters existing conventional ideologies of gender positioning. These ideologies, for many decades now, have reinforced such traditional social structures as male-dominance, patriarchy or institutionalized sexism in all societal strata. Darko, in the selected prose works, has repeatedly questioned the God-given power of man over woman. She has also highlighted such aspects as innocence (or naivety), illiteracy (or low education) and especially economic subjugation of her female characters as the key factors that sustain male-dominance and power in literature and by extension society.

1. Introduction.

Before the rise of feminism in the seventies (Lakoff, 1975) and other derived overlapping woman-promoting ideologies like African Feminism, Womanism, Africana Womanism, Stiwanism (from STIWA: Social Transformation Including Women in Africa), Women's Rights Theory and so on, African literary canon was rife with male-authored texts like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973), Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965), Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) etc., which profusely celebrated the male image or identity. The male sex/gender was, as revealed by prior scholarly linguistic and literary studies (cf. Fonchingong, 2006; Dooga, 2009; Koussouhon, 2009b; Kehinde and Mbipom, 2011; Akogbéto and Koukpossi, 2015; etc.), given priority in these literary pieces to the detriment of the female one. As Koussouhon and Dossoumou (2015) clearly note, "In the pioneering African [male] literary fiction, women's [image or] identity was painted against the backdrop of the various societal schisms that seek to perpetuate the status quo of the enslaved female versus [the] lionized male" (p.129). It is obvious in the foregoing that the pioneering African male literary fiction fraught with male-dominance and its underlying traditional social structure called patriarchy or institutionalized sexism has failed to advocate the cause of the African woman.

The upsurge of feminism in the seventies and other derived overlapping woman-promoting ideologies, as mentioned earlier on, actually came with a conscience-raising from the part of and a wake-up call to women. Women, in their quest for change, have diligently taken to the *plume*. From the colonial to the post-colonial times, pioneering female writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Grace Ogot, Margaret Ogola, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Yvonne Vera, Efua T. Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, etc., and contemporary women writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Kaine Agary, Amma Darko, to name just a few, have increasingly contributed to the rehabilitation and the redefinition of the African woman's image or identity by simply reflecting in literature woman-promoting

themes such as gender equality, feminism, emancipation, etc. It stands to reason that these African women writers have stood up valiantly to defend the sex/gender that they belong to. The question that arises thus is whether these women writers have repositioned or redefined the African woman's image or identity in literature at the expense of the African man's one or not. This paper seeks, so to speak, to explore how male characters are portrayed in the prose works of one of such contemporary African writers called Amma Darko. Four of her prose works, viz. *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998), *Faceless* (2003) and *Not Without Flowers* (2007) have been selected for this study. The choice of Amma Darko actually lies in her lucid use of language, style and most especially the thematic concerns of her works. The current study draws on feminist linguistics for theoretical orientation and framework.

2. Overview of Feminist Linguistics.

Feminist linguistics is a brand of linguistics informed by feminism. The term "feminism" serves to designate two things: an ideology and a movement. As ideology, it indicates "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men" (Hornby, 2010:545). Hooks (2000:1) claims that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." Drawing on this, Mama (2005, cited in Dooga, 2009:135) argues that feminism refers "to the political and intellectual movement for the liberation of women." It is obvious in the foregoing that the utmost aim of feminism is to stand up against male-dominance and power as well as free the womenfolk from all forms of societal ills buttressed by patriarchy or systemic institutionalized sexism both in literature and society. According to Oluwayomi (2013:370), patriarchy "is a form of sociological stratification that exalts the male gender over the female [one]." Simply put, it is the appropriation of social power by men to the exclusion of women and the inferiorization of women by men as a way of justifying the subordination of women in society (Sekoni in Darah, 2008:15). For feminist scholars and/or critics, patriarchy is a hitch that women of all races must combat at all cost: "Patriarchy, the institutionalized structure of male dominance, encourages males […] to define their masculinity by acts of physical aggression and coercion toward others, women and children" (Hooks, 1994:148).

