Chapter 4  
Customized Feminism: Amma Darko

It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves we will be defined by others for their use and to our detriment.

Audre Lorde

The objective of this chapter is to identify and frame the elements that make up African feminism with reference to the chosen fictional work *Beyond the Horizon* by Amma Darko. Though Africa is a large continent with diverse cultural practices and this work by Amma Darko is in no way an all-encompassing representation of the feminist issues of this continent, nevertheless the issues around which this fictional work has been woven are quite relevant to women in Africa and address multiple problems that plague many women from African origin. In spite of varying histories, Black societies reflect elements of a core African value system that existed prior to racial oppression or colonization.

In the past the countries in Africa have undergone many crises in the form of colonization, coups, military regimes, economic instability, and pressures from globalization. On account of their gender and race, women from Africa have borne the brunt as evidenced in their lower educational level, malnutrition, economic deprivation, inhuman living conditions and social discrimination. African women’s problems are multipronged due to the socio-cultural problems that arose as a result of European colonization, slavery and consequently racial discrimination. Black women have a self-defined standpoint on their own oppression. Two interlocking components characterize this standpoint. First, Black women’s political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality from that available to other groups. Second, these experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. By taking elements and themes of black women’s culture and traditions and infusing them with new meaning, black feminist thought rearticulates a consciousness that
already exists. “Indigenous feminist groups picked up ideas and practices, absorbing them into their existing practices and creating new versions of feminist projects so as to suit themselves” (Davis 27).

The feminist movement in Africa was an offshoot of the activism and struggle against the colonial rule and racist ideologies of the west. The repression and exploitation of both men and women during and after the colonial rule resulted in a revolt against racism and slavery. African feminism was responsible for the ‘difference debate’ within feminism; it in fact pioneered in exploding the concept of gender as the primary social category of analysis in the discrimination of women. The ‘difference debate’ introduced not only race into feminist theory, but other categories of social relations also, such as class, sexual orientation, ethnicity and many other aspects. Feminism as a movement has been further enriched by the findings of the African women activists. As the movement of feminism has gained recognition in countries other than the west, it has become more inclusive about the issues concerning women around the world. The dialogue of African feminists with western feminists has brought to the fore their unique issues which were earlier not incorporated in the mainstream feminist movements of the west. They realised that their gender-reform efforts could not be addressed by the radical feminism of the west. Authentic cultural models had to be created keeping in view the concerns that are peculiar to the African situation.

The new African feminist approach differs radically from the western forms of feminism ...African feminism owes its origins to different dynamics than those that generated Western Feminism. It has largely been shaped by African women’s resistance to western hegemony and its legacy within African culture. (Gwendolyn 4)

Feminism in Africa has a different dynamics than the West. African women have a different starting point. African women’s roles grew from a long tradition of female integration in collective structures. This is completely different from the West, where feminism grew from middle class individualism and the patriarchal structure in a post industrial society. The women from Africa faced multiple oppressions in the form of racism and sexism. While they suffered racial bigotry in the outside world, the sexist ideology battered them at home, within their families. Hence, a major
thematic and structural element of feminism in Africa has been its simultaneous attention to multiple oppressions and multiple categories of analysis. According to Valerie Smith, “Black women experience a unique form of oppression in discursive and non-discursive practices alike because they are victims at once of sexism, racism and by extension classism” (319).

Literature has been a very effective weapon in the hands of oppressed people. It enables them to voice their opinions before a wider audience and garner support. Literature stimulates the readers to develop a political understanding of their situation and to devise strategies of resistance against exploitation. African literature was initially dominated by black men writers. Women writers were conspicuous by their absence. However, with the growing feminist movement in the United States, led by black women of African descent, the feminist writings from Africa have captured the attention of the world. The women writers from Africa have furnished the inside view of the group of which they speak and to which they belong. They have tried to give voice to their social group and community. The assertion of the African women’s consciousness through literature is an effort to make the society aware of its hidden dark truths that need to be confronted in order to change and transform into a better and equalitarian tomorrow.

