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## Table of contents

## Pages

La Fabrique de la satire dans <i>Les crapauds-brousse</i> de Tierno Monénembo, BOULINGUI Rodrigue, Docteur en Littérature Française du XVIII <sup>e</sup> siècle Collège Paul Verlaine-France.....	p.1
<i>René Maran et Joseph Zobel : une fraternité des noirs pour la cause anticolonialiste</i> Antonio Gurrieri, Contrattista di Lingua Francese, Università degli Studi di Catania, <i>Dipartimento di Scienze Umanistiche</i> , .....	p.11
L'adjectif qualificatif par réplication verbale en ghomála' comme moyen endogène d'enrichissement lexical, MAMNO FOKO Hylarie Flore, Université de Ngaoundéré, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Bertoua/Cameroun .....	p.21
Feminization of Poverty as a Postcolonial Feminist Parlance in Amma Darko's <i>The Housemaid and Faceless</i> , Kouadio Pascal KOFFI.....	p.32
Les hétérotopies spatio-temporelles dans le théâtre de Samuel Beckett, CHERKAOUI Insaf, FLSH Tétouan, Université Abdelmalek Essaâdi (Maroc) .....	p.46
Les Enjeux de la disparition du <i>bendre</i> dans le développement socioculturel au Burkina, Grégoire KABORE, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologie Institut des Sciences des Sociétés (ISS) Ouagadougou- Burkina-Faso .....	p.57
Pour une approche ethno-critique des préjugés tribaux dans <i>Les tribus de Capitoline</i> de P C Ombété-Bella, Guilioh Merlain VOKENG NGNINTEDE .....	p.68
<i>L'amour la-bas en Allemagne</i> de Catherine Paysan entre autobiographie et autofiction Nana Ngueng Nicole épouse Zébazé, Université de Dschang, Cameroun.....	p.81
Ancrage Marxiste et l'Architecture Idéologique Ségrégationniste Américaine chez Richard Wright JOHNSON Kouassi Zamina, Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny et NAOUNOU Amédée, Université Jean Lorougnon Guédé de Daloa.....	p.92
<i>Bemama</i> de Inongo-Vi-Makomè: una metafiction historiográfica de la trata negra, André Mah y Rodolphe Kuate Wafo, Universidad de Yaundé I (Camerún) .....	p.107
Cuba: las sombras de un gran sueño revolucionario, LALEKOU Kouakou Laurent, Universidad Félix Houphouët-Boigny en Abiyán (Costa de Marfil) .....	p.119

## **Feminization of Poverty as a Postcolonial Feminist Parlance in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* and *Faceless***

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### **Abstract**

This article analyses poverty as a key element of Amma Darko's feminist discourse. The merit of this statement derives from the study of postcolonial novel centred on the issue of gender and feminism. These aforementioned fields initiate a kind of relationship in which female texts are regarded as a set of pleas against systemic biases leading to poverty. *Faceless* and *The Housemaid* reveal a feminist writing seen as a particular parlance. Here, this parlance is guided by poverty as a centred theme viewed through a postcolonial feminism analysis. The work intends to show how Amma Darko conducts her parlance in accordance with poverty as an expression of female predicament and social awareness. Such a reading of Amma Darko's feminist writing sets her discourse into accurate perspective to gender inequalities in postcolonial society.

**Key-words:** postcolonial novel, gender, feminism, parlance, poverty, discourse.

### **Résumé**

Cet article analyse la pauvreté comme un élément essentiel du discours féministe d'Amma Darko. Le mérite de cette affirmation découle de l'étude du roman postcolonial centrée sur la problématique du genre et du féminisme. Ces deux champs susmentionnés initient un type de rapport duquel les textes féminins sous-entendent un ensemble de plaidoyers contre les inégalités systémiques entraînant la pauvreté. *Faceless* et *The Housemaid* dévoilent une écriture féministe vue comme un parlé particulier (sociolecte). Ici, ce parlé est guidé par la pauvreté comme un thème central perceptible à travers une analyse à la lumière du féminisme postcolonial. L'étude montrera comment Amma Darko conduit son parlé en relation avec la pauvreté comme expression de la vulnérabilité féminine et de prise de conscience sociale. Une telle lecture de l'écriture féministe d'Amma Darko positionne son discours comme une approche efficace contre les inégalités du genre en société postcoloniale.

