

**USING DIRT TO CLEAN DIRT: DECONSTRUCTING THE
ENIGMATIC PORTRAIT OF MARA IN DARKO'S *BEYOND THE
HORIZON***

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ABSTRACT

Mara's travails in Ghana and subsequently Germany, have provided the fertile grounds for critics to draw various labels for the protagonist in *Beyond the horizon*. To some readers, Mara is a victim who has been exploited through patriarchy; to others, Mara learns from her environment and finally asserts her independence; and to a third group of critics, Mara is complicit in the fate that befalls her. Thus Mara remains an enigma, earning our sympathy or losing it; winning our admiration or courting our disgust depending on which angle we look at her. This paper does an objective analysis of Mara by resorting to the theory of deconstruction which helps us unearth more than what meets the eye in the novel. This approach helps us provide answers to issues such as how Mara is presented in the narrative, the motivations that guide her actions and inactions and how Mara, as an individual, and the society at large contribute in creating the protagonist we part ways with at the end of the narrative. The conclusion arrived at is that there are myriads of relationships among the characters in the narrative that provide hierarchies of meaning which can be deconstructed to produce more subtle and valid ones. Mara is not simply a victim; she is complicit, to some extent, and she takes steps to obliterate those she considers the vermin of the earth. In short, she uses dirt (prostitution) to clean dirt (patriarchy, male chauvinism, discrimination, poverty, racism).

KEY WORDS: deconstruction, dirt, Ghana, marriage, patriarchy, prostitution.

ABSTRAK

*Perjalanan Mara di Ghana dan kemudian di Jerman, telah memberikan lahan subur bagi para kritikus untuk memberikan berbagai label bagi tokoh utama dalam novel *Beyond the Horizon*. Bagi sebagian pembaca, Mara adalah korban yang dieksploitasi melalui patriarki; bagi yang lain, Mara bertahan hidup dari lingkungannya dan akhirnya menegaskan kemandiriannya; dan bagi para kritikus,*

Mara terlibat dalam nasib yang menimpanya. Dengan demikian, Mara tetap menjadi teka-teki, mendapatkan simpati atau kehilangan simpati; memenangkan kekaguman atau membuat kita jijik, tergantung dari sudut mana kita melihatnya. Makalah ini melakukan analisis objektif terhadap Mara dengan menggunakan teori dekonstruksi yang membantu kita untuk menggali lebih dalam dari apa yang terlihat di dalam novel. Pendekatan ini membantu kita memberikan jawaban atas isu-isu seperti bagaimana Mara ditampilkan dalam narasi, motivasi yang memandu tindakan dan kelambanannya, dan bagaimana Mara, sebagai seorang individu, dan masyarakat secara luas berkontribusi dalam menciptakan tokoh utama yang berpisah dengan kita di akhir cerita. Kesimpulan yang didapat adalah bahwa ada banyak sekali hubungan di antara karakter-karakter dalam narasi yang memberikan hierarki makna yang dapat didekonstruksi untuk menghasilkan makna yang lebih halus dan valid. Mara bukan sekadar korban; dia terlibat, sampai batas tertentu, dan dia mengambil langkah-langkah untuk melenyapkan orang-orang yang dia anggap sebagai hama di bumi. Singkatnya, ia menggunakan noda (prostitusi) untuk membersihkan noda (patriarki, chauvinisme laki-laki, diskriminasi, kemiskinan, rasisme).

Kata kunci: dekonstruksi, noda, Ghana, pernikahan, patriarki, prostitusi

A. INTRODUCTION

In Africa, "marriage is the focus of existence" (Mbiti, 1976, p.133). Marriage "concerns the whole society in which it takes place" (Sarpong, 1974, p. 77) and the fact is that "marriage and procreation in African communities are a unity: without procreation, marriage is incomplete" (Mbiti, 1976, p. 133). These quotations from Mbiti and Sarpong sum up the essence of marriage in the African context and in most cultures throughout the world. It is a union that plays a very essential role in African societies and other societies worldwide; and parties to the marriage, both husband and wife, have expected roles to play in ensuring the success and longevity of the marriage. This therefore places an onerous task on the shoulders of both the husband and the wife. Despite the relevance of marriage as a union and the roles placed on both the male and female genders in ensuring the success of the marriage, some factors militate against the accomplishment of the roles expected of the woman in particular in most African cultures and in other cultures throughout the world. And the monster we are alluding to in this regard is patriarchy (Langen, 2005; Ndabayakhe & Addison, 2008 and Kammampoal, 2014).