African women writers are struggling to make themselves visible and their voice heard inside and outside the continent by creating new locations and alternative scenarios to the ruling hegemonies, they are breaking out of the dominant political, economic, cultural conceptions of gender and are problematising their identities and subject positions. By freeing herself from simplistic dualisms and dichotomized paradigms that try to encapsulate her composite self and experience in all encompassing and convenient definitions, the African woman writer is increasingly inventing and using strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narratives. (Odamtten 28)

Outlining the need for African feminists to be self-defined, African feminist and critic Molara Ogundipe Leslie makes the assertion that the African woman needs to be conscious not only of the fact that she is a woman but that she is both an African and a third world person (15). As a consequence of the unique standpoint of women
from Africa, African feminists have tried to customize their feminist agendas according to their respective contexts. In the opinion of bell hooks the triple marginalization has given African women a vantage point to view the subjugation of women and devise a counter hegemony. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) locates four major themes in the construction of Black feminist thought, all of which are generated from a Black woman’s “standpoint” (Collins, 1989). First, Black women empower themselves by creating self-definitions and self-valuations that enable them to establish positive, multiple images and to repel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood. Second, Black women confront and dismantle the “overarching” and “interlocking” structure of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression. Third, Black women intertwine intellectual thought and political activism. Finally, Black women recognize a distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skill to resist and transform daily discrimination. Collins sums these four themes up by saying that Black feminism is “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (39).

Feminist writers from Africa have written about various issues peculiar to their contexts. Some of the major issues established in their fiction are the need for sexual self-determination and economic empowerment, the struggle against the psychic pain of racism and sexism, the possibility of coalition across the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation and class, and black women’s passionate and persistent strategies of self-formation, self-recovery and self-expression.

The work of Amma Darko can be critically situated within the context of post-independence Ghana and continental writers such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Florence Nwapa. Amma Darko was born in 1956, a year before Ghana’s independence from colonial rule in Tamale, northern Ghana; she grew up in Accra under the care of her adoptive parents. After completing her secondary education, she attended the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi where in 1980 she obtained a degree from the College of Arts with a minor in English. After working for a year in Kumasi for a year with the Technology Consultancy Centre, she left for Germany like many young Ghanians who were part of the exodus to the West in search of further education, better prospects and the pot of gold. “What she and many others found was a life of menial jobs in order to survive and maintain some modicum of dignity in a market place that was ruthlessly indifferent to those without
power or wealth” (Odamtten 4). Presently, she is an excise and tax inspector in Ghana and has written a number of books that represents the condition of women in Africa.

Her experiences in Germany find a place in her novel *Beyond the Horizon* which revolves around the socio-economical problems faced by people from Ghana. Women writers from African origin have faced many problems regarding the publication of their works. Amma Darko also had to face similar problems to get her first novel *Beyond the Horizon* published in her country. It was first published in translated form in German language in Germany. “The German title, *Der Verkaufte Traum*, literally means ‘The Vended Dreams’, the substituted English title suggests the pot of gold at the rainbow’s end, a Sisyphean quest, the pursuit of a chimera, and a heroic venture despite the ever receding horizon of infinite defeats” (Odamtten 102).

Her novels primarily focus on the condition of women from Africa. Darko wrote about the experiences of ordinary people, the ones who were too poor or unfortunate to know anything other than what society made apparent to them. She represents through her stories the continent’s globalization pains for the readers all over the world. Her story *Beyond the Horizon* depicts the plight of African women in Europe, and the false hopes of those they leave behind.

Darko actually attempts to show how black women in Africa and the diaspora have not only been confined to a private domestic space, but also have been forced by colonialism and slavery to function as second-class citizens in other countries. She also highlights that even the post colonial situation in African countries has not been able to elevate the status of women from Africa. The legacy of colonialism still permeates the lives of African people. The roots of self-denial still plague the women from Africa. Issues of gender intersect with other concerns of class, location and history in the lives of women from Africa.

Ghanian novelist Amma Darko tackles themes that have long occupied writers from the African continent; the psychological and economic impact of colonialism on women, the injustices of patriarchal society, the conflict between the traditional values of the village and the pressures of urban life, and recently, critiques of pressing social problems. (Odamtten 12)
Amma Darko joins fellow Ghanaian female writer Ama Ata Aidoo in focusing on the social ills of modern Ghanaian society, especially as they concern and affect women. The themes are familiar as they range from general national corruption to issues of money and greed, from the role and view of women in modern Ghanaian society to destructive woman-to-woman dynamics, from pursuit of education to the politics of poverty and to polygamy and husband snatching.