**Mots-clés :** roman postcolonial, genre, féminisme, parlé, pauvreté, discours.



## Introduction

According to Jeanne Bisilliat and Michele Fieloux, women are the poorest of the poor people within African society (1983, 11). This statement echoes African writers' creative works such as Amma Darko's. The latter's thematic interest is generally grounded around poverty and women's social condition. Reading Amma Darko means discovering female lot entrenched in poverty seen as "the way or part of life" or "just like the blood flowing in [female characters'] body" according to Emmanuel John Kaka's terms (2013, 77). In this line, the Ghanaian writer posits her feminist discourse as a parlance beyond the traditional one known as the critique of socio-cultural elements keeping women under patriarchy.

Skipping socio-cultural elements to social illness such as poverty raises questions to gender discourse. More importantly, it calls for a theoretical reconsideration of female: To which extent poverty in feminism can be considered as a strong argument against patriarchy? In other words, how does the feministic parlance woven with poverty redeem and articulate feminism in Africa? Since then, this paper aims at demonstrating that Amma Darko sexualizes poverty and articulate it as a major gender bias in post-colonial Africa. On behalf of a postcolonial feminism lens, the paper is structured in three parts. The first part deals with the space in which Amma Darko's characters evolve. The second one is about the way the writer characterizes women in her novels. The last part analyses female characters' social status.

### I. Space in the *Housemaid* and *Faceless*: Process of Third-Worlding the Female Yard

Seen in idyllic or political talks, post-colonial Africa is more or less a modern area with modern spaces furnished with current supplies and commodities. This image makes believe that female lot might evolve in a fairer place where life within a dreadful fence would just be a past event. Reading Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* ends up this dream and settles the reader at the core of a reality designed by a poor space in which female characters are constrained. Before going deep in this remark, let delineate the notion of poverty we intend to study in this article.

First of all, it is worth mentioning that the assertion of poverty as being in defect of the minimal income to live on per day camouflages the signified reality of that term for African women. It means that income as the yardstick of poverty reduces the perception of poverty in terms of precarious conditions lived by women in Africa. According to Emmanuel John Kaka and al. "Poverty is a woman issue" and that is due to "discrimination women encountered in search and access to job, healthcare service, education, ownership" (2013, 77). As a gender issue, poverty is articulated by feminist critics as a subsequent phenomenon to a poor and marginal economic environment set for women (A. Mama and H. Abbas, 2015, 1-5). This leads Lyn Ossome to opine that "more critical feminist and political-economy analyses have argued that informal economy represents a poverty trap for women" (2015, 6). Or informal economy is most of the time related to informal space/environment. This statement concludes the fact that African women live in discriminated and poor space called Neo-liberal.

Both *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* substantiate a feminist writing creating female yard with the concept of third-world viewed in terms of margin and poverty after Christine Verschuur (2010). This is an internal margin within the whole margin called post-colonial with a gender-bias orientation. Thus, space in these two novels has a dichotomous meaning as far as gender perspective is concerned. In this line, *The Housemaid* starts with a strong warn as follows:

In Ghana, if you come into the world a she, acquire the habit of praying. And master it. Because you will need it, desperately, as a old age pursues you, and mother nature's hand approaches you with a wry smile, paint and brush at the ready, to daub you with wrinkles. (3)

As for *Faceless*, it goes like that:

She chose to spend the night on the old cardboard laid out in front of the provision store at the Agboglobhie market place because it was a Sunday. It has nothing to do with Sunday being a churchgoing day. The reason was simply that if she hadn't, she would have stood the risk of losing her newly acquired job of washing carrots at the vegetables wholesale market. Fofu would have spent the Sunday night into Monday dawn with her friends across the road at the squatters' enclave of Sodom and Gomorrah watching adult films her fourteen years required her to stay away from, and drinking directly from bottles of akpeteshie<sup>9</sup>, or at best, some slightly milder locally produced gin. (1)

These two excerpts from *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* can yet be read in accordance with the setting and space in postcolonial feminist writing. The first text tells the reader about the post-colonial Ghana viewed as a hostile place for women. In fact, the narrative voice in the excerpt reminds the reader of the ugly face of post-colonial Ghana for women. The second text goes along with this idea that it unravels the plight of Fofu in an area where living becomes strenuous and horrible. Drawing from the fact that "a She" is not welcome in such an area because "She" will have to undergo the hard/harsh reality from the space, Amma Darko inscribes a postcolonial feminist complaint about post-colony. This complaint raises questions to "third-world" as a whole space with internal stratifications. There is the whole "third-world" with local elite prescription and a fractal third-world/space in which evolve the subalterns. Amma Darko's reader can make this remark with the presence of "Agboglobhie market" where Fofu goes on night vigil for survival.