Indeed, sexism is believed to have its roots in the language system. As Simpson (1993:147) observes, "sexism is encoded into language, either consciously or unconsciously, by users of language." Following this, feminist linguists cogently contend that language serves as a site of struggle for power; a site where the dominating group, sex/gender or class is given voice and celebrated at the expense of the dominated one. This hegemonic representation is often marked by a linguistic inequality harnessed through the grammatical gender system and its direct connection with the extralinguistic category of sex. For instance, the use of generic pronouns to designate both sexes/genders in a given context or the use of such lexical items as powerful/powerless, assertive/submissive, independent/dependent, violent/non-violent, perpetrator/victim, etc., to mark stereotypical societal schisms between them, simply denotes an established asymmetry in the language system, which invariably enhances the gender rifts in literature and society. In this sense, the use of language in the pioneering male fiction to represent the male sex/gender without regard for the female one can be contended to be gender-biased or simply sexist. According to Bussmann (1998:407), "feminist linguistics studies the gender-typical language use and the gender-specific asymmetries (established through thousands of years of tradition) in the language system and makes a connection between linguistic and social discrimination."

Close to sexism is the notion of "*androcentrism*" (Coates 1986:15 cited in Simpson, 1993:148). Androcentrism describes a male-centred word-view wherein male activities are evaluated positively and female activities negatively (Ibid). In this perspective, the pioneering African male literature can be argued to be a sort of what one can call here a male discourse wherein woman is marginalized, demeaned and summarily silenced. In the past four decades or so, feminist scholars and/or critics have called for a counter-discourse in African literature so as to balance the gender rifts therein. This call has actually been heeded by second generation and contemporary writers, largely female writers. Their works put together do represent a counter-discourse; i.e., a discourse by women and about women. The expectation, as generally assumed, is that these women writers will take vengeance on men in their fiction; i.e., they will evaluate male activities negatively, thereby pointing out the shortcomings of patriarchy (and by inference its underlying sexist and/or androcentric ideologies) as well as its negative overtones on the womenfolk in African society. How true this expectation is will be examined in Amma Darko's novels in the subsequent section.

3. Portrayal of Male Characters in the Four Novels.

As Ofosu (2013:188) points out, Darko, in her fiction, "presents an objective feminist literary voice meant to identify and expose societal ills against women." In her quest to free her sex/gender from societal ills, Darko, as argued here, is bound to counter existing conventional ideologies of gender positioning. This is to say, she will forcefully seek "to deconstruct and demolish the patriarchal status quo by reducing men both to worthless, irresponsible, physically

grotesque images and to wicked husbands and fathers in order to engineer a new social order in which women are in control of their destiny" (Adjei, 2009:48). To prove this assumption, this paper will qualitatively draw some linguistic or textual snippets from the four novels wherein male characters are depicted in the roles they play as husbands or fathers or as lovers.

3.1. Portrayal of Male Characters in *Beyond the Horizon* (1995).

Beyond the Horizon is Amma Darko's first novel. It is the story about the female protagonist Mara; she recounts her plight inflicted on her by men. While some of the men in the novel are overtly named or labeled, others are nameless; they are rather represented as non-physical entities used as sample archetypes of good husbands or men in Naka (Ghana), the spatial setting of the novel (p. 4). It is noted too that almost all the named or labeled male characters in the novel are painted as brutish, exploitative, eccentric, materialistic, lustful, greedy, deceitful, reckless and heartless. Two of such male characters, namely: Mara's father and Akobi Ajaman (Cobby), Mara's husband, are used for illustration here. These personae are chosen because of the roles they play in the narrator's plight.