Generations of African women writers have expressed a sense of social obligation and hope that their writing, even in early stages might bring positive benefit to someone besides themselves. Part of this social commitment results from African world view that recognizes the artist’s translating it into a lesson her society needs to learn...This sense of connection with readers runs deep, and seems to come from women’s complex role as caretakers for their societies, both preservers and critics. (Odamtten 14)

Feminist writers, as we are aware, attack the systems that oppress and subjugate women. This is a way of helping women “unlearn the lessons of the past, engendering in them a new dynamism borne of their new awareness of their inherent strengths and potentialities for effecting change in their society as equal partners with men” (Segun 300). As a fitting and challenging voice in the arena of literary production, Amma Darko’s novels have elicited sophisticated readings and represent a variety of ideological perspectives, and to some extent, divergent positions in feminist, deconstructive and political criticisms. Amma Darko has created literary characters that in turn create awareness among women. She has highlighted the realities facing women in Ghana. She questions the unfair use of women’s unremunerated labour in the private and public sphere in her novel. It is her critical engagement with the politics of patriarchal forces that make her fictional work a revisionist programme. It is again a reminder to people of the white race how the under-privileged women from Africa are abused both at the hands of white men and women and also by the men from their own country and race. A lot still needs to be done to change the condition of women of African origin. The novel helps feminists to know about the core issues that need to be addressed to transform the deplorable state of affairs of black women. Amma Darko’s novels and the characters that populate them are ‘real’ to the degree that she observes society and records her
observations in order to create awareness for certain social problems and to effect change. How the vulnerable uneducated women are lured into a trap and have to lead an eternal life of servility and humiliation has been depicted through the story of the main protagonist Mara. *Beyond the Horizon*, the story of Mara is also the story of many women from Ghana including Amma Darko. The novel depicts the sordid realities of neoclassical, postcolonial, globalised lives on the women from Ghana. The story of Mara unfolds in a flashback. The narrator of the story is Mara herself. The story begins where it actually ends. Mara is a third world woman in the west. It begins with Mara confronting a reflection of her battered self in an oval mirror, the result of years of physical and sexual abuse by men.

I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – what is left of what once used to be my image. And from my left and right, all about me, I keep hearing chuckles and pantings, wild bedspring creaks, screaming oohs and yelling aahs. They are coming from rooms that are the same as mine, rooms where the same things are done as they are in mine. And in all of them there are pretty women like myself, one in each room waiting to be used and abused by strange men... I am just in brief silky red underpants... I’ve used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer. But that doesn’t render me emotionless. I’ve still got a lot of feelings in me, though I’m not sure if they aren’t the wrong ones... I shiver at the sight of my sore cracked lip... This gaudy pink rouge I’ve plastered on my ebony black face looks horrid too, I know, but I wear it because it’s a trademark of my profession. (Darko 1)

With this beginning, Mara recounts her transformative journey from a naive Ghanaian village girl to a defiant, financially independent but drugged-out prostitute in Munich, Germany. Mara’s story in *Beyond the Horizon* is sadly not unique. There are thousands of African women prostitutes in Europe. The use of the prostitute motif is also not new in African literature. However, it is the subversive, the unabashed, the harrowing, the shattering of long-held ideas and the no-holds-bar telling of Mara’s story that makes *Beyond the Horizon* a compelling and provocative novel. The author, Amma Darko, holds back nothing. The anger of the author is very evident in her writing. Some critics have even blamed Amma Darko for showing men in an
extremely unkind light in her novels. In an interview with Raymond Ayinne (2004), Amma Darko says: “We’ve started writing from our point of view because, for a while, you were writing for us . . . . So . . . . if we are writing, probably there is some pain that has to come out. And I think rather than take it as male-bashing; you must take it as a means to better understand the women folk of Africa. . . . You were always portraying us as all-enduring, all-giving mothers and that is the attitude we find in males . . . but I don’t want to be all-giving all the time, I don’t want to be all enduring, I want to be angry, I want to react.” Thus, in Darko’s works, the text becomes the site to ventilate pent-up feelings about the experiences of women. The need “to be angry” and “to react” defines the way Darko treats women and girls in relation to men in her stories. Darko, through her narrative postures, exhibits strong anti-patriarchal tendencies and attempts to deconstruct and demolish the patriarchal status quo by reducing men both husbands and fathers as worthless, irresponsible, violent and wicked in order to engineer a new social order in which women are in control of their destiny. In her works, women are victims of rape, battery, betrayal, abandonment by irresponsible husbands, economic exploitation and obnoxious cultural practices. The result is that, taken together, there is not a single man of honour in her novel. The principal male characters are irresponsible fathers and husbands, drunkards, rapists, exploiters, predators and monsters. They are presented as though they are totally detached from the general social malaise and moral decadence, but are rather congenitally, inherently and pathologically predatory, sexually depraved, perverse and evil. To tell the female side of the story, Amma Darko employs a highly subjective female viewpoint which is expressed through verbal violence or language which is deflationary and condemnatory of men, including insults and curses; the caricaturing of male characters; the muting and banishment of male characters; creating assertive female protagonists who defy male dominance in words and deeds; creating female characters who are repositories of knowledge and wisdom and who act as commentators and counsellors expressing the female viewpoint; female counter-forces based on group solidarity; and through authorial intrusion in terms of sympathy and empathy.