The concept of third-world is no more (only) valuable with regard to a first-world representing the Western counterpart. As Deepika Bahri puts it, spatial marginality is caused by "those who retard or resist the project of modernity and development" (2009, 203). Third-world space within the whole third-world/nation depicts an internal relation based on a dialectical overlapping between a modern area and excluded one with a poor figure. In the light of Amma Darko's texts, the within third-world is female and designed after capitalism moulded in postcolonial acceptance. Such a perception of the space in female texts put forth the deconstructive argument against postcolonial ideology viewed as a nation-building effort criticized by some renowned postcolonial feminist such as Uma Narayan (2009, 1997), Chandra

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<sup>9</sup> Ghanaian local alcohol

Mohanty (2003) and Gayatri Spivak (1990). All of them bemoan that postcolonial movement (preserving unity) fails to make it real by excluding women as subjects and sometimes complains about feminism as westernization. This polemical hiatus between feminism and postcolonialism is here visible in terms of space in Amma Darko's texts. For example, "Agboglobshie" is painted in *Faceless* as a backward space within Accra. More importantly, it is dominantly settled by women for economic purpose. The narrative gives more clues about this inner city place and highlights. It is built from exclusion and capitalist management of Accra as a modern city:

This was an area that used to known as Fadama, so named by the early settlers there who were mostly from the north. Fadama means "swampy" in Hausa, which the area was. Then, in the early sixties, not too long after independence, the combination of a severe flooding, caused by days of heavy downpour and a government decision to dredge the lagoon to fill the lowlands of Fadama, necessitated the evacuation of the residents to Zongo, near Abossey-Okai and to new Fadama, near Abeka. For several years, the area of Old Fadama lay bare. Across at Agboglobshie, the government of the day, acquired the land for industrial purposes and paid due compensation to its indigenous settlers, some of whom procrastinated over their relocation. Then following the demolition of the Makola market in the heat of the 1979 revolution, the pressing need for the creation of a new market for many floating traders hastened the construction of the Agboglobshie market, and the realization of the area's industrial hopes, after the procrastinating dwellers were forcibly evacuated in police and military trucks to new settlement at Madina. In anticipation of the area soon becoming a brisk trading place, the Konkomba yam settlers were re-located there from the timber market. Thus, begun the gradual settlement of squatters in the area on the eastern bank of the lagoon and west of Abossey-Okai. (65-66)

Read as a retrospective, the above passage reveals how "Agboglobshie" has come to be what it is. Here, one can notice that this place results from the urbanisation and the economic planning of Accra. It means that modernism and capitalism go hand in hand, and they function in disfavour of poor people. In fact, "Agboglobshie" is built out of exclusion from urge to profit-making and state consolidation acted after independence. As such, capitalism and neoliberal completion redeploy Accra with discriminated spaces as one of their paramount consequences. Therefore, "Agboglobshie market" happens as a third-world within Accra where poor people such as women settle for low-economic purposes. This image justifies spatial stratifications under modernism fuelled by global economic needs. It also debunks local elite complicity to the creation of that margin.

Drawing from the existence of "Agboglobshie" in Accra, it becomes obvious that space in Amma Darko's two novels (under study) expresses an ambiguous figure. This figure can be explained through the consubstantial existence of two distinguishable spaces in one by dint of development. If Accra is known as a modern city, it is also beset with places liked "Agboglobshie" which receives poor people or women. The coexistence between Accra and its slums substantiate the way the whole country is planned with privileged centres against backward suburbs. This image of that cohabitation between the centre and periphery is given in *The Housemaid*. The novel portrays the relationship between traditional Africa and the modern one. While rural areas are painted as boring, less entertaining and void in terms of job



opportunities, the cities are represented as the poles of social fulfilment as revealed in this passage:

Kataso, a village in the eastern hills, had no flowing water, no electricity, no entertainment centre, nothing. [...] which therefore left sex as the only really affordable entertainment in Kataso. Everyone- young, old, mature and immature- indulged in it freely, making the two midwives the busiest of the village professionals. The young men, when they could no longer stand this bland, would leave for Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi, to work as shoe-shine boys, trucks pushers or hawkers of items such as popcorn, dog chains and air fresheners along the cities's busiest streets. (9-30)

The image is patent; the rural area viewed from Kataso is dull. That dullness conducts to an over-use of sexual activities and then makes young people escape to. Confronted to social realities in the city, Kataso has a feminine visage to the extent that the lack of commodities underlined here and its impacts are more prejudicial to women than men. For example, the absence of "flowing water" doubles women suffering as far as daily chores related to house-holding are concerned, and "no entertainment" set women as the villagers' sex-pot.