In the novel, Mara's father is represented as the person who out of sheer greed deliberately encages his under-age daughters including Mara in a marital relationship devoid of love, affection and sense of humanity. He is the one who often finds husbands for his daughters. He does not care whether these men have a good character or not. What he only cares for is the number of cows that come as the bride price. Mara recounts her fate as well as her faith in the existence of something better in her village, Naka, when she is told by her mother that her father has found her a husband in the following linguistic terms:

> All I did was grin helplessly because I clearly remembered the same good new news as this that mother had given my older sister two years before. Found, too, by father. And my sister was now a wreck. Naturally, not all husbands made wrecks of their wives. Many women in Naka were extremely content with their marriages and their husbands and wouldn't exchange them for anything in the world. And some such good men still existed in Naka. But father, it appeared, had a different formula for choosing or accepting husbands for his daughters, which took more into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man (p. 4).

Again, the same father is painted as someone who has given his daughter in marriage out of utter pride and keen sense of social stratification. He says that he is proud that his daughter, Mara, is married to the first Naka son with a school certificate. He later adds in a state of absolute drunkenness that he would gladly have given Mara out in marriage just in exchange of one goat. This is puzzling! While this observation plainly reveals Mara's father's lack of love for his daughter, it also raises an essential question as regards the absolute right or power fathers have in a patriarchal setting over their children, mainly girl children.

> And then, he was flattered the first Naka son with a school certificate should choose his daughter for a wife. So much so that I later learnt that, drunk from palmwine and belching boisterously, he had proclaimed that he would gladly have given me away even for one goat" (p. 6-7).

Mara's father's lack of love for his daughter is even more obvious when she comes back home from the city to give birth to her first child. She finds out that her father who because he has married a new wife (a young widow) not only neglects her (and her siblings) but he also forgets his older wives, Mara's mother included. One can observe that this state of affairs will invariably inflict a severe physical and psychological trauma and suffering on all the family members (women and children inclusive). This depiction is indicative of the workings of the patriarchal structure whose sole aim is male dominance and oppression.

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

Akobi Ajaman is the man Mara is married to. He, like Mara's father, is delineated as deceitful or greedy. He lusts for material wealth so much so that he does not care about how he gets money, the strategies he uses, etc. For him, it is the end that justifies the means, not the contrary. He treats his wife both as a slave and as a source of income. Akobi exploits Mara's sheer innocence for his own selfish ends, turning her into nothing but a mere slave. Mara puts this bitter experience in the following terms:

> 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 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 (p. 12-13).

In addition, Akobi considers his wife as a source of income by forcing her aggressively to throw people's rubbish away for them in exchange of foodstuffs and vegetables from which he gluttonously benefits:

> Now listen to me, he resumed, 'from now on you will throw Mama Kiosk's rubbish away for her and she will pay you with foodstuffs and vegetables. And since that means you need not go to the market often, I can also save by cutting down on the daily chop money I give you, you understand? 'Yes,' I replied shaking all over (p. 11).

The linguistic terms in the text above clearly exude that Akobi no longer caters for Mara's upkeep, nor sees to her well-being, which Mara out of naivety still considers as part of what she has to bear as a housewife. She expresses this better as follows:

> That he had bought me no new clothes and left me still with only those I had come in from the village, and that in spite of this he had also forbidden me to sew any of the cloth he had presented to me as part of my dowry […] was for me normal (p. 13).

The narrator's linguistic choices as well as Akobi's further reveal that Akobi callously abuses his wife. For instance, he batters her severely even when he knows she is carrying their first baby, he sells her heirloom without letting her know about it in order to raise money for his trip to abroad. When she finally knows about his trick, he quickly soothes her with a promise to make her an owner of a sophisticated dress-making shop on his return from Europe (p. 36-37). Two years away from Mara and her two children (two boys), Akobi continues his abuse with another woman, Gitte, whom he deceitfully gets married to so as to ensure his stay in Germany. All this while, he does not seek to hear from Mara, nor her children. He later brings Mara to Germany to make a prostitute of her, and the gains of which, in connivance with Pee (the owner of the brothel in which Mara sells her body), he copiously benefits from. When Mara finally takes cognizance of her plight and out of sheer desire to engineer her own life, she immediately attacks and sends her exploitative husband, Akobi, to jail in Germany (p. 138-139). All these are obvious manifestations of sexist exploitation and abuse in the novel.