*Beyond the Horizon* is a narrative about a young woman transplanted from her village in Africa to urban Germany. The illegal status and a quest to attain a legal documentation to stay in the host country only lead her into a quagmire of illegal
activities. The novel also narrates a sad tale of exploitation that an undocumented immigrant is willing to undergo in order to be in the foreign land. Mara has to stake her reputation and personal integrity to make her husband’s plan work.

In the beginning of the novel, Mara is sitting in front of a mirror in her chamber at the German brothel where she is employed. She takes the reader on a journey that begins in a remote Ghanian village, Naka. Her life is disrupted when her father arranges for her to marry a man from a neighbouring village. Soon her husband, Akobi, uproots her from her rural setting and transplants her to Accra, the capital city. There Mara is physically abused, mentally tortured and raped by Akobi. Though Akobi was given education in a school but his education in Western ways is not able to give him a respectable job in Accra. He is allured by western lifestyle and obsessed with acquiring wealth. Driven by licit desires he indulges in actions and plans that eventually prove disastrous. He wanted to marry Comfort but she had rejected Akobi for a wealthy boy-friend. He plans to acquire wealth and Comfort. He exploits Mara to give shape to his dreams; he uses her in all possible ways to extract money for his plans to immigrate to Germany. There he marries Gitte, a German woman, not for love, but to gain citizenship. He wishes to procure Comfort, a Ghanian woman who had once rejected him, as a mistress. In order to finance this life he again uses Mara. He imports her through an illicit route to Germany with an intention of selling her as a prostitute. Akobi is not only completely disinterested in preserving Mara’s innocence, but is also has no qualms of conscience to exploit her youthful sexuality for his own profit and social advancement.

Although it might be argued that Mara had initially accepted a life of prostitution because she was following the dictates of the traditional African wife’s duty to obey her husband’s wishes but she is eventually crushed under the weight of her guilt that she is violating the values she had been brought up with. Mara’s journey begins in the farming village of Naka. She has been a dutiful obeying daughter and then a wife; but her obeying the dictates of the males who control her life only brings distress and utter devastation. Mara’s becoming exceedingly dutiful, patient and faithful, still does not save her from excessive torture from Akobi, her own husband. Her quest for acceptance ends in a sad reversal of her end. She undergoes bitter humiliation to realize her dream and eventually meets failure as a prostitute.
Her mother tells her, “Your life is your road, Mara. God puts you at the start of this road and propels you to walk on, and only He knows where your road will end, but it is the road He choose for you and you must walk it with gratefulness because it’s the best for you” (Darko, Amma 3). This teaching by her mother clearly shows how destiny is evoked in the name of conditions that have been fixed for women by patriarchy. When Mara’s mother informs her that her father has found a husband for her, Mara says, “All I did was grin helplessly because I clearly remember the same good news as this that mother had given my older sister two years before. Found, too, by father. And my sister was now a wreck” (Darko 4). There were women who lived happily with their husbands 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 bride price than the character of the man” (Darko 4). At the same time, her father gives her away to the son of the village undertaker for “two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin” (Darko 3). The way women are bartered for a few material things highlights the position of women and how they are equated with material possessions. Mara is then taken by her husband, Akobi, to the city. “Life in the city, Akobi soon realised, was not the glamorous days and nights he had seen in his dreams. Reality hit him and hit him real hard, and he realised furthest he could go with his level of education was a messenger clerk at the Ministries at best” (Darko 5). The novel depicts the economic and educational divide among black and white people.