Such depiction of places in respect of the concept of "third-world" makes Amma Darko's reader reconsider this term as an intra-subversive item. In fact, read as third-world, space in Amma Darko's novels becomes the crux of dissensions between men and women. It means that poverty takes roots from the space that carves women. That is why apart from the "inability to have access to material resources" Emmanuel John Kaka includes "the lack of access to education, health services, inability to partake in decisions making and exposure to external circumstances" (78). All these elements cited by Kaka are related to the environment in which people live. And Amma Darko's fictional Ghana has spaces that compelled women to poverty because these spaces are themselves poor in terms of modern commodities and inclusive policies of development.

This kind of spatial injustice lies at the origin of Gayatri Spivak's querulous title known as "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) in which she criticizes the constraints the rural/peasant women go through. Since then, we can argue that the suicide committed by the young girl<sup>10</sup> is due to that silent and poor social environment where access to legal institutions is forbidden to women. As for Amma Darko's novels, the space is gendered, used as questions to post-colonial states and it finally validates feminism within postcolonial ideology. That is to say feminism is not odd to Africa because sexualisation of space affords it. The depiction of Osiadan in *The Housemaid* fills in Amma Darko's feminist plea through which poverty is woven around female characters and gender issues. That is why Koumagnon Alfred Djossou Agboadannon argues in his doctorate thesis that

*In the Housemaid*, Amma Darko fulfils her role of fiction writer by creating Osiadan, a small fictional village as a microcosm of the wider national trauma of chaos, suspicion and silence imposed on the female dwellers who attempt to defy the order of oppression and subjugation, the very system which maintains an atmosphere of poverty and relegation. (2018, 136)

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<sup>10</sup> Spivak starts her essay by a story of suicide committed by a young girl.



In the above quotation, space is viewed as the first element from which Amma Darko inscribes the necessity of feminism in her fictional Ghana. Thus, post-colonial area related to gender is depicted as ambiguous to the extent that it has got two contradictory visages with the filthy one reserved to female characters. These characters' creation also substantiates Amma Darko's plea for female empowerment visibly daunted and hindered by poverty regarding how they are painted in *The Housemaid* and *Faceless*.

## II. Characterization in *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* or the Personification of Poverty

If the first section shows how poverty is feminised in accordance with space, the present section analyses how Amma Darko carves poverty with female embodiment. It means Darko's reader comes across female characters wrapped in poor outfits. According to Pheny Butale, the definition of poverty should be relative because it derives from lived experience (2015, 4). Post-colonial Africa constitutes an important paradigm from which reality about poverty with women's concern may be seen as peculiar as one can notice in the novels under study. *The Housemaid* as a title brings more clues justifying women's indigence. In fact, being "a housemaid" in post-colonial context depicted in the novel is a tantamount of unravelling all the indigence female characters like Efia carry with them. Amma Darko's Efia is a naive girl taken from a rural area (Kataso) to Accra for house-holding. She is painted as an ignorant living with her village mind (blind to city realities). As such, Efia is set to be exposed to the blunt realities of poverty in Accra since the only thing for which she is needed is what Teacher discloses to her parents: "The basics. If she can clean, wash, sweep and cook well, that's all" (41). All these housekeeping chores require Efia to be "reliable" according to her boss, because as she justifies "The whole house will be in her complete care on many occasions. It is important for me to be able to trust her enough not to have to worry about my home when I am away (41). From this statement, one realises that Accra will not change Efia into a refined woman. In other words, the lady stays illiterate, unknowledgeable and thus vulnerable in a city where only literacy can pave a successful way.

The failure is also noticeable with other female characters such as Akua who is Efia's age and village mate. Akua is painted as a young girl from Kataso to Accra for being a mere porter. She faces a real plight in the city and she sometimes whores for survival. That is why the narrator of *The Housemaid* comments on as follows: "Life as porter in Kumasi was not what a normal person would call living. It was a survival" (32). The narrator's comment forecasts the reader about the category of persons working as porter: Poor people. Their poverty includes lack of skills, competency and capability. It is then a basic lack due to the paradigmatic shift afforded by the "post-colonial" context. That is to say like Amartya Sen, "Poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes<sup>11</sup>" (2001, 87). Drawing from Sen's assertion, Efia and Akua are perceived as characters that do not suit modernism because they have no merit. Their profile exposes poverty to the extent that they show deficiency in basic competencies to modern life.