3.2. Portrayal of Male Characters in *The Housemaid* (1998).

The Housemaid, Darko's second novel, relates the story of two female protagonists: Tika and Efia. Both are represented as victims of sexist exploitation and abuse in contemporary Ghanaian society. Though some of the male characters in the novel are named or labeled, others are anonymous; they symbolize samples of kind-hearted husbands or men (p. 34) and irresponsible husbands or men (p. 6, for instance) in Accra (Ghana), the spatial background of the novel. In fact, the portraiture of the named or labeled men in this novel is mitigated. The male personae here are dually characterized as follows: exploiters/exploited, predators/preys, independent/dependent individuals, responsible/irresponsible fathers, husbands or men, etc. The two male characters the current study considers are Tika's father and Tika's boyfriend, Owuraku.

In the novel, Tika's father is first portrayed as a fully self-actualized intellectual who is married to a woman for many years without any seed of the womb, which is due to an abortion he and his wife have had when they have courted. He later dates an illiterate woman, Sekyiwa, who is twenty-four years less than his age. He gets her pregnant. Out of sheer attachment to parental responsibility, he leaves his first wife to cater for Sekyiwa and their child.

> I will live the rest of life for you and our child,' he promised Sekyiwa. 'I will set you up in business. I will make you rich. I will invest every pesewa that crosses my hand in you. So that one day, when I am old and no longer working, you can take care of me and our child (p. 18).

The terms in the passage above bear out clearly that the man has the financial means to look after a woman, and he strongly manifests his good faith to give priority to his family, his new wife included. But this man turns out to be ridiculed, duped and exploited by Sekyiwa, the same person on whom he has invested all his savings; i.e., the same person he has made a successful tycoon. He is cheated by her with other young men, whom she gives good money and they give her good sex. As if this is not enough, he is also battered by Sekyiwa, and this leaves him with a long-lasting physical and psychological trauma and suffering. As Darko narrates,

> Little Tika remembered the fights and arguments she had witnessed between her parents. All the screaming and yelling had come from her mother; the imploring and pleading from her father. She remembered her mother's hands flying at her father's face in time with her insults. It was her father who had wept (p. 19).

It is obvious in the above that the man is helpless, weak and voiceless before terrifying Sekyiwa. Regretful of his mistakes, the man later goes back to his ex for reconciliation; the latter viciously bashes him, cursing him with leprosy and soliciting the power of the gods to see it through (p. 20). This prolonged male-maltreatment and humiliation finally lead to the man's death. This male depiction perfectly suits the feminist utmost aim: 'man is an enemy'. Just like the enemy in the warfront, the contemporary African woman must combat the traditional perpetrator of sexist exploitation and abuse on her in African society. Such is the message Darko is covertly trying to pass across to her sisters.

Owuraku is depicted as Tika's teenage boyfriend. Both are eighteen when they meet and have just both completed their fifth-form secondary education, expecting the final results of their Ordinary-level exams. It happens that Owuraku passes with distinction and qualifies for the sixth-form, whereas Tika fails miserably and summarily drops out of school to trade. By the time Owuraku finishes the sixth-form and moves to university, Tika has become a successful businesswoman. So Owuraku's needs are continually provided for by her (p. 22). This representation denotes that the man is dependent on whatsoever the woman gives him for his survival. This male character portrayal actually counters a conventional belief that runs in male writings: 'man is the breadwinner'. Here Darko overtly empowers woman at the expense of man by simply making her the *breadwinner*. There are many feminist reasons for this. One of these is that if women are socioeconomically empowered in literature (and by extension society), this can help build their image positively. As Emecheta (cited in Akporobaro et al, 2010:351) observes, "Once a woman starts making money she stops having children regularly. This is because women who are lucky to find the work they love and which they are good at derive the same kind of enjoyment from it as from sex." Another reason which is obvious in the preceding quote is the replacement of sex with work, which can act as a natural means of/for birth control and female self-actualization.

