

The Feminist Voice in Contemporary Ghanaian Female Fiction: A Textual Analysis of Amma Darko's *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers*

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Abstract

This paper attempts a critical analysis of two of Amma Darko's novels, *Faceless* (2003) and *Not Without Flowers* (2005). It identifies how Darko uses prose fiction as a vehicle to cross-examine the complexities of the Ghanaian woman's life in relation to culture and gender. Through in-depth study, critical appreciation, and critical textual analysis of the novels, the paper explores feminist insights into Darko's philosophical reflections on the plight of women and girls in contemporary Ghana. It plays on the theoretical assumption that literature is a mirror of society and, in its effectiveness, tenders different perspectives of existential problems and their solutions. It thus interrogates some of the themes in the novels from the Womanist Literary and African Feminists perspectives. The contention is that Darko's novels reflect the nature, causes of, and possible solutions to the numerous feminist issues confronting the contemporary Ghanaian female. Finally, I conclude that the novels provide important lenses through which we can better understand some of the core cultural contexts of feminist issues in contemporary Africa as a whole.

Keywords: Feminism, Culture, Gender, Polygamy

1. Introduction

For many years very little was known about the aesthetics of the female in Africa except the metaphorical paintings in negritude writings. Her outer beauty was greeted by literary writers who ignored the cultural experiences that shrouded the beauty of her everyday life. From girlhood to womanhood, the African woman has had to contend with many issues that militate against her 'being' as she journeys through life's winding cycles dictated by culture. Marriage, childlessness, old age, stereotyping amongst other tenets of the African culture are discussed as some of the issues fretting the contemporary Ghanaian female. The premise here is that fictional narrative is often generated by life experiences and women writers in Africa regularly focus on women's condition in their works of fiction (Mojola 1997). One such contemporary female writer, Ghanaian born Amma Darko, provides us with novels (*Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers*) that depict some of the experiences of the present-day Ghanaian female. The feminist voice in this paper concedes the aim of feminism as an advocacy for the rights of women, and African feminism as a call for looking at issues bothering them with an African eye.

The Novels: *Faceless* & *Not Without Flowers*

Faceless, is a story of a mother, Maa Tsuru, who loses grip on her own life and the lives of her children, leaving them at the clemency of the predators of the mores. It is also about four educated women who are inspired by the plight of a 14-year old girl, Fofu, Maa Tsuru's daughter. In the course of recounting how this comes about and who are involved, Darko presents feminist trepidations on issues such as stereotyping, abuse of females, marriage, childlessness and motherhood, education, poverty and exploitation, and parental neglect. As the main characters convert their library centre into a practical street initiative, the novel presents the squalor, health risks and violence that drive the contemporary Ghanaian women and children to unimaginable conditions.

Not Without Flowers fictionalizes the perils of apathy in life and infidelity in relationships, the contribution of women to this and the effect on women. It digs into the dark trenches of cultural mores where polygamy, motherhood and childlessness robs many women off true happiness. It depicts the chaos and perverted values in contemporary Ghanaian society. The replicating effect of this includes madness, childlessness, and streetism and HIV/AIDS infection resulting in yawning family watersheds.

Issues from the Feminist Perspective

Polygamy is an age-old African tradition whereby a man is permitted to have as many wives as he can fend for. Even in religion, polygamy is tolerated making it an integral feature in the African life. According to Ali (1983), the

Qur'an indicates that: "Marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; But if ye fear that ye shall not. Be able to deal justly (with them) then only one (100). Nevertheless, polygamy has its rubrics; the man has to obey these rules to warrant harmony in his family. The most vital of the rules is equal share of all resources amongst the number of wives. Practically, this is impossible because the newest wife often enjoys more favour from the husband. This unfairness is the major source of conflict in many polygamous marriages. The reason for the conflict in Darko's *Not Without Flowers* is no different; 5th Wife is given preferential treatment by the husband because she is the newest wife. As a result, she has to contend with the wrath of her co-wives and in-laws when her husband dies; a special widowhood right; marrying her dead husband's brother, is prescribed as punishment for depriving others of the attention of their husband.

Even though polygamy is traditionally an acceptable practice in many African cultures, Darko, like many female African writers; Emecheta's *Joy of Motherhood*, Aidoo's *Changes* and Ba's *So Long A Letter*, indicates that it always "took a certain kind of woman to agree to become the second wife" (Darko 2007:270) when such traditional conditions as the fertility of the first wife was not the reason. In *Not Without Flowers*, Kakraba's reaction to the visits of 'Teacher', Ma's reaction to Pa and 'Flower's' relationship as well as Aggie's opposition to the relationship between Idan and Randa suggests that polygamy is not entirely cherished by women in contemporary Ghana. Darko presents polygamy as a spectacle of the greed and egoistic control of men over women when she depicts that "they (women) are all taboos to Pesewa; lovers, girlfriends, chicken-soups, concubines. If he wanted a woman, he simply made her his wife. Period." (Darko 2007:57). The agony women go through when they have to yield to the control of men this way is evident in 1st Wife's expression of sorrow when she gets to know about 2nd Wife: "It was her faith that gave her strength... The first time Pesewa retired to his bedroom with his second wife, who for that moment was his favourite and more desired wife, it was the faith of first wife that got her down on her knees in front of her bed to pray to God to expand her vessel of endurance. She prayed to God as if she was talking to Him face to face. "...please God, expand my endurance so that I can bear the pain of his want for this other woman to whom he has legitimize his right to desire, so that as I promised before all who once gathered..."(271-272)

