
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Domestic Violence in the Ghanaian Context: Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* in Perspective

Imeta Akakpo

Department of Applied Modern Languages and Communication, Ho Technical University

Corresponding Author: Imeta Akakpo, **E-mail:** iakakpo@htu.edu.gh

ABSTRACT

In the majority of African nations as well as other communities worldwide, domestic violence is not a recent issue. Based on a person's gender, violence against them is common and increasingly common. Sadly, marital violence that results in murder is also on the rise. In an effort to put a stop to the problem, numerous studies have been done on what causes and fosters gender violence. The analysis of domestic abuse in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* is examined in this paper. This study examines how Darko depicts domestic abuse in her novel and how it impacts women. This study demonstrates that religion, culture, and tradition are significant factors in sex variation, gender identity conception, and energy sharing in the text selected by its theme of patriarchy and oppression of women. It also shows how socially constructed identities and roles in patriarchal countries fuel social and national conflict. The study used the feminist viewpoint and Radical Feminism theory to analyze themes and the symbolic portrayal of characters. This is because knowledge theories about a person's biological sex and gender identity and how they impact power sharing, as well as the role of religion, tradition, laws, and the prevailing ideology in the continuation of gender-based violence, must be considered in analyses of gender relations. The feminist voice must battle against gender radicalism because Darko's work strongly condemns domestic abuse and the portrayal of women as objects. Darko's writing portrays a strong call against gender violence and the treatment of women as subjects, therefore calling for the feminist voice to fight against gender radicalism.

KEYWORDS

Domestic violence, patriarchy, Radical Feminism, sex

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Introduction

Over the years, women who write in Africa have received growing coverage. Gender studies thus dominated the literary landscape, and women's inclusion in male-written works has precipitated many critical debates. Also, there was more interest in examining how men conduct themselves, particularly concerning women. However, a literary tradition was established in which women writers represent the female experience by presenting a particular portrayal of women in their work, unlike male authors with earlier works. Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* skillfully depicts the historical solidarity of women in their struggle against racial and gender discrimination in a post-colonial context. The narrative exposes how patriarchal systems perpetuate the subjugation of African women by highlighting their social, economic, and sexual exploitation (Nutsukpo, 2020). A collective awakening that fosters sisterhood and solidarity among themselves is essential for the empowerment of Darko's female characters, who are often shown as powerful and linked.

Adams (1997) describes oppression as "the omnipresent nature of social injustice woven across social institutions and rooted within individual consciousness" (p. 4). In this definition, Adams et al describe the omnipresent existence of racism in that it "fuses structural and systemic discrimination, personal bias, sexism, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships that saturates most aspects of life in our society" (p. 4). The authors address the oppressive essence of oppression, which "denotes

institutional and material limitations that profoundly form a person's life chances and sense of possibility" ... and "delimit what one can imagine being and the power to act in favor of one's rights and ambitions" (p. 4). In the foregoing, Adams (1997) indicates that parents' economic status is going to predict their children's economic status. Having that in mind, the authors are then able to explore the relations between different types of oppression that privilege some and restrict others. They expose hierarchical social systems, "in which dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups" (p. 5). However, they recommend that individuals have memberships in multiple social groups, which may include combinations of privilege and minority status. The authors argue that it is important to understand that there are social patterns in place that bind and perpetuate oppressive practices among themselves.

African literature is full of writings projecting male dominance and inadequately arguing the African woman's case. Hence, tracing the origins of gender inequality in African literature is imperative. As Kolawole (1997) states, most male writers in the early phase of African literature allowed women to be marginalized through omission. Female characters are made incidental to the plot of literary texts in this sense, while only a few appear as strong and credible protagonists. Chukukere (1995) asserts that the ideal female character created by male writers mostly acts as wife and mother within the context of her traditional roles. So high are social values that the respect and love a woman receives for these positions are proportional to the degree of her adaptations to them. Though Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958) slaughters a goat for one of his wives who has had three sons in a row, Madume in *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi (1966) is demoralized by his wife's inability to produce a male heir. On the other hand, the stigmatization of a barren woman is considered a social misfit and attracts the wrath of her family and society. There is a complementarity between male and female roles in pre-colonial African cultures (Van Allen, 1975; Hay & Stichter, 1984), and it is during and after colonization that the African woman's regression occurred from a position of power and self-sovereignty to becoming a helper to man.