Akobi ill treats Mara like a slave and Mara endures her sufferings silently. “I still regarded my suffering as part of being wife, and endured it just like I would menstrual pain” (Beyond the Horizon 13). Akobi fools Mara into using all her ornaments and possessions to pay for his visa for Germany. He even convinces his father to sell a piece of land to sponsor his trip to Europe. He exploits Mara in all possible manners to save up for his trip to Germany.

Darko shows that for many women life in the city is a continual fight for survival, and poor and uneducated women are more prone to adapt themselves to patriarchal and oppressive mechanisms having nowhere else to go. For these women a hard life in city is always better than returning to the village empty handed. Darko’s point here is that
whether in city or in rural areas around Accra, women should be able to fight against squalor and economic instability without being forced by the system to give up their dignity. (Odamtten 44)

Akobi bribes the agents heavily in order to get a visa. He lures Mara into believing that going to Germany would change their life. Akobi weaves a dream for Mara and she starts getting deluded by it. Mara views the prospect of Akobi landing in Europe with a lot of pride. This news becomes the ultimate redemptive talisman which, in Mara’s naïve estimation, cures Akobi of any marital or moral iniquity. The dreams of the city now incarnated in the magic of Europe as glorified by Akobi, “Television, radio, fridge, carpet, even car!” (Darko 34). Suddenly, the end justifies the means for Mara. Not surprisingly, there is a veiled attempt by the author to sympathise with Mara. Darko portrays Mara as simply stupid, naïve and vulnerable; she is totally incapable of reading between the lines. She is susceptible to the allure of the so-called good things of the world. “But now I let the thought sink in gradually deep into me till I began trembling and my heart began to pound unnaturally fast with excitement. So carried away was I at that moment that if Akobi had suggested there and then a wish to sell me I would gladly have agreed” (Darko 35). Mara took a leap of faith and embarked on a journey which eventually led to her doom. “In a society still economically dependent on foreign aid for survival, like most African postcolonial countries, money is worshipped by many above principles and values. Materialistic instincts are shown to prevail over dignity and morals. An economic attitude characterises most of Darko figures in the novel” (Odamtten 35).

Many Ghanians saw the opportunity to better themselves by going to aburokyire, the Akan word for ‘beyond the horizon’, or overseas. Amma Darko talking about her own experiences and what urged her to write this novel said:

If you go abroad and return you are worshipped irrespective of who you are...I did menial work and didn’t make very much money. I saw girls making so much more on prostitution. Their families were happy because they sent so much money back home. Some of mine thought I was a failure. This was something that needed to be told. (28 May 1998)
One of the strengths of this novel is its poignant depiction of the pressure on those who are abroad -‘beyond the horizon’- to send money home no matter how they earn it. Darko’s pity for immigrants, tied by family obligations to send money home, is deeply felt. There seems no escape, money and material goods from Europe prove the ‘been-to’ has been successful and brought honour to the family at home. Young girls with dreams of their future journeys abroad will profit from Mara’s sad lessons and take heed of her warning.

Mara is disposed and transferred like a commodity right from her birth. She experiences that patriarchal patterns replicate themselves from one situation to another. All the male characters depicted in the novel are despicable creatures that have no redeeming quality. Once Darko begins to develop the relationship between Mara and her supposed husband, Akobi, Akobi himself, his father and Mara’s father become the quintessential defining archetypes of the male species. Akobi is exploitative, heartless and brutish. Akobi’s father’s wealth is derived from his job as an undertaker whose constant prayer is for the outbreak of cholera so he can profit from it. About Mara’s father, we know nothing except his zeal to marry off his underage daughters, taking more into consideration “the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man” (Darko 4). As the story unfolds, it too easily collapses into an allegory in which Akobi, the principal male character, personifies vice while Mara, the principal female character, personifies virtue wrapped in the garb of innocence, naïveté and vulnerability and therefore an object of our sympathy. She courts our pity and support through the overly sentimental and lyrical narration of her experiences, first with Akobi in Accra, and then with Akobi and his accomplices in Germany where she is forced into prostitution. She presents herself as a young, innocent, illiterate, trusting, unassuming woman trapped in a violent and exploitative relationship. On the other hand, Darko presents Akobi as callous, brutish, sadistic and exploitative. The greater part of the story is devoted to Akobi’s capacity for violence on the one hand and Mara’s extraordinary capacity for endurance on the other hand. Akobi is so consumed by a passion for violence that most times the reasons he resorts to such conduct are shocking. As Mara narrates:

When I didn’t bring him the bowl of water and soap in time for washing his hands before and after eating, I received a nasty kick in the knee. When I forgot the chewing stick for his teeth, which he always
demanded be placed neatly beside his bowl of serve 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. (Darko 19)

In contrast to this when Mara moves to Germany and witnesses that Akobi is supposed to work at home; cook for Gitte, his German wife, Mara cannot imagine that husbands can be equal partners in doing household chores; what seemed to be natural for her in Naka all this while stands dismantled in Germany. Elaborating on certain culturally embedded ideas and how they can be reviewed Friedman opines, “One component of such thinking is to ‘travel’ elsewhere; a movement that can defamiliarize ‘home,’ teaching us that what we take as natural is in fact culturally produced and not inevitable” (110).

In all, Akobi is presented as a man without any edifying human emotion, least of all, love. He performs his sexual duties in a primitive, perfunctory manner, without any sensual attachment, conjugal bonding or expression of love; a man who would “wordlessly” and authoritatively “strip” off his wife’s clothes, have sex with her in a hurry and then order her “off the mattress […] because he wanted to sleep alone” (Darko 22). These abuses become so routine that they are part of the daily regime of Mara’s portion as a wife, such that when Akobi eventually leaves for Europe, instead of relief, there is rather emptiness in her. She cries endlessly to fill that void because “his beatings, his kicks, his slaps, scolds and humiliations” (Darko 44) have become a permanent feature of the marital relationship. Patricia Meyer Spack writes in this regard, “The drama of female existence centres on the effort to achieve and maintain marriage as an index of social status” and “marriage measures a woman’s success” (116). Mara makes all effort to save her marriage which defined her social status according to the patriarchal standards.

Darko presents two contrasting pictures of these partners: the male partner as oppressor and the female partner as victim. Whereas the male partner is possessed by a spirit of violence and abuse, and performs accordingly without any human compassion, the female partner, in spite of her suffering, continues to show love and affection. According to Mara, she “had grown used to Akobi […] to his bullying, to the strength he possessed over me. I didn’t like what he meted out to me with that strength and yet, at the same time, that strength made me acknowledge him as my
husband” (Darko 44). Her rationalization that male violence against women is what has come to define the image and conduct of the average marital union leaves a lasting impression on the reader.

In the second half of the story, set in Germany, Akobi moves from wife beater to wife exploiter. Akobi is a representative character who typifies and symbolizes the male trait of violence. Together with his friend, Osey, and other men, he inducts the initially unsuspecting and vulnerable Mara into prostitution and lives off Mara’s earnings. Mara is reduced to a virtual slave, trapped in an alien country and a vocation which is both designed and run by unscrupulous men. Mara’s fantasy turns into a nightmare. Trans-cultural background accentuates her sense of alienation. She faces a triple alienation on account of the colour of her skin, her gender and her illegal status in a foreign land. The alienation and a feeling of living at the fringes of the mainstream are impossible to be denied and they surface over and over again provoked by the racial and discriminatory dynamics of the dominant culture. Mara seeks the approval through compliance and stifles her spontaneity. Her naive, illiterate and village upbringing is exploited by all. The novel predominantly highlights the sexist exploitation of Mara.

Darko also hints at relationship between women trans-nationally and also of relations between women across classes. The German Gitte who is white, upper class does not help Mara to escape from her predicament; in part because of linguistic boundaries but also because of Gitte’s blindness. She does not comprehend that Mara is being exploited. Gitte benefits from Mara’s labour, she rarely questions the situation. It was convenient for Gitte; she does not question too many things aside from a few suspicions. Racism is experienced by Mara only when she moves to Germany. She is expected to wash Gitte’s clothes, do all the household chores. Racism of a white woman against a black woman is evidenced in Gitte’s silence over the exploitation of Mara everywhere. Mara learns through her sufferings. Racial and sexual factors interact in the oppression of Mara in Munich. Where in the same country Gitte enjoys freedom and a choice to lead her life as she pleases, Mara cannot rid herself from the roots of self-denial. She has to lead a life of a subaltern in her own house. Gitte joins Akobi in exploiting Mara both for her physical labour and her earnings. Not only does Mara face discrimination at the hands of her husband Akobi but she has a weaker position socially, economically and legally in Germany.
Mara feels shattered and faces a crisis in life when she faces the ultimate betrayal by her husband. Akobi had married a German woman Gitte to get a legal citizenship. When Mara arrives in Germany she is introduced as Akobi’s sister. She has to live this lie because Akobi tells her that polygamy is illegal in Germany and this was the only way that he could live in Germany. He also supports his doing so by giving examples of other black people who indulged in marriage with legal German citizens in exchange for a legal citizenship. Taking it to be a norm Mara inadvertently becomes a party to Akobi’s ploy. She nurses the insult of her betrayal and continues to suffer indignities at the hands of her husband.