Ma as well, cannot fathom an intruder in her marital home either. She also falls on her religious faith which teaches her to pray with the hope of receiving an answer:

Ma had been married to him for too long not to notice. She sensed his agony at forcing passion where it had ceased to exist, his desperate attempts to right the wrong done her by clamouring to inject life into what was long dead at its roots. Ma's prayers slowly began to find voice. And when she prayed, it was no longer only for the easing of the pain in her heart, but also for survival of her mental faculties, because she began to feel and sense it slowly and gradually slipping away (339)

Most African female writers present polygamy negatively, with respect to women. They suggest that polygamy as a form of marriage has come to stay. However, Darko, in addition to this negative presentation, grants women with alternative uses of polygamy; for their betterment. To her, polygamy is not entirely disadvantageous to women; it is within the powers of women to make it beneficial to themselves: for emotional support, financial support and motherhood. For instance, in *Not Without Flowers*, 5th Wife agrees to a polygamous marriage because she needs to be attached, have emotional support and not be bothered with having children: "I mentioned emotional security as being one of my reasons for marrying my late husband. That was it. It alleviated the misery of unfulfilled expectancy with a younger man looking forward to having children." (Darko 2007:95)

The polygamous marriage of Ntifor and his wives solves the problem of childlessness. Since one of the rules in polygamy is that children of such a union belong to all the wives, Panyin's inability to conceive is concealed and she rejoices in the children of her co-wife. This is made known to Mena Penyin by Kakraba anytime the latter tried raising the issue, saying: "a little jealousy, yes. Even till today. I am human, Kakraba. You are the mother of all his children... The children I bore with him belong to us all. Our children, Penyin." (Darko 2007: 160)

On the other hand, polygamy involves having multiple sex partners and this is often blamed, by the medics, for the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. However, Darko rather blames such disease infections in any marital set-up on conjugal infidelity and not its polygamous nature. She reminds us that had 2nd Wife been faithful to her husband, the infection would not have occurred. More importantly, had Pesewa maintained just one wife, 2nd Wife would not have existed let alone be unfaithful. Therefore, Darko advocates conjugal fidelity in marriages, whether polygamous or monogamous.

Stereotyping of elderly women is another issue of concern to the feminist. In *Not Without Flowers*, Idan's grandmother has a gift of premonition. It is by this gift that she senses a bad omen concerning her grandson's marriage. This is not the first experience of premonition she or a family member has had about something. But this time, she asks to be allowed to perform a rite to avert the misfortune. This spells a clash of cultures and religions; the African versus the Western culture; Christianity versus Traditional Religion. The old woman is not fortunate. Her premonition is dismissed initially as just the hunch of an old woman (166). Her own nephew instigates the family to brand her a witch. In effect, she is not only prevented from performing her rites, she is banned from coming near the marriage ceremony or the couple. Eventually, the inevitable happens; the couples knock down and kill a boy on their wedding day. Years later, after the marriage, tragedy hits the couple; they are unable to have a child and other issues follow (166). In the end, the marriage of the couple is destroyed by childlessness and subsequently, the deadly HIV/AIDS. Darko as a result, beckons on society to give some credit to the voice of elderly women who are embodiments of African traditions. She believes allowing Abrewa to perform the rite could have averted the misfortune that befalls the couple as Destine remarked thoughtfully, "Maybe she should have been allowed to have her way" (218). Notably, she prays society to learn to put tradition, culture and religion in their right perspectives rather than dismissing them entirely. Similarly, in the interjecting story in *Not Without Flowers* on Akatasia and the Londoner's marriage, traditional culture clashes with the western culture, once more a woman is caught in between the tussle. It is Akatasia's grandmother, Abrewa, who protests the defamation of the traditional marriage because Akatasia wears a black dress for the event and calls the traditional marriage "just an engagement". Abrewa is not listened to but unlike Idan's Grandmother, "Abrewa feared this (bad omen) but she kept it to herself because just as she had been shut up about the black dress, so too would she be shut up about this. After which she would be lucky not to be declared a witch" (175). "lucky" is used here sarcastically to indicate that worse things like the harshness of the witch camp could happen to Abrewa if she is declared a witch. However, three days before the "de luxe" wedding, Abrante, the suitor, dies when a truck knocks him down. The feminist voice in this novel, again, warns society about trivializing the voice of tradition; the elderly woman.

Darko envisages her readers asking why women should often be the ones to have such premonitions. Thus she provides a few suggestive answers to this question. For instance when Kakraba attempts to feel Ntifor's boil to enable her diagnose what it could be, she is branded a witch for her knowledge and concern (Darko 2007:161). This implies that the experience and the frustrations of seeing loved ones plunge into trouble may be a reason why women quickly offer to help with their suggestions in such situations. The concern is that instead of being appreciated for their often timely contributions, they are misunderstood and branded witches or insane. In the same story, Efe is instructed by her husband to stay away from her own mother because his family (led by his aunt) cannot "accept it was mere coincidence that the two daughters that were born to him are disabled. To Efe's husband and his family, Sisi's, Efe's mother, was once declared a "bad omen" therefore, "it was in the family. Sisi was a witch who wanted to transfer the witchcraft to her granddaughters" (202). As to why women are the only ones stereotyped as witches in society whenever something went wrong. Darko provides the answer sarcastically: "No male in the family had been declared a wizard it had to be the females who inherit it" (202).