Elsewhere in the novel, Owuraku is portrayed as a person with the notion of male dignity. He will not accept to exchange his dignity for whatsoever (say money, material gifts, for instance) on earth; he will not marry a woman who cheats on him by bedding other men, viz. "Shop owners, bank managers, customs officers" (p. 23) for the sake of making more profits in business. Tika actually wants Owuraku to understand her attitude, which he does not anyway. According to Koussouhon, Akogbéto et al (2014), Tika's attitude here is due to her naivety in business and her willingness to prove that she could succeed in business to Owuraku. It should be noted that Owuraku, even being aware of the truth, still continues to benefit from the profits Tika makes from this practice, which is actually a *non dit*. In fact, Owuraku knows quite alright that Tika is stinking rich and willing to pay the bride price out of sheer love for him, but he prefers to forget her, not having anything to do with her (p. 22-25). This portrayal simply exudes that not all men are materialistic. It stands to reason here that, for responsible men, money is good but not at all cost; money can never equate human dignity.

3.3. Portrayal of Male Characters in *Faceless* (2003).

Darko's third novel, *Faceless* narrates a story that revolves around Maa Tsuru, her children (mainly her female children: Baby Tsuru (Baby T) and Fofo) and four educated women (MUTE workers): Dina, Vickie, Aggie and Kabria. The story is mainly about Maa Tsuru's predicament. Her plight is partly due to the supposed curse her dying mother dishes out to her father and his descendants after him, and her lack of courage to face her reality and turn it into something meaningful. Her resignation and inaction throughout the novel actually threads its plot. In the novel, two categories of male characters are identified: named or labeled and nameless. The portrayal of the two categories here exudes exploitative, eccentric, materialistic, lustful, greedy, deceitful, reckless and heartless husbands or men. Two of such male characters, Maa Tsuru's father and Maa Tsuru's first man (not to say husband), Kwei, are subsequently discussed here.

In the novel, Maa Tsuru's father is represented as somebody who dishonours and jilts a woman, Maa Tsuru's mother. He impregnates her prior to the puberty rites, and he forcefully denies that he is responsible for this. Naa

Yomo puts this in a better way: "when Tsuru's mother picked seed with her, the young man responsible, that is Tsuru's father, denied the pregnancy. Worse still, he insisted he had never even seen Tsuru's mother ever in his life" (p.92). Tsuru's father's sexist behaviour actually fills Tsuru's mother with anguish and protracted hatred, and she consequently rains vicious insults on him day-in day-out. She strongly expresses her loathing for him in a way that surpasses mere human understanding. She curses him and even curses the descendants after him (Ibid). This denotes the anger and the fighting-back attitude of the contemporary African woman. Unlike the traditional prototype of African woman who is represented in male writings as the embodiment of patience, endurance and silence, the contemporary African woman is symbolized here as someone who is filled with flaming anger and ready to fight back, even beyond what one can imagine. Men should know then that "when a woman [i]s angry, nothing work[s] in the village [or in the city]" (Mengara, 2003:19). So they should appease women now to avoid an open gender war, which may highly be destructive to the entire human race. Anyway, this is a mere warning to the entire menfolk!

Kwei is Maa Tsuru's first man with whom she has four children (two boys and two girls) outside the wedlock. He is first described in the novel as someone who fights against every mount of distorted beliefs, superstitions, etc., related to Maa Tsuru. He shows his passion and love for her even before his angered mother who openly frowns at the idea that her son should marry a cursed woman: "Stupid boy! she yelled. Stupid! Stupid little-minded boy!" (p. 118). While Kwei's mother obviously seems to play the role of a caring and protecting mother here, she, in actual fact, flouts the "sisterhood" principle (Hook, 2000). From the feminist perspective, she is expected here to show support for her gender, which she does not. Kwei is further portrayed as an unemployed mason who depends on his mother for his upkeep. Because of this, she treats him as a "boy" (p. 119). He goes against his mother's will to impregnate Tsuru, and he is immediately disowned as a son and treated like "a leper" by his family members, his mother being the master-mind (Ibid). This denotes a patriarchal practice perpetrated by a woman.