Consequently, many an African female writer including Bâ (*So long a letter*, 1981); Nwapa (*Efuru*, 1966); El Saadawi (*Woman at point zero*, 1983); Aidoo (*Changes*, 1991); Emecheta (*Joys of motherhood*, 1979); Darko (*Beyond the horizon*, 1995); and Adichie (*Purple hibiscus*, 2012) have written works that protest the treatment of the female gender as the other sex in African societies due to the saturation of patriarchal values in in most African ways of life . Patriarchy in itself

has been termed as “any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles” (Tyson, 2006, p. 85). To Mudau and Obadire (2017, p.67), patriarchy is “a social structure that gives men uncontested authority” over the female gender. It is this uncontested authority of men over women and the limited opportunities created by the society for the development and full functioning of the female gender in African societies that are inimical. These are the same factors that, in some circumstances, constitute the stumbling block to the realization of the full potential and development of Mara in *Beyond the horizon*.

In her attempt to achieve her personal freedom in terms of finance, sexuality, social relations, and work, Mara made certain decisions in her life that have turned her into a dynamic character who is loved, loathed and pitied; described as a victim-victor, a rebel, a resistant fighter, selfish, a whore and so on. Does Mara actually qualify for all these epithets? How and why does Darko paint her female character in many colours? What are some of the reasons or factors that motivate Mara's decisions and actions in the narrative? These and other questions motivate our study of the enigmatic portrait of Mara in *Beyond the horizon* through the lens of deconstruction.

The paper starts with an introduction, a methodology, a review of the theory of deconstruction, an empirical literature review on *Beyond the horizon*, a synopsis of the narrative, a study of the enigmatic character of Mara in the story, and a conclusion. Mara is a dynamic and intelligent woman who uses dirt (prostitution) to clean dirt (patriarchy, discrimination, racism, and male chauvinism). This does not mean that Darko approves the uses of prostitution as the solution to all the negatives that come with patriarchy or to male dominance; it is to illustrate that Mara has been pushed to the wall; she learns, adopts, punishes her oppressors and decides to stay in control.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Ulmer's view, an intriguing thing about the post-new critics is the realisation that “unlike physics, in which two bodies may not occupy the same space, language is a material in which the same names are capable of supporting several mutually exclusive meanings simultaneously” (1988, p.165) This means that, unlike the new critics who believed textual meaning to be definite and capable of being identified by relying solely on the formal features of the text, deconstructive critics “redefined meaning as open to continual shifts, in contrast to the earlier modernist conception of meaning as close in finite denotations” (Stern, 1996, p.62). The implication is that the exclusion of readers from meaning-making as well the exclusion of socio-cultural influences from such meaning is catered for by deconstructive critics who took cognisance of the role of these same players in teasing a meaning out of the text.

Derrida propounded the theory of deconstruction in the 1960s. According to him, deconstruction is all about looking for the “unperceived, the non-present, and the unconscious” in a text (1967, p.68). By the “unperceived, non-present and the unconscious”, Derrida is referring to the gaps, the inconsistencies, and the

contradictions inherent in a text. To deconstruct, one needs to first construct a meaning before looking for the absent meaning. Thus, deconstructive critics look out for what is present in a text in order to uncover what is absent in the text or to look out for the inverse form of this meaning in the text. Therefore, the new critics and formalists still have some influence on deconstructive critics since one has to look for what is present in the text by largely applying the methods proposed by the former two groups to the text.

Deconstruction simply says that language is fluid and ambiguous and as a result, an utterance lends itself to a varied number of meanings depending on its environment and context. According to Tyson (2006, p. 249), "Language is not the reliable tool of communication we believe it to be, but rather a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experience in which ideologies program us without our being aware of them." Thus depending on the context of the text and depending on the socio-cultural backgrounds of the readers (backgrounds influenced by different ideological programmes), different readers will interpret the same text in different ways.

Hence, deconstruction simply refers to a way of analysis that leans heavily on the fluidity of language used in the construction of a text in unveiling several, varied and alternative meanings of the same text. Derrida and his contemporaries believe that to deconstruct a text is to take advantage of the inconsistencies and gaps created in the text by the language used in order to produce other varied meanings which are acceptable in their own context. Explaining this, Nancy Holland advances the observation that to deconstruct:

...is to take a text apart along structural "fault lines" created by the ambiguities inherent in one or more of its key concepts or themes in order to reveal the equivocations or contradictions that make the text possible. (Nancy Holland, IEP, ISSN 2161-0002, accessed 03/12/2018)

To the deconstructive critics therefore, there is no definite or closed meaning to a text, there are plausible meanings. As such, this study argues that though many structures in the *Beyond the horizon* speak to the roles of men and the cultural systems in sustaining patriarchy in the society, there are other structures in the same narrative that point to how Mara adapts to the situation, asserts her authority and takes charge of her own life in the latter part of the novel. She even makes decisions that she herself cannot explain.