In that novel we find another reason why women tend to hallucinate when faced with a crisis. Society does not provide avenues for women to vent their frustrations. In the case of men, society permits them to hang around with friends, drink or flirt with other women. A case in point is when Pa feels bored in his marriage with Ma and opts to satisfy "the throbbing desires; the fiery climaxes" (340) with 'Flower' a girl who is young enough to be his daughter. The cultural practice frowns on married women resorting to entertainment and leisure outside the home after a stressful day as their male counterparts do. As a result there is virtually no avenue for the married woman to vent her frustrations. Darko implies that an accumulation of all the stress experienced in the daily lives of women results in hallucination. When this occurs they are branded witches or insane. This is the situation in which Ma finds herself in *Not Without Flowers*. In her circumstance, "it was as if a volcanic heat was slowly building up inside her head. Pa's frantic pretentiousness and his clumsiness began leaving Ma feeling debased and degraded" (339). It can be deduced from this submission that "the issue of the misconception about mental illness as possession by evil spirits" (33) is of great concern to the feminist.

Like Ma, Aggie hesitates to question her husband's extramarital activities for fear of being branded 'nagging'. Idan has the luxury of adultery to compensate for the unhappiness he experiences as a result of his inability to have children with his wife Aggie. "He had even had a couple of one-night stands about which he gave no further thought about sex. But with those affairs, he had planned them. And he went into them with both eyes open to either release

tension or deal with an onset of that periodically deadly marital boredom” (Darko 2007: 110). However Aggie, who is equally depressed for the same reasons, is unable to seek fulfilment outside marriage. The disparity is to the extent that Idan is overjoyed at thinking that he has impregnated Randa out of wedlock. The feminist voice protests society’s bias against women and criticizes it for seeing very little wrong with adulterous men whilst strongly kicking against adulterous women.

One major undoing of the achievement of the feminist aspirations in contemporary Ghana is prostitution. Defined as usually a woman having sex with a man for money (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*), prostitution undermines the assertiveness, independence, respect and equality that feminists stand for. In *Faceless*, Darko depicts the brothel system she first indicates in her novel *Beyond The Horizon*. In that novel, Mara is forced into what can be termed as ‘organized prostitution’; ‘modern day slavery’. Similarly in *Faceless*, Baby ‘T’ is forced into the brothel by Maame Broni and her accomplices. When she refuses to ‘serve’ the man she loathes so much, she is severely beaten up by her administrator, Poison. There is all the indication here that the feminist voice in Darko’s work is against women who lead other women into prostitution. But men who take undue advantage of the vulnerability of women are criticized even more. In *Faceless*, Poison “owned” Baby ‘T’ and controlled her. He reminds Baby ‘T’ of the golden rule of oppression: “Don’t you ever dare to challenge me again!. Poison warned when he was through with her” (226). Women who dare men like Poison do not only have their face go dead, they die and so Baby ‘T’ gets an “image of splintered stone oozing blood for daring him: A stone struck against steel. Baby ‘T’ was dead (227).

According to Fraiss (2002), Darko depicts the complexities of the lives of the African women who migrate to Europe in *Beyond the Horizon*. Her novels reveal the densities of the life of contemporary Ghanaian women; females are entrapped in varying forms of prostitution that usually end miserably. In *Not Without Flowers*, 2nd Wife, Aggie and Randa engage in the ‘sugar daddy/mummysm’ a form of prostitution where a very young female/male dates an elderly, usually married, male/female respectively. The young girl/boy provides the elderly man/woman with sex in return for emotional and financial provisions. The urge to lead materialistic lifestyles compels the unmarried woman to find financial means of sustaining herself. In the absence of any decent means, prostitution mostly with the adult and financially sound male or female popularly known as the ‘sugar daddy/ mummy’ is preferred.

In whatever form, Darko shows that prostitution has no benefit to a woman. In *Beyond the Horizon*, as in *The Housemaid*, Mara survives but loses her beauty, honour and integrity as an African woman. In *Faceless*, Baby ‘T’ dies miserably with her body dropped by a lotto kiosk in the streets. In *Not Without Flowers*, the men and women involved get infected with the incurable, deadly HIV/AIDS. We learn that many females who indulge in prostitution are driven by lack of parental care, poverty and streetism. They find themselves trapped in the world of prostitution where they have no voice as to whom they engage or what is paid for their services. As Ms Kamame rightly puts it; girls are at the most risk on the streets because they could get pregnant and add to the already escalated problem of streetism. Ms Kamame therefore, reiterates the major occupation of the feminist concerning women and girls neglected by society:

Our vision is to target our awareness campaign at those women and girls of our society who are more likely to neglect their children and make street children out of them.”... We are not shutting them (men) out completely. But we recognize the urgent need to concentrate on the girls because it is they who get pregnant and who bear the brunt of that carelessness. It is the females who end up saddled with the child after the male has decided he no longer wishes to stick around and play father after all. So it the girls who should be sensitized to this reality and urged to take responsibility of their lives into their own hands (Darko 2003:140)

Faceless and *Not Without Flowers*, show Darko’s subscription to the post-colonial prostitution metaphor identified by Fraiss (2002) who sees prostitution as a modern name for the slavery of colonial days where Africa as continent was exploited and her women sexually abused. In these texts, the women are pushed into prostitution often by both obvious and subtle forces. Aggie gets into dating a regular boyfriend whom she marries later and a married man for financial reasons. 2nd Wife gets involved in prostitution because she is driven by the subtle force of marital dissatisfaction. Randa is also driven by revenge, another subtle force, even though she has a study boyfriend. From Randa, we know some reason for this form of prostitution: “if a woman is not looking for a long term affair” (78); sex in return for financial security (79); sometimes for sheer emotional security (79). In *Faceless*, Odarley is not portrayed as a prostitute as such. There are indications however, that she may have indulged in it at one point or the other. Fofu resists any form of sexual relation but her sister, Baby ‘T’, is presented as a prostitute. She ends up in a brothel not by choice but like Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*, forced into it and unable to free herself until death. From

these characters, Darko subscribes to Frair's conclusion that women like Randa and 2nd Wife may seem "on top" (in control of their lives) when they willfully indulge in prostitution "but they might dangerously and disastrously start sinking lower and lower into utter self-destruction and irrevocable madness" (12).