Unlike Tsuru's father, Kwei shows a sense of male responsibility. He does not rebuff that he is responsible for the pregnancy in that "He scrambled some money together, bought a bottle of schnapps, went over to Maa Tsuru's family home, and announced that he had come to show his face" (p. 119). This behaviour pleases the woman's family representatives; they find in it a sense of respect for socially established norms. But Kwei does not go beyond this stage; he does not seek to perform the marriage rites, marry Tsuru and make her a wife properly. Without attempting to justify Kwei's attitude, one can infer from his socioeconomic status that he is limited; he cannot provide what it takes for a proper marriage. This has nothing to do with the sexist behaviour. It rather reflects the poverty rate in post-colonial and capitalist African society, serving as a major motive for many juvenile crimes, perverted cultural mores and loose values, etc. This assertion finds its expression when Kwei out of sheer attachment to parental responsibility goes "into stealing building materials from construction sites in Accra's newly developing settlement areas" (p. 120) so that he can raise money to feed his wife and their children.

Unfortunately, Kwei cannot dissociate himself from the patriarchal system in which he has hailed and socialized. Out of frustration and failed existence as a man, a husband and a father, he seeks refuge in his masculinity and he subsequently exercises severe violence on his enduring pregnant wife. As we are later told in the novel, after filling his flabby tummy with two tots of *akpeteshie* and getting back home,

> He pounced on her [Maa Tsuru] like a cat on an unsuspecting mouse and began a vicious pounding spree. He pounded Maa Tsuru with his fists, landing the blows anywhere and everywhere and on every part of her pregnant body. The day 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 (p.124).

The male activity described in the text above clearly shows to what extent patriarchal practices can be detrimental to the contemporary African woman. The same Kwei, after this event, soothes Maa Tsuru and she naively forgives him. He sleeps with her uncontrollably and she falls pregnant as if a hen lays eggs, which reveals Maa Tsuru's idleness and economic subjugation, one major enemy of the female sex/gender against which Emecheta wants women to stand up. After Kwei has had four children with Maa Tsuru, his mother, who has given in to superstitions, kindly asks him to go away; to run away from her. She says: "A cursed woman and the number five? It was time to escape" (p. 126). This sounds illogical! A mother who openly asks her son to run away from his own family and responsibility is not on any pretext excusable. But she can be understood here from her own perspective. She simply expresses her allegiance to the patriarchal structure and its sexist ideologies. For instance, nowhere in the novel is Kwei's mother found, after her son has gone away on her advice, catering for his children, not to talk of their mother, Maa Tsuru.

3.4. Portrayal of male characters in *Not Without Flowers* (2007).

Not Without Flowers fully delineates a literary world wherein both men and women are engulfed in a perilous but socially endorsed practice termed here as "transgenerational sex". It is a behavioural practice wherein a rich man (a sugar daddy) picks a young woman (a chicken-soup) approximately half his age (or vice-versa in some rare instances) in marriage or simply has sexual intercourse with her on a contract basis. Very often, one of the two parties to such a practice is not aware that it is a mere contract; i.e., a sort of game, that could, for one reason or the other, break up any time and engender incredible consequences like despair leading to madness or suicide, HIV/AIDS infection and family shattering. Many reasons do justify this practice. Some of these are material or financial means or security, emotional void or security, upliftment, connection, etc. Darko, in her first three novels and most especially in the fourth one, has, from a sociological perspective, explored this sexist practice in-depth in its most multifaceted cultural context in contemporary Ghana, and the contribution of men to this is recurrently highlighted.