This solidarity is crucial because it challenges the traditional male-dominated narratives that have historically suppressed women's voices (Gbaguidi, 2018). In 2017, Zanou et al. highlighted the transformative potential of female relationships and advocated for education, financial independence, and physical autonomy as ways to achieve emancipation. Darko redefines the place of women in post-colonial African society. This study deals with these traditional delineations based on contrary views of feminist critiques. The central questions taken on board are: How are men and women in particular depicted in contemporary African literature, and how is the battered image of the female gender being redeemed in contemporary writing, considering two African novels, Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

Statement of the problem

Domestic violence often involves actions or threats of physical, sexual, economic, or psychological abuse. When such acts or threats occur within the context of an ongoing or previous relationship (Cantalupo et al., 2006), victims can suffer from one or a combination thereof. The issue of domestic violence is not unique to any specific part of the world. It occurs both in developed countries and in developing ones. It also cuts across societies, amongst others, regardless of age, wealth, or geographical location. In general, domestic violence is not a one-off incident but a trend of misconduct over time. The abuse in a relationship can happen at any time. It could begin in life, at the beginning, or later. It could also begin on a small note and in the future escalate (Sudbury-Wayland-Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008).

In light of the foregoing, many early male writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, John Pepper Clarke, and Mohammed Ben Abdallah have portrayed men as superior and, in their writings, portrayed women as a mere appendage and a subordinate to men who are portrayed as superordinate. Since literature projects problems in a particular society, its writings reflect how women are treated in different communities. Women have had to pass through many problems, obstacles, and barriers to become important members of society. In the past, women did not have any kind of rights; they were isolated, neglected, and mistreated by men. In contemporary times, women have found their voice and have variously demanded equity and fair treatment in the gender equation, because "woman right is a human right" (Owonibi, 1998:16). Even though the issue of gender equity has dominated the academic and literary space so much so that even male scholars and literary writers use their works to engage with the concept of woman right, the need for gender equity and marital harmony, the issue of gender violence is still on the rise in Africa, especially against the feminine gender (Owonibi, 2009).

The experiences of women in *Beyond the Horizon* show how racial discrimination, gender discrimination, and subordination are intertwined forms of oppression. Women, particularly those from racially oppressed groups, often experience compounded discrimination, which is not just additive but multiplicative, because racial prejudices intensify gender discrimination. According to intersectionality, how different women experience and perceive gender and racial discrimination is greatly influenced by social status criteria such as ethnicity and socioeconomic hardship (Ro & Choi, 2010). Although literature abounds on various forms of gender-based violence in Ghana the world in general (Greig, A with Edstrom, J 2012, Jekayinfa, 2012), to the best knowledge of this researcher, there are not enough critical works exploring gender-based violence in Ghanaian women writings and especially

in Darko's fiction, with a comparative slant, despite the large body of works on their novels. This study is therefore out to fill this critical lacuna by examining how Ghanaian female writers portray gender violence in their writings in the purposively selected literary texts: Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore gender violence in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

Theoretical framework

Several ideas about gender inequality have been established, but this article is concerned with radical feminist theory. Hyden and Månsson (2007) explain that the theory of radical feminism is based upon an analysis of the power structure of society. The theory suggests that the established government is a masculine patriarchy, meaning women are subordinated because the structure of society is patriarchal. The authors further clarify that the primary form of oppression is the oppression of women by men. In radical feminism, the suppression of women as a group is the single most important issue in society, and it is ideal for women to be treated as a collective unit.

Radical feminists, according to Bryson (1999), see women as an oppressed group that has to fight against the oppressors for their liberation; that is, against men. Abbott, Wallace, and Tyler (2005) argue that women's rights are a matter of radical feminism rather than gender inequality. For this reason, the authors conclude, radical feminists wish to challenge and overturn the prevailing gender power structure.

In radical feminism, the suppression of women as a group is the single most important issue in society, and it is ideal for women to be treated as a collective unit (Jackson, 1992). Radical feminism views the male-controlled hierarchy of capitalism, which is inherently hierarchical, as the defining feature of the oppression of women. MacKinnon (2016) opines that radical feminist women have done away with what they find to be an inherently oppressive and hierarchical patriarchal system, and that women free themselves. Radical feminists believe that there is a male-based hierarchy of authority and power that is responsible for sexism and injustice, and that as long as the system and traditions are in place, society cannot be substantially changed.