The scourge of stereotyping and discrimination and the domestic abuse of females remain the topmost worry of many female writers. According to Elia (2007), husbands and men for that matter have the notion that it is their right to batter women when they think they are falling out of their rules. Thus the act of beating a woman is termed an act of "correction" in the words of Elia (2007). Hence just as Mara, the victim in *Beyond The Horizon*, is without the voice to defend herself in *Faceless*, Maa Tsuru and Baby 'T' have no voices either as they are battered and sexually abused by the men who come their way. In *Faceless*, Onko, Kpakpo, Macho, Poison, Kwei epitomize male bigotry. For instance, Baby 'T' is unable to survive the scourge of these men who happened to be in the life of her mother. Onko, the man she trusts like a father defiles her when she is barely twelve years. She is again raped by Kpakpo, Maa Tsuru's living husband. In the words of the narrator, "Baby 'T' lay there motionless, crying. The pain was distinct in her eyes. The trauma she had suffered had left its prints on her very person and her soul. She was in great physical and even greater mental pain. If the good Lord gave her long life, it was obvious she was going to require lots of strength and love to rebuild her dignity, herself love and trust (166).

Maa Tsuru herself is not spared from the wickedness of the men she allows into her life; Kwei, a man known for his excessive drinking, batters her even without provocation. In one instance, he "pounced on her like a cat on an unsuspecting mouse and began a vicious pounding spree...landing blows anywhere and everywhere and on every part of her pregnant body" (153). As though that is not enough, portraying characteristics of a sado-masochist, "he returned to Agboo Ayee boasting that with immediate effect, they had better start calling him Dr. Kwei because he had single-handedly and very cost effectively terminated an unwanted pregnancy" (153).

Motherhood, no doubt, remains one of the major phases of the life cycles of the African woman because a woman often receives love and respect from her husband, children and society when she becomes a mother. In Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* for example, Nnu Ego's inability to have children was a source of pain in her life and that of her first husband. But Nnaife hails her because she bares him many children especially sons. As identified earlier in *Not Without Flowers*, the inability for women like Panyin, Aggie and Dina to have children resulted in their husbands' unfaithfulness to them and their own unhappiness. Obviously, the ability of a woman to have children earns a woman the favour of her husband otherwise it makes a husband as unsettled as Idan. Darko's novels therefore suggest that even in the contemporary Ghanaian society, where traditional culture is highly adulterated, childlessness is a woman's greatest fear because women find happiness in exercising their roles as care givers to their families.

Where women are able to have children, Darko supposes that there is also the problem of absentee fathers. In *Not Without Flowers*, Ma successfully takes care of her family until Pa becomes emotionally and physically absent when Randa steals his attention. This drives Ma into insanity. Maa Tsuru, in *Faceless*, has a rather tough skin. Even though all the fathers of her children are absent, she does not break down yet, she though unable to fulfill her responsibilities to her children. Thus absentee fathers and the lack of male support remain a major hindrance to successful motherhood in Darko's novels.

Abortion is also a major issue of feminist concern in Darko's novels. In *Housemaid*, it is the murder of a child through abortion that is most highlighted. In *Not Without Flowers*, abortion rears its head once more only that unlike *Housemaid*, the women who indulge in it pay with their happiness as they are unable to have any more children. This is the cause of Dina's divorce and 5th Wife's marital problems. The feminist voice of caution urges women to dare to keep it when they get pregnant out of wedlock and avoid abortion as its consequences can be devastating in the future. It calls for the tradition that embraced pregnancy with the society helping the mother to raise her children.

That is not to say that abortion is the sole reason why women experience childlessness. The character and characterization of Panyin in *Not Without Flowers* attests to natural circumstances with no fault of either husband or wife. But the situation between Aggie and Idan goes further to imply that the inability of a woman to conceive is not always the fault of women. By making Idan refuse to go for a fertility test for fear of finding out the source of the problem, Darko shows that men become a problem to women when they are not humble enough to seek help when they need one but make their wives bear avoidable pain while they hide behind them and worse of all act unfaithfully.