The portrayal of men in this novel exudes two categories: named or labeled and nameless. It should be noted that the category of nameless men is used to indicate examples of both good and bad men in Ghana, the milieu in which the novel is set. It must also be noted that the named men in the novel are depicted in a dual role: exploiters/exploited, predators/preys, independent/dependent individuals, responsible/irresponsible fathers, husbands or men, etc. Three of such male characters, Pa, Ma's husband, Idan and Pesewa are used for illustration here. Pa is depicted in the fiction as Ma's husband; they have three children together, namely: Randa, Cora and Kweku. Pa has secret extra marital affairs with a young woman called Flower, who is less than half his age. For this reason, he develops some eccentric features like staying up at night to make or receive calls instead of being in bed in the warmth of his beloved wife. He is also emotionally distant from his wife and their children. By so doing, Pa unknowingly digs his own grave. He progressively sinks into it as he gives in to alcohol when the demands of his chicken-soup (Flower) are becoming too excessive and unbearable for him. Finally, he takes his own life out of sheer frustration. All this leaves his wife, Ma, chronically depressed, and as a result she is placed in a Psychiatric Hospital and later in a prayer camp where mental patients are being healed. This heart-rending situation drags the children too into all sorts of mockery from the society, with much more consequence on Cora whose marriage plan with Nana Afful (a prototype of good men) is cancelled because of the history of suicide hovering on her family (p. 123-124).

Idan, Aggie's husband, is depicted somewhere in the novel as someone who is dependent on his girlfriend, Aggie, in their university days, for his survival. Then, as we are told, "he used to be the poor and needy one, and Aggie was the generous provider" (p. 71). After leaving school, Idan gets a well-paid job and thus becomes a self-actualized individual. After Idan and Aggie have married each other for many years, a problem arises. The problem is childlessness. And when his wife suggests that they carry out the fertility tests to find out who is the cause, he categorically rebuffs her opinion. He does so out of ego complex; he knows quite alright that "he could be the one responsible for their childlessness [and this] would dent his self-esteem as a complete man" (p. 41). This observation bluntly challenges the idea that 'only women are barren'. Here the other side of the coin is described to question manhood as the case is with womanhood in male writings. Womanhood in such male writings, as assumed, equates motherhood, so a woman who cannot procreate or does not know, in Emecheta's (1980) words, "The Joys of Motherhood" is stigmatized as an incomplete woman. Darko actually mocks this assumption through Dina when she quips that "procreation is considered [in African society] to be a woman's obligation to the ultimate essence of life itself" (p. 96). Another reason for Idan's refusing his wife's opinion is his fear of "what people will say"; i.e., society's judgments, about his inability to inseminate his wife. Of course, he will be mocked and treated as the opposite of the stereotyped "incomplete woman"; i.e., an "incomplete man". And this, he is not ready to bear, not even his mother, Sisi, who obviously lacks the sense of "political solidarity" (Hooks, 2000).

In addition, he is described as a person who holds sexual fantasies, like Pa, with women, Randa included, outside marriage. Randa, who is young enough to be his daughter (p. 107), is the sole woman before whom his five senses crack. One can observe from the replica of trangenerational sex in the novel that the stakeholders of such a practice are "married men" and "young women". As the writer clearly observes through Randa, "Married men make the best secret lovers" (p. 113). They are unsuspected because they wear the wedding ring. The ring should semiotically mean "stay off" or "busy", but most (not all) young women in contemporary Ghana out of sheer delight in worldly things and laziness prefer dating such men for the aforementioned reasons. Idan puts it this way: "Not all females are discouraged by that [the wedding ring]! [In other words] some women prefer men who have it on." (p. 78). Like Pa, Idan displays some eccentric attitudes like making and receiving calls in the bedroom far away from his wife's sight, telling lies, spending more time outside home, etc. His wife finally discovers the truth. Aggie's reaction to her husband's sexist behaviour is that of an informed pacific feminist who feels she is robbed, but she does not go straight away for violence. Instead, she asks questions related to her rival's identity and when she gets no answers coming, she "leaned against the palm tree and burst into tears. She wailed like a child" (p. 115). It follows from this to

note that some women truly constitute the cause of sorrow and suffering of other women. While this behaviour openly breaches the "sisterhood" principle that feminist proponents cogently advocate, it, in fact, endorses the endemic patriarchal structure. Idan is later painted as someone who feels exploited in that he is jilted by Randa with another young man, a man of her generation, and it finally dawns on him that the love affairs between him and Randa are nothing but a mere game.