According to Dworkin (2019), radical feminism sees the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy as the root cause of women's oppression and thus advocates a total eradication and reconstruction of society. The reason why this group gets the "radical" label is that they see women's oppression as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that crosses the boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change. This study examines Darko's text, *Beyond the Horizon*, as a contemporary African novel. It also discusses how the novel portrays the radical feminist theory in Ghanaian society through its settings, themes, and characters. This study is an attempt to substantively and critically review the feminist literature concerning patriarchy, gender, feminism, and feminists' views in her novel. Consequently, since the primary focus of this work is gender violence, the radical feminist theory will be applied as an analytical framework for the study.

Methodology

Wyse (2011) stated that qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions and dive deeper into the problem. The justification for the use of this approach in the study is to retrieve in-depth knowledge from the texts analyzed for meanings and themes.

The foregoing discussions clearly show that qualitative research methodology is preferable when a study requires detailed analysis and exploration to unveil issues to aid comprehension. This research follows a textual and descriptive method based on a combination of traditional library research and textual analysis to embark on a close reading strategy. It also uses textual analysis of data that portray gender violence in the progressively selected text in line with feminist literary theory. The primary sources of data include Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, while secondary sources include several academic journals and books related to feminist and power theories. Besides, an interdisciplinary approach was used while drawing from the fields of Literature, Philosophy, History, and Sociology.

Analysis and Discussions

Synopsis of the novel *Beyond the Horizon*

Mara, a young woman in a village of Naka, whose marriage was arranged without her consent by her father to a son of an undertaker in exchange for "two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewelry, and two bottles of London Dry Gin". Mara was married to Akobi and taken to the city of Accra. Mara suffers in the hands of Akobi during their stay in Ghana through cunningness, unfaithfulness, brutality, and violence. Akobi later sells some of Mara's pieces of jewelry to

enable him to travel to Germany. He later asks Mara to join him as life takes different directions for her. To her surprise, she realizes that Akobi has brought her to Germany to work as a prostitute for his selfish gain.

Gender violence revealed in *Beyond the Horizon*

There is no universally accepted definition of violence against women. Some human rights activists prefer a broad-based definition that includes "structural violence" such as poverty, and unequal access to health and education. Others have argued for a more limited definition in order not to lose the actual descriptive power of the term.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical violence, sexual harm or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

Amma Darko exposes psychological violence when Mara's father gets married to a hot-blooded widow, which affects her (Mara's mother) to the extent that she decides to visit a juju man.

"my father was not even interested to see me because he has taken another wife, a hot-blooded widow who had filled his head that mother even cried to me that she was certain that their youngest rival had done ju-ju on father to cause him to forget and disregard his other wives. And convinced was she that she had even been to the medicine man to ask him to perform a counter ju-ju and as a result was wearing heavy waist-beads of cowries and dried bones.p.14"

The above statement infers the kind of psychological trauma Mara's mother goes through, and this has led her to carry all these things around her waist to reverse the situation.

Physical violence can take the form of, among others, serious and minor assault, deprivation of liberty, and manslaughter. Physical violence is highlighted in Amma Darko's novel when the principal character, Mara, is subjected to numerous beatings and attacks by the husband. Even during the climax of her pregnancy, she is still being mishandled by her husband, Akobi, who has no sympathy at all for Mara.

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

The above proves that Akobi is a man without human emotion and love.

Again, he performs his sexual activity with Mara in a primitive way and without any feelings, bonding, or expression of love for his lover.

"Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him, and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and lay out my mat because he wanted to sleep alone". (p.22).

Akobi leaving for Europe was a bitter pill for Mara, because she will not enjoy her daily routine of being beaten. Even though these deeds by Akobi were highly outrageous, they had become so normal for Mara as a result of the level of its persistence. "His beatings, his kicks, his slaps, scolds, and humiliations" have become a permanent feature of the marital relationship.

"And yet here was I crying because he was gone; because no longer would I receive his beating, his kicks, his slaps, scolds, and humiliations."(p.44).

This proves the habitual and perpetual beatings that she went through.

Prostitution is one of the prominent issues discussed in the plot of the narrative. It is not the will of the ladies in the narrative to indulge themselves in it, but the cunning nature of men and poverty pushed them into the act. Mara, the heroine, was pushed into this act by her husband. Mara becomes wrinkled and remorseful about prostitution in Europe and pities herself as she looks at what is left now of her body in an oval mirror.