Creating awareness of the issues that concern women in the contemporary Ghanaian society is a major step towards

finding solutions to them. It goes a step further when we are not only told what is wrong but given an idea of what the right thing is through characterization. In literature, through a character, readers put themselves in a story but through characterization they gain a revealing knowledge about a character from attributes such as age, gender, race, occupation, status, ambitions, speech and actions. According to E.M. Foster (1927), it is characterization that makes a character round and unpredictable (29). Thus good characterization yields an effective unfolding of the plot. A critical analysis of Darko's novels shows an effective blend of round and flat characters who serve as acceptable and unacceptable models of women. As a result, whereas some of her women are active, others are passive, whereas some are mothers, others are barren etc. Maa Tsuru and Baby T in *Faceless*, Aggie as Idan's wife and Ma, in *Not Without Flowers* represent the passive inarticulate whereas women like Fofu, Odarley, Naa Yomo and the MUTE ladies in *Faceless* as well as Randa, 5th Wife and Cora mainly represent the active, assertive women. Darko makes her passive women suffer whilst the active ones excel. Through the passive female characters however, we uncover the monstrosity of her male characters. She also does this to urge women to exercise assertiveness in order to avert the suffering caused by men especially in marriage. According to the narrator decision making in the marriage setting is entirely the prerogative of the man. As such we get to know that even the decision to wear condoms is the man's prerogative (Darko 2007: 262). Thus Pesewa feels abused the first time 5th Wife mentions the wearing of condoms and insists on it till she has her way. Had it not been for her persistence, she too would have contracted the disease. Similarly, but for Efe's fortitude, Sisi would have ended up like Ma, perhaps, in the witch camp. Here, Darko exposes the ignorance of these husbands. She supposes that if Ma and Aggie had confronted their husbands without fear they, perhaps, would have saved both their marriages and their men. As well Randa, in *Without Flowers*, according to the narrator "is sparse with tears when they were most expected" and her boyfriend, Dam is said to have confessed that Randa's lack of emotions attracted him most because "it enabled him to tolerate and contain his own (22). The signal is that after all, men rely on the strength of women for their own strength. Darko therefore suggests that women must be assertive and active not passive players in society. One also notices in both novels that prior to marriage, Darko's women are strong, independent and assertive in their relationships with men as in the case on Randa and Aggie (as a students) but once married, they become generally timid and passive in the face of male authority. What does marriage do to them then? Women are encouraged to be bold and assertive and to dare to question in marriage when they have to.

Women's ability to question used to exist in the days of Yaa Asantewa (a historically famous Akan warrior of the pre-colonial era) when the queen mother had authority but this is not the same today even in the days of equal rights. Women do not command much authority in Ghanaian society though traditionally the queen mother plays a vital unifying role. Darko depicts her as the most immediate person to settle disputes and foster peace amongst members of the community. In *Not Without Flowers* Sylv's aunt emphasizes the role of the queen mother as she tells her nephew "just look at the extent they've gone to: coming to see our village queen mother, to seek her intervention. Who next will they go to? ...It wasn't an ordinary person who sent me but the queen mother Sylv" (229, 230). However, Sylv's disregard for the queen mother's authority suggests a depreciating role of women in society; feminist concerns about the unfavourable gender power-structure and the "Sexual Politics" of the Ghanaian society

The 'Otherness' of a woman; as a mother in Africa is even more enhanced in *Faceless* when financial insecurity makes a decent woman degenerate into acute immorality. Maa Tsuru has to push her children unto the streets so that they can bring home some fish and money since she had no meaningful financial support. This renders the children susceptible to the evils in society. Their vulnerability leads to the agony they all go through. Like Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*, if Tsuru were educated enough or had financial security, she wouldn't have exposed her children this way. It that insecurity that drives 5th Wife in polygamy; into giving in to the unscrupulous men who left their own wives sitting lonely at home to come and harass other women in their search for adventure of living out their fantasies with a middle-aged single woman (260). The feminist voice in the novel is therefore against the kind structures in society that reduces a woman to the property of a man when marriage, culture, history and politics and morality and intersect. In *Faceless*, economically, Maa Tsuru has no financial means of supporting her own children. According to the Ms. Kamame, "a woman like Fofu's mother, whose 'village' happens to be inner city Accra, is more likely to lose her sense of onus rather speedily when pushed by joblessness and poverty and the non-existent male support (140). She relies on supposed husbands and in the process loses her moral strength, a tool that is vital to the survival of any woman in a world of male chauvinism:

I know Fofu. I know. Oh God! Don't bring God's name, mother. You knew what you were doing when you chose him over ... Maa Tsuru choked with saliva and coughed violently. "I don't have the strength to fight you

with words Fofu,” she spoke slowly, “And even if I did, I wouldn’t do it.”... What mother wouldn’t care? (47)

We see that even though Christianity and Islam (foreign religions) have gained ample grounds in Africa, traditional African religion remain an integral part of the contemporary Ghanaian woman. Such that the power of a curse and superstition determines what Naa Yomo and Maa Tsuru think and how they behave. Tangled by the cords of superstition, Maa Tsuru allows superstition to gain the better part of her. Naa Yomo becomes a feminist voice against this and through her we get to know that Maa Tsuru is cursed and perhaps that is why she experiences a difficult life (121). She does not undermine the effect of the curse but she opines that women like Maa Tsuru must fight the odds that separate them from their own happiness and that of the people around them. They must live to defy their curses. From Naa Yomo, we are informed that Maa Tsuru’s mother placed a curse on her daughter during delivery and on her death bed: “A dying woman clutching onto the last vestiges of life through hate, she cursed and cursed when the time came, and cursed and cursed as she pushed the little life out of her (121). To epitomize her own regard for traditional beliefs, Naa Yomo does not blame Tsuru entirely for what happens to her. She believes that “only a woman robbed of her soul would do what she was doing”. The problem with Maa Tsuru is what she was doing and not what something like a curse was doing to her. If Maa Yomo buried five children out of eleven (115), she thinks it is not too late for Maa Tsuru to turn things around. To her, there is more to life and Maa Tsuru can “salvage whatever is left of her soul” (121). In essence, passive women like Maa Tsuru are encouraged to fight for their lives and their well being. Darko demonstrates the need for women to exercise initiative to succeed in life and the need to balance the local/transnational cultures in contemporary Ghana.