Pesewa is portrayed as a respectable, rich and polygynous man. He is also painted as a disciplined, faithful and principle-minded man in that he considers "lovers, girlfriends chicken-soups, concubines" (p. 57) as taboos. He prefers to marry any woman that pleases him straight away. He marries all in all five women. The fifth wife (otherwise called 5th Wife) whose name is Destine is roughly half the man's age. Pesewa treats all his women well. The first four wives live with him in his famous mansion near Tantra Hill but 5th Wife, his favourite wife, is given a special attention by her husband in that "He rented and furnished a place for her at Sakumono. [And] [h]e was in the process of constructing a house for her in her name at Taifa" (p. 64). Pesewa trusts his wives blindly and does not foresee any infidelity from their part. One of them, precisely 2nd Wife, flirts around and catches the most dreadful 21st century killer called HIV/AIDS. She gets him infected and from him other wives except 5th Wife, who always requests the man to use condom or wears hers (p. 98). Pesewa out of sheer fear of the disease or male dignity later takes his own life (p. 97-98), leaving his wives and many children in utter disarray. Here Darko raises a crucial question as whether one should encourage a responsible polygyny at the expense of a savage monogamy in contemporary Ghanaian society. Unfortunately, as she clearly points out, this too is not a safe option.

4. Conclusion.

It is obvious from the feminist linguistic analysis of Darko's four novels that she names or labels most of her male characters. The anonymous male characters in the four novels are used to illustrate samples of good as well as bad men in contemporary Ghana. From the named or labeled characters, it is also obvious that Darko evaluates male activities negatively. She portrays them in roles that represent them as brutish, exploitative, eccentric, materialistic, lustful, greedy, deceitful, reckless and heartless. Such is the case of Mara's father and Akobi Ajaman (Cobby), Mara's husband in *Beyond the Horizon* and Maa Tsuru's father and Maa Tsuru's first man, Kwei in *Faceless*. However, there is a slight change or progress in the other two novels in that the men therein are portrayed in dual roles. They are depicted as exploiters/exploited, predators/preys, independent/dependent individuals, responsible/irresponsible fathers, husbands or men, etc. This case is illustrated by Tika's father and Tika's boyfriend, Owuraku in *The Housemaid* and Pa, Ma's husband, Idan and Pesewa in *Not Without Flowers*. These male characters, as the analysis reveals, are projected in relation to the womenfolk. But the stories told in the novels are not about men.

The four novels invariably treat women's issues and problems like exploitation, childlessness, womanhood, motherhood, widowhood, abortion, sexuality, etc. In other words, Darko, in her four novels, tells the female side of the stories wherein the African womenfolk is given voice and equally celebrated. But while she does so, she subtly deconstructs patriarchy and overtly challenges its underlying sexist or androcentric ideologies. She also points outs that apart from men being the main cause of women's plights, aspects such as innocence (or naivety), illiteracy (or low education) and especially economic subjugation of her female characters are the key factors that sustain male-dominance and power in literature and, by extension, in society. In other words, these factors contribute to a large extent to the debasement of the female image or identity in literature and, by extension, in society. For instance, it is these factors that make some African women like Kwei's mother or Idan's mother, Sisi, in Darko's fiction consciously or unconsciously advocate and perpetuate sexist practices even against their own sex/gender. By so doing, they cause pain to their fellows and as a result weaken the "sisterhood bond" (Hooks, 2000) among their folk. In this perspective, this paper contends that Adjei's (2009:58) claim that in Darko's novels "women seem to find only pain in their relationships with men, but both on their own and in their relationships with other women find "female solidarity, power, independence (Frank, 1987:33)" is highly questionable.

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