"Europe to me was a place so special and so very, very far away, somewhere unimaginable, maybe even somewhere near Heaven, where not just anybody could go. A place where only the very rich, those ministers, the big doctors and lawyers who learned plenty of books and married white women could go" (p. 34).

Mara and her colleagues appear only as sex objects, a dehumanizing activity that she is compelled to do. No job for them in Germany other than engaging themselves in sex activities to make ends meet and send some of their wealth to the family at home. The novel portrays them as innocent about the activities they engage in and attributes the cause to the heartless male characters, like Akobi and Osey.

"Tears are building up in my eyes. They always do when I stare at what is left of me. They are blurring my vision and are slowly rolling down my face in an agonizing rhythm like the beating of the devil's drums ... ta ... ta ... ta ... dropping down one after the other, painfully slow, painfully gradual, onto these two flabby, floppy drooping things I call my breasts, my tired graceless bosom. I fear what I see when I look at myself. I shiver at the sight of my sore cracked lips which still show through the multiple layers of the glossy crimson paint I apply to hide them. (p. 2)

The physical description shows how Mara feels out of the exploitation by the wicked male characters. She laments bitterly that she has nothing left in her out of prostitution because she has been overused by males.

"As for me, I have nothing dignified left of me to give them". (p.50).

Mara's body was subjected to several instances of sexual abuse in Germany, and she even had a fracture on her finger in the course of making love with one of her clients.

One should understand that the greatest profiteer of her engagement in prostitution is Akobi, as he receives the money after Mara has engaged herself in the act. It is, however, worth noting that Mara also, upon seeing the interest she derives from the act, enables her to stay in it; this is because it is through prostitution that she gets money to send home for the family and also depends on in Germany. She sees prostitution as very lucrative despite the dangers she sails through. Going by Mara's willingness to engage in this act of prostitution, one can safely say that she was part of the reasons why she was abused.

"Small was my little finger and it still cries, but no more for mother's playful hunger. It's bent. Its bone's been displaced and it looks weird. I see it all the time and I loathe it, but not the money that came with it. The injury was done to me by one of my best spenders, a giant of a man who always, when he comes to me, cries like a baby in my arms, telling me about his dictator wife whom he loves but who treats him so bad she makes him lick her feet at night. Then filled with the loathing and rage of revenge for this wife he'd love to kill, but lacking the guts even to pull her hair, he imagines me to be her, orders me to shout I am her, and does horrible things to me like I never saw a man ever do to a woman before in the bushes I hail from. But I bear it because it is part of my [prostitution] job. I listen attentively to his talk and comfort where I can. And even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me a nigger fool I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he's just called me a princess, for I've got a job to do, and I've got to put my all in it." (pp. 2-3).

Mara is also to blame because she is not determined to avert any sexual assault, just because of the money she earns to make her living in Europe, and also send some money back home for her parents, brothers, and most importantly, her children.

Akobi deceives Mara and sells her jewels to get enough money to be able to travel to Europe.

"Mara, do you know that there are so plenty of factory and construction work waiting to be done there in Europe but with so little people to do them? That is why I sold your things, Mara. I want to go there and work, to work hard... I will make so much money that I can buy everything! Everything, Mara! Television, radio, fridge, carpet, even a car!" (p. 34).

Mara was also subjected to Akobi's request as a good wife who wants the success of his husband. Akobi goes ahead to lure Mara with the prospects that will come out after traveling to Europe. All that Akobi says is to deceive Mara into handing over her pieces of jewelry to him so that he can sell them and make additional money for his travel.

"If I don't miss you [Mara] and Kofo [our son] too much by then ... and I can stay on for another year or more, then before I return we can have our own home. A beautiful block house just like those government Ministers and doctors with their English wives (p. 34).

Akobi finally succeeds in traveling to Europe, and Mara does not hear from him until it is nearly two years of waiting for him. When she receives a letter from Akobi, she is shocked and delighted, as the letter states that he wants her to join him abroad.

"the letter was long and full and in it, he said that he had changed his address which was why we didn't hear from him for so long" "on the second sheet a bombshell dropped that shattered all doubts and anger: Akobi wanted ME to join him in Europe!! (p. 51)"

The word "ME" in capital letters emphasizes the kind of shock that goes through Mara's body. She is so amazed upon hearing the news because it is something she has never imagined.

What she does not know is that she has been deceived by her husband into coming to Germany to advance his abysmal self-seeking and cunning acts.