Apart from contending with cultural elements like superstition, the city’s economic and social demands on Maa Tsuru are held responsible for the troubles she goes through in *Faceless*. We learn from Sylv that “the phenomenon (of parental neglect) appears to be less prevalent in our villages (140) but Ms. Kamame explains why when she states that:

The traditional setting of our villages, cohesion and familiarity is so imbued in the lives of individuals that women are more conscious of what they do. But in the cities, there is a fragmentation, which results in behavioural flexibility. A woman like Fofu’s mother, whose ‘village’ happens to be inner city Accra, is more likely to lose her sense of onus rather speedily when pushed by joblessness and poverty and the non-existent male support (140).

Politically, in the traditional African setting of our villages, the female has the queen mother to fall on for justice when it comes to the worst. In this contemporary epoch, female inaccessibility to justice and the corruption in governmental set-ups is a prime feminist concern. The policemen in *Faceless* do not show interest in the investigations into the death of Baby ‘T’ because to them, the deceased and her family are firstly, women and secondly poor but most essentially, the force itself is ill equipped to carry out its responsibility to the citizenry. Maa Tsuru herself is unmarried. She feels unwanted and without a voice to fight for her family so she sits by whiles nothing is done about the injustices meted out to her by Oncho and the others. We also get to know that “the need for some women to become attached to and become someone’s wife is sometimes grossly under-rated and under estimated” (Darko 2007:260). Maa Tsuru confesses the emotional trauma a woman goes through when the political, economic and moral issues in her life do not go well. Darko ridicules women like Maa Tsuru by implying that ironically, this is perhaps the reason why Maa Tsuru kept allowing all those men in her life as she puts it: “I am a woman and I was lonely. Maa Tsuru opened up. He gave me the right words. He said, ‘I want to retire to bed with you at night and wake up with you in the morning’. It felt good. I had been without a man since Kwei’s final disappearance from our lives. No man wanted me. I was a cursed woman. But cursed or not, I was still a woman. I felt like a woman. I needed to be wanted by a man” (186).

In *Not Without Flowers*, 5th Wife is settled in with Pesewa, even though she knows he already had four wives, because she needed just to be attached to a man, to be called a wife; to be respected by other men:

Only she knew that marrying Pesewa was the only option that she had... In marrying Pesewa, she did become attached, albeit one of many wives but it still qualified her to take the title of wife; someone to whom a man is married. And it brought to an end that living hell of having to constantly deal with those unscrupulous men ... Men who defined ‘single’ as synonymous with ‘lonely’ and thus ‘available’... (260)

In that novel, Ma’s marital situation is used to expose religious malfeasances in Ghanaian society as 5th Wife’s plight reveals hidden handicaps when gender and culture intersect. Traditionally, if Ma had witch craft indeed, she would

be accepted and perhaps hailed as a witch doctor rather than subjected to such brutality. Obviously, Darko teaches us that when marriage, culture, politics and morality intersect in the life of the Ghanaian woman, the strength of Ghanaian society in terms of support for women and children leaves much to be desired. The instability of the contemporary Ghanaian society is as result of imbalances in the interaction of local/transnational cultures.

Another issue of concern to the feminist voice identified in Darko's writings is the traditional conjugal division of labour where the bulk of the household chores are allocated to the woman, putting extreme time and energy constraints on the woman as Kabria reveals as "her mind wondered onto the day, which like all days, always began with work and ended with even more work (Darko 2003:82). From her we learn about a research report that "alleged that the African woman worked for an average of sixty-seven hours a week as opposed to fifty-five for the African man (83). Darko therefore, with the voice of Kabria dares to question "So who really was the weaker sex? Her worry about this issue is emphasized when Kabria in a dialogue with Abena reveals that in Cuba, laws have been enacted to force men to help around the house hence perhaps, one day her husband would cook for her sometimes (82). Ironically, Abena's laughter at Kabria's hopes brings out the sarcasm in Darko's presentation. It also suggests that Kabria's is only a wishful thinking in contemporary Ghana as Kabria herself puts it: "How revolutionary that would be in Africa... Except that whichever African government attempted such a legislation, would be gone overnight in a coup d'état which, guaranteed, would have the full backing of all African men. It would probably spark off a gender war, whereby sons would find themselves taking up arms against their mothers. One group of men who would gleefully fight this war would, of course, be husbands, when they come face to face with their mother-in-laws on the battle ground" (82). Kabria's laughter at her own thought sarcastically implies that there is virtually no probability that anything like what she is thinking could ever happen. Yet her thoughts are a clear indication of Ghanaian women's dislike of having to do all the work at home and work for money to support the man as well. Perhaps this is because as Kabria suggests, if women had the time to study further like men do, they would be reaping the benefits in terms of a better salary instead, women get busy making babies. Darko suggests that Adade always tried to avoid this line of argument maybe because of the truth in it (39).