The story of Mara speaks of the hard truth that the female body, by virtue of its being vulnerable to male assault is used by men to control women. This is what Akobi does when he has no other recourse to humiliate Mara. It is at this stage when Mara’s worst fears about what her husband can do to her body become a reality, that she becomes free from all fears as she has nothing more to be afraid of. She gathers the courage to challenge the authority of her husband over her body. She is ready to avenge her exploitation at the hands of her husband.

The story of Mara finds a resonance in Mahashweta Devi’s “Draupadi”, where the victimised woman eventually becomes a preceptor and puts her victimizer to utmost fear and shame. *Beyond the Horizon* is about Mara’s pitiless baring of the exploitation and humiliation that a woman of colour faces at various junctures in life. Having gone through insult, neglect and cruelty Mara reaches a point where she can take it no more and tries to subvert her situation just as Dopadi in a story named after *Mahabharat*’s “Draupadi” by Mahashweta Devi.

Mara refuses to disintegrate and resolves to reconstruct her life without being economically dependent on a man. Though Mara is a victim of lust and suffers numerous attempts on her modesty, but instead of a broken person, she emerges as an empowered being and avenges her humiliation. Mara is forced to mature under the most brutal of circumstances and her ability to exact revenge upon her tormentors, to assert herself in the end by reporting them to the authorities, evidences an internal strength hitherto not expressed: “Comfort has been deported . . . Akobi is in jail . . . Gitte, has divorced him” (Darko 138-9). Mara frees herself from perpetual bondage
and psychological dependency on Akobi. It is a brave step that she takes to shake off the bond that was constricting and needed to be discarded.

Mara chooses to do what is best for her and ends the abusive relationship with Akobi, yet she is aware that being in prostitution there is no acceptance for her in her family. Perhaps Odamtten is right in arguing that “Mara’s own lie of making her people back home in Ghana believe that she is making it good in an African restaurant cannot redeem her from the life of shame and abuse she is condemned to at Ove’s brothel” (10). Darko seems to intimate that for women, resistance is necessary, and the price is often humiliating and potentially soul-destroying. It is the women who have to face a public backlash even when they raise their voice against patriarchal dominance. Hence, society uses both the public and the private spheres to serve its own interests. Mara is compelled to be an enduring and sacrificing wife; it leads to her physical exploitation and emotional starvation. She is marginalised in her own family by a vicious social atmosphere. Her mother has no say in matters; in fact she herself is a victim of polygamy. Mara’s mother, instead of blaming her husband for the neglect, blames it on some evil magic. Superstition, sexism, racism, economic deprivation and lack of education all put together have doomed the lives of many African women. Darko brings women together in group solidarity to share their experiences of pain, vulnerability, exploitation and to galvanise appropriate responses to male dominance. All the female characters, from her sister to her mother, Osey’s wife, Gitte, and Comfort share a common story of sexist exploitation.

Darko charts the journey of Mara’s exploitation at the hands of patriarchal forces and how eventually it leads to Mara’s claim over her body, her decision to be commodified on her own terms. Amma Darko raises the socio-economic and cultural factors that are part of women’s decision to prostitute their bodies. Darko also highlights how women are forced to opt for prostitution as a means of economic survival. The tragedy of her broken marriage gives her an opportunity for self discovery. She reflects upon her past and present and is able to look back on the betrayals by those who were supposed to be her emotional anchors. Looking back she is also able to identify her real well wishers. Her narrative is a warning to all women not to be deluded by men whom they trust to be their husbands and place their blind faith in. Mara was blackmailed into prostitution by Akobi. Her own husband deserted her to move up the social ladder.
The increasing importance that economic factors have assumed in Ghana and many other post-colonial African society means that more and more women perceive an opportunity of improving their status. However, Darko demonstrates that the allure of making easy money in a largely corrupt and chaotic environment further contributes to women’s profound alienation and powerlessness in society and, in some cases, leads to their destruction. (Odamtten 47)

Darko’s bluntness and frankness in naming and exposing the malaise of her society makes her one of the most militant writers on the contemporary African literary scene. Though the centre of attention in her novel is the exposure of the enslavement of women by gender biased regime, Darko realises that women’s histories and experiences cannot be understood by referring to an abstract ideal of feminist consciousness, but can only be addressed by considering the complex interplay between the social and material conditions affecting women’s lives.