To her utter shock, Mara finds out that her husband has a new name. Also, she notices that Akobi, who has changed his name to Cobby, has got himself a German wife, and is introducing Mara to her as his sister and not his wife, and has also hooked her to a German pimp. Mara is therefore forced into prostituting herself at a sex nightclub after Akobi has blackmailed her by organizing a gang to rape her and take a videotape of the action.

"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 legs wide apart while one after the other, men, many men, white, black, brown, even one who looks Chinese, took a turn upon me. All this was captured in the Video film. And all this was what Osey and Akobi blackmailed me with so that I agreed to do the job at Peepy" (p. 115).

With the above extract, Mara laments how wicked and cruel men could be. She felt very cold when this was happening to her in someone's country, where she had no option but to take on a boneshaker and run to Naka, the only option is to tune herself to the jingle that is playing.

Domestic violence is one of the key issues raised in the novel, the protagonist experiences several brutalities from her husband at home, ranging from beating to making her sleep on a cold floor after he has finished making hash love with her. According to the novel, she suffered this kind of violence from her village Naka, under the auspices of her father, giving her away into marriage without her consent, also under the brute attitude of her rude husband Akobi, and in Germany under the umbrella of Osey, Akobi, and her clients. The torture that Mara went through domestically cannot be measured in the novel, *Beyond the Horizon*.

At the end of *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara flees from her husband but decides to remain a prostitute in Germany as she "decides to stop thinking about ever going home" since she "just doesn't belong there any longer" (p.139).

While she turns away from her motherland out of fear of her family's rejection and her emotional alienation, Mara turns to her body as an alternative space through which to attain some semblance of control. While this is by no means an entirely redemptive decision, by making this choice, Mara gains some sense of control over her body and achieves financial independence. In the analysis of the novel, despite the painful, frustrating, and humiliating experience of prostitution and drug addiction written on her body, Mara keeps reclaiming and reconstructing her own private space, freedom and financial independence. Instead of succumbing to constant abuse, the body becomes the vehicle through which Mara attains physical and financial independence from her abusive husband.

Conclusion

The entire discussion, however, indicated that both novelists as contemporary writers also followed the practice of earlier writers. This was because earlier writers during the advent of colonialism became partly colonial and partly Traditional Africans, and since they were trained in Western literary forms, their texts were written in English, which was Western but had traditional elements mixed, in terms of code-mixing, transliteration, and the employment of poetic and proverbial language, exposing the dominance of men over women. Their settings, themes, and characters, however, reflected the patriarchal context of their being as Africans. All these features were seen in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

In a nutshell, the main character in Amma Darko's novel *Beyond the Horizon*, through a Ghanaian local name "Mara"; found out that the name originated from the Fante language, which means "myself". In my view, the main character went through a lot of oppression and trauma but later she realized herself and came out of her shell and placed the oppressors behind bars. The message to women is that they have to be themselves and fight for their rights.

Men are generally painted as horrendous beings in this novel. Amma Darko wrote *Beyond the Horizon* as a feminist narrative because readers surely get a deep understanding of the power men hold in society, as they manipulate, deceive, and use aggression in oppressing the rights of women in this story, and sometimes in reality.

At the end, the portrayal of male characters in *Beyond the Horizon* is a way for Amma Darko to showcase and critique the male patriarchal rules and establish the wickedness and greed of African male characters, whether living in Africa or in Europe.

Amma Darko skillfully weaves in a lot of feminist issues throughout this story that make this novel relevant to present-day life. Some of these issues are: patriarchy, racism, colorism, domestic violence, pornography, sex exploitation, prostitution, feminism, and womanhood. Amma Darko did a great job at pulling readers' emotions with the rawness in her style of writing; she exposes readers to the horrible realities of the helpless victims of male sex exploitation.

The paper argues the case in the novel belongs to the category of liberal feminism who was forced by situations beyond their control to respond and go radical to crush anything that stands in her way to happiness. In exploring the different tenets of feminism, this paper acknowledges that radical feminism is an offshoot of violence; a radical reaction to dehumanization, humiliation, and violence. Mara's action of putting Akobi behind bars and Mama's radical way of ending her husband's life were prompted by the violent actions of the men.

- This study recommends that women be given equal opportunities as their male counterparts in various areas of human activity.
- Women should also be made to know their rights and stand for them, and that they are not victims of traditions and customs.
- Students and scholars of literature must be encouraged to interrogate literary works in line with specific issues in African societies.

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