There is also the indication in Darko's novels that the typical situation of conjugal responsibility of women is different in other parts of the world. There, Sylv says, women are not obliged by society to marry in the first place nor to have children. Neither are they expected to do all the keeping at home. His interjection during a discussion on 5th Wife's widowhood rights further points out why one can believe that Western Feminism is not effectively applicable to the African setting; an African feminist call indicated when "Sylv begged to digress a little and observed how women in some parts of the world had both the societal and emotional right to decide against having children"(95). From this perspective, we can say that Darko shares Nadia's concern for the plight of the working African woman who is also a wife and a mother. In *Faceless*, Kabria's struggle to combine these roles really depresses her even though she keeps at it and "fumed at her recollection of all that long and easy talk about how if a woman wanted to keep her marriage always fresh and her husband all to herself, she had better make him feel good at home. "Welcome him home with a smile," they say, look good for him. Do him this. Do him this. Gosh! Who pampered her when she returned home tired from work, only to go and continue in the kitchen while trying to explain the word 'abandon' to their son? Who met her with a smile? Who wore Levis jeans and an open neck polo shirt, which she loved so much on men, for her?" (83).

The perspectives of males about female issues differ from that of women in Kenya. In effect, Kenyan men are ignorant of the needs of their women (O'Barr, 1987). Apparently the situation is quite different in Ghana. Sylv's question in the dialogue about emotional and societal rights elsewhere seem to suggest that men in contemporary Ghana are fully aware of the demands that the predominantly patriarchal Ghanaian society imposes on the women.. The question then is: Do contemporary Ghanaian men and society have the will to make things much better for women? Kabria's thought about a governmental legislation is Darko's way of suggesting that though there is the awareness, Ghanaian women do not believe that Ghanaian men have the will to make life better for them. This is to say that though contemporary Ghanaian men are aware of the imported culture of men helping women with their traditional chores, they still practice the local culture which burdens the woman with all household chores.

Amma Darko seems committed, to social inquiry. Not only is she concerned with the diagnosis of women's problems, her works proffer insights into the historical and political choices open to contemporary Ghana on women's issues. From her works, one can decipher that the following factors are crucial to the realization of women's renaissance in Ghana and Africa: a dialogic engagement between men and women and, past Ghanaian culture and present traditions;

a conscious effort by society to provide support services for women and children; a balance in system of governance which promotes equality of the sexes; an educational system that sensitizes society on current personal safety and reproductive health choices; and the creation of a male African personality that is proud of its women and has a strong sense of security in the face of feminine development.

With regard to the historical and continued structural (material, cultural, and political) hegemony of the global on the local, we see a contemporary Ghanaian society that defines certain life cycle task for the Ghanaian woman – life as a teenage girl, entering adulthood, finding work, getting married. This traditional cycle that has survived global cultural intrusion because even though women seek to find jobs first, it means a lot to them to get married and have children. In the absence of good marriages, they found solace in their jobs. We can therefore say that the current dispensation of global economy dictates that women must give as much attention to their financial life as they would other social issues such as marriage because work has become a source of power and succor to the contemporary Ghanaian woman. The local culture where society sought to protect its women and children seem to have given way to a culture that took advantage of the weak and vulnerable. Today, there are inadequate support services for women and children in contemporary Ghana. Social services such as security, finance, education, health care and mentorship are woefully inadequate. The few support outfits such as the non-governmental organizations and the Police Service are under resourced. Responsibilities of biological and social reproduction are left to women in addition to the need to find money to survive in urban areas while the main bartered commodity is sex. Not only infant but child care and maintenance is left often solely to women and when they splinter or chose to devote a bit of their lives to a sex partner their children's lives are at risk and the street is often the outcome. Absentee fathers are a common phenomenon and the few present husbands, are reluctant to support their wives at home. This is a typical description of the Maa Tsuru's life as she wobbled through the intricate life cycle handed down by her culture; her world.

Significantly, there is the indication that some men believe an unmarried female is there to be sexually exploited. As a result rape involving even children remains a problem in the society. On another level of power relations between men and women, there is the notion that women asking to use a condom amounts to the confirmation of infidelity by the other partner or undermining the authority of the man. Thus women risk recording higher infection rate of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. All the novels voice a growing sense of urgency among women, a feeling that 'enough is enough', a show that women are no longer willing to tolerate subjugation and abuse. Investigating why and how the arena of sexual negotiation is particularly resistant to change is a crucial question for further research because it is central to stemming the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as to the broader struggle for changes in gender relations in contemporary Ghana.

There is an evidence of the continuous loss of women's authority and respect as a result of factors such as poverty, corruption, male bigotry and obsolete cultural practices: getting married, having children and widowhood rites. The novels therefore reveal that the recipe for building an involved citizenry is in increasing work opportunities for women which is a deviation from the traditional norm. An economically independent and educated woman like 5th Wife is likely to stand up to cultural molestation. In all the novels, men team-up with women in work scenarios to show that work is an essential aspect of women's empowerment. The conclusion one draws from this is that the contemporary Ghanaian society is certain about gender roles, equalities and inequalities. It is a society in which both men and women are aware of social contradictions. It is one where men are aware of the needs of women only that just a few have the will to compromise their ego. However, women as individuals and collectively, device ways to cope with the stressful issues that militates against their rights. Thus the female characters demonstrate strong will, hope and determination to challenge and overcome patriarchal inhibitions. Their efforts are rewarded mostly when they receive sister support from other women and benevolent sympathy from some men. Hence women advocate for women's support for each other even as they appeal to men to help women to get on their feet where need be.