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<sup>11</sup> A. Sen cited by Pheny Butale in *Discourse of Poverty in Literature: Assessing Representation of Indigence in Post-colonial Texts from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe*, Stellenbosch University, 2015

The policy of casting female characters wrapped in poverty continues in *Faceless*. This time, Darko's reader meets homeless young girls such as Oderlay, Fofu and Baby T ending up into prostitution in Accra. These female characters encapsulate one of the most current phenomena of modern Africa called 'street children', and then considered by Kofi Anyidoho as "one of the most widely discussed social tragedies of our time"<sup>12</sup> (2003, xix). Being a social tragedy, street phenomenon seen in the aforementioned female characters opens the reader's eyes upon an aspect of poverty exhibited by young girls supposed to be at school. It may be why Clémence Capo-Chichi and Djosou Agboadannon state that "In *Faceless*, poverty is something one can see by one's eyes and touch with one's fingers. [Because] it is something concrete, touchable, physical and mental" (2015, 177). This statement helps us argue that Fofu and her age mates onto the street portray indigence, misery and pauperisation since their life is constrained into squalor, humiliation and violence. These are the poorest faces of poverty one can see and touch in *Faceless*. As the rule goes, according to Fofu, "one can do anything and everything in peace here so long as one follows the rule. [It means] live in peace, trade in peace, steals in peace, deal in peace, sin in peace, by doing nothing to upset them" (156)

The long list of 'ironical peace' within the quote underscores some of the humiliations street girls go through under "stone-hearted men such as Poison" after Kouakou N'Guessan's words in his work on *Faceless* (2019, 209). At the same time, the rule recited by Fofu shows how powerless these young girls are on the street. Put it differently, Fofu and others' image substantiates poverty for they are farming, being raped and sacrificed in the street without a prospect rescue. That is to say they inherit poverty from their parents, namely their mothers also painted with poverty designs.

The bulk of studies on 'street children' in *Faceless* argue that among many others, parents' mismanagement of family is one of the root causes sacking their boys and girls into the street. Even though such an idea cannot be debunked at the first sight, one can counter-argue that poverty in Darko's novels is inscribed in inheritance line. In other words, Fofu and her sister Baby T assume their fate from their one-parental mother Maa Tsuru. The latter is painted as a perfect representation of poverty. From mindset to social relationship, this mother is fixed in *Faceless* as passive, malleable and sexpot. At the social level, she is good but at making babies for irresponsible men passed for temporary husbands. In fact, Maa Tsuru's passivity and naivety predispose her to vulnerability in post-colonial context where distraught men such as Kpakpo are desperately looking for being catered. That is why the narrator of *Faceless* objects that "Kpakpo would not have gained the opportunity to abuse in the first place, had Maa Tsuru not acted deliberately blind and let him into her life" (157). This narrative stance is well justified because Kpakpo is not Maa Tsuru's first user. There are Kwei and Onko who spent a few but devouring time with her. Unfortunately, the adage saying that wisdom comes from experiences brushes against Maa Tsuru's ears.

As consequence, she is numb to previous events and keeps on bedding men with the same discourse on her lips: "I am a woman and I [am] lonely" (157). This is like an open door to any man to enter her life. Thereby, Maa Tsuru is seen in *Faceless* as a mother whose children

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<sup>12</sup> This quote is taken from the introductory essay entitled *Amma Darko's Faceless: A New Landmark in Ghanaian Fiction (to Faceless)* by Kofi Anyidoho

vanish into the street because she cannot meet their basic needs as well as she cannot do for herself. In this line, the portrayal of Maa Tsuru fits Amma Darko's feminist discourse that consists of creating poverty with feminine figures. This of Maa Tsuru is "the prototype of inaction, cowardice, illiteracy money greediness" as Clémence Copo-Chichi and Djossou Agboadannon reveal (op. cit., 181).