The African women have always valued community over individual progress. Mama Kioski’s character becomes the voice of African women’s feminism. Mama Kioski affirming the value of women’s status as mothers urges Mara to think again before leaving her sons behind in the village. However in the novel, Mara chooses to join Akobi in Germany ignoring the sane advice given by Mama Kioski. She had advised Mara to forget Akobi and take care of her sons in the village instead of going to Germany. “To tell you the truth, Greenhorn, if I was you, now that he’s gone I would forget him and start thinking wholly about yourself and your son. That is what you must do” (Darko 45). But Mara’s individual freedom is against social progression, she leaves her children behind. Mama Kioski is almost a surrogate mother to Mara in Accra. Her relationship with Mara typifies female bonding and solidarity.

Amma Darko has tried to fulfil her social obligation as a writer by illuminating the plight of young women who are allured by the life beyond the horizon and western ways of life. It also seems that Amma Darko is trying to remind the women of Africa that the biggest difference between them and Western women is that African women attach greater importance to the reproductive role of women and the tendency to put the community before the individual. For African women reproductive and economic roles are not in conflict with each other. The Western
feminist can gain from the African feminism in this regard. One of the reasons for the decline in population in Europe has been attributed to women choosing to opt out of their reproductive functions and instead prioritise their economic empowerment.

Although the novel depicts the cultural and masculinist subordination of women both in Ghana and Europe, it also demonstrates the importance of female solidarity as women come together to help each other. This aspect is evidenced in the relationship between Mama Kioski and Mara. Mama Kioski is always trying to liberate Mara from the label of a ‘green horn’, meaning innocent and naive about the worldly ways.

In the end Mara loses everyone, her sons, her family, her village and even her roots. Mara has reached a point of no return in Germany in the cesspool of prostitution. She has an ambivalent existence. The homeland remains a place of safety, security and belongingness but will remain frozen in memory. It is a sort of warning to other women from Africa whose lives may be similarly thwarted.

Darko also laments the Machiavellian tendencies that have gripped the simple people from Africa; the likes of Akobi and Osey represent the malaise that has afflicted the men who have no qualms of conscience in prostituting and trading their wives for material gains. *Beyond the Horizon* is a critique of the pursuit of commodities at the expense of human values. Darko’s text is a warning about the unrealistic expectations that Africans have about travelling to the west and the difficulties and hostile confrontations they will face.

Although Mara has crossed the threshold, her confessions allow her to retain her humanity. In the end she is meditative, reflective, rational and remorseful. She wants to make amends for her past mistakes to her children. The only way she can do this is by sending them money and by continuing to live a life of anonymity. In the end Mara finds herself in an inferno which she could neither douse nor escape. Mara defies cultural practices that bind her emotionally and physically to an abusive husband and leaves her marriage to embark on fictional journey of self-discovery.

Darko has a “keen sense of observation, as the writer exposes human foibles and the conflicting nature of characters caught in a nation and world where personal, political, economic and historical forces threaten to destroy the fabric of communities
fascinated and often blinded by the dazzle of globalization and materialism” (Odamtten 9). Darko emerges as a complex writer, who knows how to tell a good story, yet is confident enough in her art to deliver stinging and unflinching criticism of what Ghana has become as it, and its people, are evermore enmeshed in global capitalism. Darko attempts to explain the racial dynamics by addressing some of the existential dilemmas that women have to confront in an alien land. She deals with the sexual exploitation that black women have to undergo both at the hands of black and white males. The illegal trafficking of women from developing countries to the developed countries has also been taken up by Darko in the novel. She has shown, through her narrative, significant inequalities in relation to violence, for instance the extent of rape and partner violence committed by husbands against wives; and in relation to civil society in matters of prostitution. Darko seeks the medium of writing for discovery and expression of the collective psyche of the women from Ghana.

However, her criticism of women’s subordination includes not only male bashing but also a condemnation of women’s complacency, hypocrisy and unwitting complicity in their own subordination.