For women to get on their feet, the relevance of the education of the female regardless of patriarchy and tradition cannot be underestimated. Both educated women and men in the novels occupy respectable positions and they all realize their responsibility towards making society a fair place for the disadvantaged women. The educated women make relevant contributions, as lecturers, researchers, event planners, investigators and civil rights activists involved in literacy drives and campaigns against forced marriages, marital abuse and obsolete widowhood practices. The women in the novels seek to rub shoulders with their fictive counterparts in contributing to national progress and development and, more importantly, to gain individual self-actualization. Hence there is the need to shun the traditional notion of educating the boy child rather than the girl.

In the face of antagonism and male chauvinism in contemporary Ghanaian society, Darko points out that women have no option but to come together in a network that gives them the audacity to stand up to injustices against them. This is seen in the role of the MUTE ladies who come to the rescue of Maa Tsuru and Fofo. She also presents a form of female networking that cuts across class and cultures. We find women of varying classes and cultures in *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers* lending a vociferous support to each other (ie. to 5th Wife in her battle for her rights during the public airing of the interview at Harvest FM). We identify female characters in the listening audience who disapprove males who support the victimization of 5th Wife. For instance a female kenkey seller says to a man who opposed 5th Wife: “Ebei! My brother... If I was your wife and I died and my family insisted they wanted you to marry my sister, will you be happy?”(101). When the man exhibits greed in accepting a beautiful sister and not an ugly one, another woman openly calls him a “Foolish man!” The woman’s disgust epitomizes the feminist disgust against men who take advantage of norms in society to deprive women off their rights. It is this strength found only in unity that the feminist voice in Darko’s novels approves of. As we read on, we are introduced to another kind of networking in Darko’s *Not Without Flowers*. Cora and Little Randa have their own network going. Even when they grow up, it is by the strength of their bonding that they are able to avenge Pa’s death and Ma’s illness. Darko’s message is that once together, women would be capable of turning life around in their favour.

Similarly, a strong bond between mother and daughter turns out to be the only reason why Sisi survives the scare of the witchcraft stereotyping. When Efe is asked to denounce her mother, she chooses to cut ties with her husband instead saying “You forbid me to see my own mother ever again? Efe shrieked at him, “Having nothing to do with her? If my mother had not carried me for nine months in her womb and given birth and raised me to the point where you saw me and fell in love with me, would you have been blessed with the two healthy boys I gave you?” (Darko 2007:202-203)

Generally, the feminist voice in Darko’s novels expect women in society to behave like Ms. Kamame and the MUTE ladies; to shield the younger females who are entering adulthood from the predators in society, to help them to find their feet and to watch each other’s back. The call on society is clearly implied in both novels: a return to the traditional communal spirit where women were there for each other and all children at all times; to a society that appreciated the role and contribution of mothers and where irrespective of the beckoning challenges, mothers were there for their children and vice versa. If mothers would forge close bonds with their children as Kabria does with her children, they could well protect and guide them through life. Children themselves desire to bond and submit to their mothers only if mothers would be there for them. They wish to be hugged even if they were “dirty” or “smelling of the streets” (26).

If women in the twenty first century continue to battle with equality and recognition then obviously the need for women to support each other cannot be over emphasized. Similarly, the need for women to take a second look at how much they contribute to the problems that militate against them is given equal attention in Darko’s novels. As a case in point, in *Not Without Flowers*, 2nd Wife cheats on her husband and her co-wives. In the process she contracts the deadly HIV/AIDS and infects all parties involved but for the 5th Wife who insists on using protective sheaths with her husband. The infection drives the husband to commit suicide. In effect, 2nd Wife’s once well knitted polygamous marriage falls apart because of her own misdeed. In Aggie’s situation, through the NEMESIS mystery, Darko implies that her experience of marital neglect is her reward for the pains she caused Ma and her family. On a similar note, Darko blames Randa’s misfortune, HIV/AIDS infection, on her own quest for vengeance. In *Faceless*, by making us wonder why Maa Tsuru would not concentrate on working hard to provide for her children rather than falling to the schemes of the men who come her way with the pretext of marriage, Darko partly blames Maa Tsuru for all the pains she suffers. On the part of Maame Broni and Maame Alata, Darko suggests that they are responsible for their miserable end because they opted to go against the laws of the land.

Conclusion

In order to present an objective front to the role of women in inflicting pain on other women, both male and female opinions are presented on the truth of the matter; the pronouncements of Ma and that of Sylv as he questions 5th Wife in *Not Without Flowers*: “Did you consider the emotional insecurity that your pursuit of emotional security probably created in his older wives” (97). In the same way, Efe and Sisi connive against their fellow woman, Aggei, even when Idan, sympathized with Aggei. We tend to agree that indeed women must take a second look at their own actions if they can win equal rights with men. The actions of the women seem to be predominantly influenced by their allegiance to the traditional system which put childbearing as the sole aim and responsibility of a married

woman forgetting that childlessness is not always the fault of a woman. Finally, the feminist voice in the novels suggests the birth and growth of a new epoch in fiction writing by women, and about women. There is a phenomenon that represents a literary movement that presents an objective feminist literary voice meant to identify and expose societal ills against women. A feminist voice that does not fail to blame women for the suppressive experiences they go through where they are to blame. A feminist voice that does not only criticize whom criticism is due but also proposes alternatives to women and society as to how to carve freedom, using the very set-ups in society that work against them. (Muana 2003:3) It is thus conclusive that the feminist voice in contemporary Ghanaian as in Amma Darko's *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers* redefines the feminist situation of women in Ghana by raising consciousness of women's issues. It is a voice with the prime aim of achieving a paradigm shift in how women themselves and society as a whole perceive the place of women in the contemporary Ghanaian society.

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