Maa Tsuru's like does exist in *The Housemaid* through the character of Mami Korkor. She is also one-parent mother. Living with her four children, Mami Korkor is painted as a busy woman, "a fresh-fish hawker (10). Doing that petit job for the survival of her whole family, the woman is regularly absent from home. This permanent absence weighs down on her children namely her ten-year-old girl who has to take on housekeeping. On top of all, her boys have to scavenge for old clothes for dressing themselves because her fish business cannot fit in. Like Maa Tsuru, Mami Korkor is a single mother, illiterate but active and courageous; unless her activities are conducted in informal since she is in lack of means to come into the formal economic sphere. Her occupation takes all her time without enough income to meet her family ends as the following excerpt underlines: "She had to hawk fish from dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and her four children. They all depended on her. Not a pesewa came from their father" (11). If the last sentence of the extract incriminates the father as irresponsible, Mami Korkor ten-year-daughter's (Bibio) complaint shows her mother compliance to their common fate. Bibio addresses her mother this sorrowful way: "Why, after making Nereley with him, when you realised how irresponsible he was, did you go ahead to make Akai, me and Nii Bois as well? May be a rhetorical question to mother, Bibio's disappointments give more clues of similitude between Maa Tsuru and Mami Korkor.

Both characters portray misery on postcolonial mothers desperately searching for husband since singleness viewed as a social malady continues to haunt them. It means they are people "For whom things did not change" as Ama Ata Aidoo titles one of her shorts stories in *No Sweetness Here* [1970] (2013, 9). They stay iconoclastic to modern life based on mainstream ideologies. Nevertheless, this kind of mothers deeply engrossed into maternity subsumes the post-colonial plight related to gender issues to the extent that they appear to be updated women floating in modern life. The burden of maternity and child caring become the daily trial as Maa Tsuru and Mami Korkor underscore in *Faceless* and *The Housemaid*. Depicting such a mother figure in postcolonial novel epitomises a feminist parlance in search of social awareness about women's lot. Tackling the issue from poverty through poor characters such as Maa Tsuru and Mami Korkor, Amma Darko questions motherhood related to new standards of living. This takes into account social environment and means for caring children.

Poverty is also seen in more independent female characters in Amma Darko's novel. It means the Ghanaian writer expounds her view of poverty through different types of female characters. Madam Sekeyiwa and her daughter Tika are used for that purpose. The first is painted as a "100 per cent illiterate" (18) woman who uses her fertility to gain control over a man longing for child since his wife is barren. As soon as she fulfils maternity, the man sets her up in business and "she [becomes] one of the wealthy market mammies" (18) as the narrator relates. Unfortunately, both wife and husband argue all the time because Sekyiwa does not feels



real love for the man. The worst thing of all happens when the man's virility wanes away: Sekyiwa pays young men for good sex.

The above account raises questions to Madam Sekyiwa's moral integrity. In fact, the character's behaviour sets her as a depraved woman whose body is exposed to men. In addition to illiteracy, Sekyiwa takes with her an array of imperfection such as unfaithfulness, sex driving and lack of dignity. These aforementioned imperfections remove her from being a model mother for her daughter Tika. This second character falls aside because she definitely steps in her mother's toes in spite of her will to drive a moralistic life as the narrator tells us: "It had never been Tika's dream still to be single and childless at the ripe of age of thirty-five" (17). But Tika's initial plan fails as soon as she accepts to inter trading on her mother proposal. Yet, she also becomes a wealthy woman but with loose morals. She beds several men for economic purposes after having realised that the social tissue is over-dominated by men always wanting sex from women. Then, she condones her literacy and indulges her everything in that win-win game consisting in paying access of goods and assets with sex.

Both related characters portray poverty to the extent that the first falls aside moralistic path and sacrifices moral values onto sexual lust. As for the second, sexual service paid to numerous men sets her as a sexpot easily falling into men's trap. In a nutshell, Madam Sekyiwa and her daughter are seen as poor characters because, among many other tools, they choose their sex to sink through the male dominated society as Ama Ata Aidoo's Mansa does in *In The Cutting of a Drink*. They would just say 'any tool is tool' like Mansa who replies to her brother that "Any kind of work is work" (Op. Cit, 43). Such a stance debunks the advocacy viewing prostitution as the highest level of perversion and female subjugation. On the contrary, female characters behaving like Mansa stay in the margin of the society and endanger female lot. Thus painting female characters involved in prostitution, Amma Darko scrutinises poverty as it prevails in post-colonial Africa. It is also her writing policy to convey feminist message through which people are urged to see women's predicament. This predicament is pervasive in their social status as one can remark in Darko's texts under study.

### III. Socialising Women as Mapping Poverty

The cartography of poverty can be observed across social status women occupy in *The Housemaid and Faceless*. Thereby, poverty has got its own space within the same society as depicted in both two novels. The first conceptual reality that highlights the fact that women's social status in Darko's fiction delineates poverty is citizenship. It lies at the beginning of women's movement giving birth to 'first wave feminism' (J. Pilcher, I. Whelehan, 2004, 11). Till now, the achievement of citizenship by women remains controversial since it is always at the core of current feminist discourses. In fact, these discourses have shifted from sexual identity to social challenges in the line of gender issues. Female writers in Africa justify this trend if we trace back to seminal texts such as Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Maria Ma Bâ's *A So Long Letter* (1979<sup>13</sup>) where female characters are entering modern citizenship in new established states always resting upon traditional worldview.

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<sup>13</sup> I refer to the French version

The 1990s' generation writes in the continuum questioning women's social status. As for Amma Darko, citizenship becomes the backbone of the myriad of questions she raises to gender in post-colonial Africa. This is done with different female characters crowned with marginal position within a fictional society where citizenship does not fit female lot. Let's admit with Pilcher and Whelehan that "citizenship is a status within which the person (or the citizen) has the right and/or obligation of membership of a wider community, especially a nation-state" (ibid, 10). This status counts with civil rights, political rights and social rights according to Marshall's elaboration in *Citizenship and Social Class* (T.H. Marshall, 1950, 11). The latter may be fulfilled through economic position, security and modern life standards inclusive to both man and woman. At this level, Darko's female characters fall aside because they are painted as excluded from social rights as defined by Marshall.

From economic point of view, most of the women in *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* are painted as the representative body of informal workers. Mami korkor, Efia, Akua, traders at Agbogbloshie, young prostitutes constitute a list of these female characters doing petit jobs in big cities like Accra and Kumasi. Their profile questions citizenship and unravels disseminated problems into capitalism. Inserted into feminist parlance, marginal female characters substantiate Amma Darko's response to ill-distribution of economic space preventing social actors to enjoy full citizenship. For example, some female characters' physical and social security are jeopardized since their economic status cannot afford them tranquillity and nor helps them assume full membership to their society. The narrator of *The Housemaid* gives a convincing clue in the following extract:

Like her mates, Akua had no regular home. They all lived in unfinished buildings; when final completion work started, they moved out. Thanks to bribes of cash and sex, workers at the building sites regularly tipped them on the next place available for occupation. Because they were living there illegally and the building owners occasionally stopped by, nothing that might betray their presence was allowed. Cooking was out; they ate strictly by the roadside. Water stored in reservoirs for construction work sufficed for their washing and bathing purposes. Drinking water was bought and stored in plastic bottles, and nearby bushes were their easing grounds.  
(32)

Drawing from the above extract, the reader can subsume female condition into homelessness, instability and humiliation which are real obstacles to citizenship completion. It also sheds lights on a category of excluded citizens who remain in the margin of the society because their status constrains them to. This margin derives from the social position citizens occupy according to the passage. It means that Akua and her mates represent the poor face/space of Accra. As such, they are used to serve a feminine cause in a post-colonial society. The cause may be different from earlier ones more related to traditional biases mixed with modern apprehension of life portrayed by Bâ and Nwappa. Amma Darko's assessment of femininity goes along Buchi Emecheta's quest for citizenship in a world where this conceptual reality is denied to women. That is to say Adah's story in *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) is a story of poverty against which this female character stays strong and tries to get over.

Different from Adah, Darko's poor (female) characters seen here are powerless and live on the periphery of the society. Maa Tsuru and her children give another clue to poverty. They

have no status worthy to modern life that deals with commodities and decent living. The mother is a mere woman assuming maternity as unsocial beings may do: Just giving birth and offspring to live their way. This inclines us to state that motherhood is also endangered since it enters citizenship paradigm under modernity. Therefore, Maa Tsuru condones the pain she endures when Onko rapes her daughter. First of all, the woman is not capable to take her suffering child to hospital. Next, she is obliged to accept bribes from the rapist so as to expect giving care to the raped. Finally, the mother loses her dignity and succumbs to challenges of citizenship since she is law-illiterate and lack of money to take legal initiatives against the rapist. All she does is what the narrator of *Faceless* tells us:

Maa Tsuru stared long at the thick wad of notes in her hand. There was a look of worry and hopelessness in her eyes and another not so easily discernible. Then she rested her gaze upon Onko's face. [...] Tears welled up in Maa Tsuru's eyes [...] Maa Tsuru looked him directly in the face. She said nothing. (138-39)

Not saying anything in such a circumstance where maternity and motherhood are set into trial means Maa Tsuru is deprived of meaningful aptitudes to that end. Then her silence justifies her poverty and reveals her as a symbol of misery prevailing in post-colonial context. Such a symbol constitutes an entity mapping poverty as a category of women literally impotent. Their impotency is more visible when it has come to deal with citizenship which is a modern concept of societal membership.

The same inertial status is exhibited by Mami Korkor who stands out as a miserable mother with fewer means. School, healthcare and social security do not exist in her daily battle against poverty. Living is then a passive trend for this mother limited to live on the minimal. Her plight prevents her from playing the full role she should for her children. Therefore, her economic status challenges her social one meant to value her personal profile among her people. In other words, mothering stands for economic prerogatives to fulfil citizenship as required under post-colonial society. But mothers whose children are daily “scavenging” from public waste, expecting a chanced discovery of materials don't fit modernity. Even if this phenomenon is depicted as subsequent to urbanity, it scarves a marginal status to people and then excludes them from the development process. People of Mami Korkor's sort are trapped into the jaws of progress and compelled to live accordingly. That is why her daughter reminds her of this: “And don't forget [...] that this very blouse I am wearing also came from the rubbish dump” (11). Put it differently, only economic means can help the mother live a decent life and be able to provide her children with good education.

Painting women with such a social status in her fiction, Amma Darko touches actual difficulties women are facing in modern context. These problems are related to the issue of emancipation. Let's remind that postcolonial feminists are more attached to motherhood and maternity. This can be observed with *Bâ* or *Nwappa* whose main characters stay strongly related to their offspring. This epistemological perception of femininity is somehow problematic since women are themselves redefined into parameters that design citizenship. Before a huge number of students, the French President<sup>14</sup> on his way to an AU-EU Summit (in Abidjan) argues that

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<sup>14</sup> From President Macron's speech made on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at University Ouaga I (Burkina Faso), available on [youtube.com/watch?v=VsSIgXofR-E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsSIgXofR-E), consulted on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021



motherhood should not be a hindrance to African women's emancipation. Yet again, critics with nationalist wings and somehow disapproving classical philanthropy may respond putting maternity at the core of any socialising process in Africa. But the matter is more related to responsibility than belief and tradition.

However, Emanuel Macron betrays a secret inseminated in African female writers' fictional books. In fact, maternity celebration is going through a plummeting chart from first to third generation of writers. This changing trend is due to contextual realities that sharp life standards deeply woven with economic treads. Thus, Amma Darko depicts how these standards ask for motherhood redefinition so that women can afford a better citizenship. Maternity advocacy shifts from identity claim to individual social blossoming. It means that the traditional Africa thought to be 'gender free' as defended by some scholars such as Oyèrónké Oyewùmi (2003 & 1997) and Nkiru Nzegwu (2006) is now altered and replaced by a contemporary society where citizenship is at stake.

Amma Darko's assessment of motherhood is what Evan Maina Mwangi posits as "a self-reflexive treatment of gender and sexual relations" (2009, 1) in postcolonial fictions by female writers. This is because the portrayal of Maa Tsuru and Mami Korkor mirrors local realities. It is also more addressed to internal (than external) pitfalls in social, economic and political systems of governance undermining female figure. From her portrayals, the Ghanaian author assesses women's social status in accordance with actual societal principles and modern standards. Fictionalising these standards is tantamount to reveal outdated role and status that calls for a feminist appraisal. Poverty is the angle from which female status is viewed by Amma Darko in *The Housemaid* and *Faceless*.

### **Conclusion**

From homogeneous to heterogeneous appraisal of gender, feminism assumes a parlance that may vary according to the location of the subject. Not really specific to postcolonial feminists, poverty is yet spilling over its discourse. *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* are written in that respect. Both novels by Amma Darko depict poverty in relation with women. They substantiate the author's policy to expound on the necessity of feminism in postcolonial Africa where misery and pauperisation are irreversibly getting a feminine figure. This advocacy is seen in the way the writer organises her fiction from creative point of view. With synchronicity, space, characterisation and socialisation are created with poverty and associated to women. Space is then female and worthy to third-world. Characterisation scarves female characters exhibiting poverty in their entire dimension. As a consequence, we agree to say that space in Darko's novel creates its corresponding inhabitants convinced to live the poorest life it may afford. Such a writing policy aims at furthering feminist efforts against poverty being the paramount obstacle to female emancipation. Female empowerment is therefore related to consciousness and economic matters.

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