Sexual objectification of women constitutes one of the major themes that has received critical attention when it comes to empirical works on Darko's *Beyond the horizon*. Uchechukwu, (2015) and Ibeku (2019) examine how sexual objectification is represented in the novel and the various ideological processes that have taken place for the protagonist, Mara, to acknowledge and respond to the sexual objectification practices. To Uchechukwu, patriarchal ideologies on the culture of submission in marriage are what account for the sexual objectification of Mara by her husband, Akobi, and the more reason why what is odd in her marriage appeared

normal to her. To Ibeku, issues such as migration, unemployment, illiteracy and corruption are some of the factors that make women vulnerable and to be objectified by their male counterparts in society. In the same vein, Kammampaol (2017) is also of the view that the novel challenges “patriarchal thrusts which contribute to the dehumanisation of women especially, in contemporary times” (p. 14). To Kammampaol, trafficking in its various forms, be they human or sexual, has telling effects on the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of female characters who fall into the hands of male chauvinists and patriarchal societies that seek to objectify, abuse and obliterate the agency of these females. Still on the theme of sexual objectification, Frias (2002) also admits that women have been objectified in the novel taking into consideration the treatment meted out to Mara by Akobi, her husband. However, Frias opines that the novel also “subversively portrays and resists the objectification of the black female body” (p.8).

Apart from the theme of sexual objectification in its various forms, the problem of exploitation is also highlighted by most critics in the analysis of the novel. Thus exploitation in its various forms such as sexual, psychological, financial as well as their attendant physical violence and abuse have also received some critical attention in empirical literature on the novel. Thus, Nutsukpo (2018), Djossou (2018), Marfo, Yeboah and Bonku (2015), Odugu (2015), and Awitor (2013) have all looked at the theme of exploitation in its various forms as portrayed in the novel. The issue of violence as a complement to the theme of exploitation has also been looked at by these critics. One thing that runs through the analyses of these critics is the role of men and patriarchy in the abuse and exploitation of women not just in African countries, but in all cultures of the world. Marfo, Yeboah and Bonku (2015) did not limit themselves to the exploitation of women by men but extended their analysis to cover the unusual relationship of the mother being the exploiter of her own daughter due to the challenges that motherhood is confronted with in most patriarchal cultures in Africa.

Udugu (2015) brings a different but an interesting perspective in her analysis of Mara's choice of occupation as a prostitute in her paper, “Prostitution as Resistance to Human and Societal Brutalities”. According to Udugu, Mara's father's selfish interest coupled with a society where a woman has no say when it comes to choosing her husband are all contributing factors for Mara turning to prostitution. Udugu again opines that, in an African society like that of Mara where a wife has to revere her husband and ensure his well-being at all times regardless of the situation at hand, such a society contributes to Akobi having his way of manipulating Mara into prostitution. The prostitution that Mara has been lured into becomes an avenue for resistance against sexual objectification and exploitation against women. Mara is not into prostitution just for the monetary benefit alone. It is a battleground that allows her to take control of her sexuality while using the resources it generates to fight the vermin of the society in the likes of Akobi and the friend as well Mara's father and other women who exploit their fellow women. In furtherance of using prostitution as a tool of resistance, Krugmagnon (2020), Houndjo and Allamagbo (2019), Asempa and Sam (2016), and Umazurike (2015),

all agree in their works that Mara does more than just acquire money through prostitution. She creates a new identity for herself by resisting the sexual objectification and exploitation in which she finds herself by re-defining “who she is and her position in the scheme of things” (Asempa and Sam, 2016, p.165).

Finally, scholars such as Abeka, Marfo and Bonku (2014), and Kossouhou and Tchibozo-Laine (2016) and Quayson (2015) have worked on *Beyond the horizon* by looking at the linguistic resources of the novel and its narrative techniques and how these combine to communicate the intricate layers of meanings encapsulated in the novel apart from the apparent ones that meet the eye. Basing their argument on how catharsis works in tragedy, Abeka, Marfo and Bonku (2014) conclude that the profane and pornographic language used in the novel is intended to promote Darko's “rebuff of moral decadence” and thus discourage women from engaging in it since prostitution is not “the panacea for the female empowerment”(p.113). Kossouhou and Tchibozo-Laine (2016) used Sytemic Functional Linguistics to analyse three excerpts from the novel with the aim of identifying the feminist voice in the novel and Darko's “struggle as encoded in her fiction” (p.650). Quayson (2015) also looked at the possibility of using the perspective from dualism to interrogate the title, linguistic features and resources of the narrative in order to unearth the dualism of meaning that it embodies. This opens up the perspectives from which the novel can be looked at instead of the usual thematic analysis or the search for unitary meaning in the novel.

C. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs the qualitative approach in which a close reading of the primary source, *Beyond the horizon* is carried out. Analysis in terms of the themes, style, syntax, diction, and characterisation in the narrative has been carried out through close reading. This method of reading enables the researchers to advance arguments in the light of the individual meanings of these items in the narrative and in the light of the general contextual meaning of the narrative. The secondary source of data from empirical literature is mainly used to adduce evidence in support of arguments in the paper. The theory of deconstruction is chosen to ground the arguments in the field of literature and it enables us to deduce meaning not only from the words printed in the text but from the gaps, contradictions, and double or multiple meanings registered by the style and content of the novel. The theory therefore affords us the opportunity to be fair to our female protagonist in drawing her portrait.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Darko's *Beyond the horizon* tells the story of a beautiful naïve young Ghanaian girl, who is forced into marriage by her father. Mara leaves her village and settles in Accra with her husband, Akobi, who is a messenger clerk in one of the ministries. She suffers countless abuses in the hands of Akobi. Later, Akobi travels to Germany and finally asks his wife, Mara, to join him in Germany. Mara

later ends up in Germany as a prostitute through the manipulations of Akobi and the latter is finally sent to prison through Mara's intervention.

A surface reading of Darko's *Beyond the horizon*, presents Mara as a naïve young Ghanaian girl who is given away in marriage to Akobi, a ministries messenger clerk in Accra who abuses her. She is presented as a helpless and defenseless naïve woman who suffers negatively from patriarchal tenets, a patriarchal society, a patriarchal world, an abusive husband and father, an exploitative world, a world full of racism and gender inequality and in the midst of all which she is a complete victim or almost one. She is presented as though it is the society and men who impose their will on her but she herself is incapable of doing any harm to herself. The other extreme interpretation in which Mara is presented as the only one responsible for all her woes in the novel is difficult to defend in the light of the events that unfold in the narrative. Then again, some of the interpretations take a middle position in attributing the blame to both society and Mara but fail to provide enough understanding on how and why Mara took some key decisions in her life such as her decision to stay in prostitution at the end of the novel. This is the portrait of the protagonist in the novel that this paper seeks to deconstruct.

The narrator's presentation of Mara's naivety and stupidity in the novel is quite worrying. From the narrations of Mara in her relationship with her husband, she presents herself as a typical village girl who is so naïve and defenseless. Indeed, the author in allowing Mara to narrate her ordeal provokes pathos in readers to the extent that readers forget to analyse and scrutinise how somebody could be so naïve, defenseless and stupid to such an extent. One might argue that, her orientation in a patriarchal culture and her mother's advice were the principal factors that made her see nothing wrong with Akobi's maltreatment and abuse but it is quite ridiculous that Mara herself confesses that, "even though it was true that I saw my mother worship my father daily, I saw, too, that father took ample care of her" (Darko, 1995, p.14).

From Mara's own confession, there is a difference between her situation in her marital home and that of her mother. It is clear that although her mother advised her to worship her husband, she knew exactly what was expected of Akobi when it comes to his responsibilities as a husband. Despite the possession of this knowledge, Mara kept quiet and "enjoyed" every bit of maltreatment from Akobi. At this point, it is quite evident that Mara is not as naïve and stupid as she has been portrayed. She might be patient, she might be green, but she is certainly not brainless to understand and decipher what is normal and abnormal. She, however, decided to remain in the marriage. Even when Mama Kiosk, in whom she sees a mother figure tries to open her eyes, she decides to still remain naïve and cling to an abusive marriage instead of walking away. Mara confesses to this when she says:

But still I wasn't going to let Mama Kiosk spoil my marriage for me, so I said, 'Mama Kiosk, I probably have eyes that see blue where you see red. But I would still not like to exchange my eyes for yours. I like my eyes as they are. (Darko, 1995, p. 14)

With these words, one begins to wonder whether Mara deserves our pity. She clearly is not so stupid and naïve as she has been portrayed by Darko and perhaps one will be right in agreeing with Mawuli Adjei when he observes that Darko's portrayal of sympathy for Mara is quite undeserved. (Adjei, 2009, p. 54)

In another context, Darko's presentation of Mara as a defenseless young girl who did not know how to defend herself in situations and especially in her marriage is also quite interesting. Undeniably, Mara is not as defenseless, naïve and stupid as she has been portrayed. In fact, Mara is capable of standing up for her rights. This is evident in the latter part of the novel when Mara, although pregnant, picks a fight with Esiama, the lover of the boss of the truck drivers for calling her boneshaker. It baffles our mind as readers when we compare Mara's reaction in the two circumstances. With regard to Esiama, Mara is able to gather her strength even in pregnancy to fight back but when it comes to Akobi, all that Mara does is to turn a blind eye to Akobi's maltreatment. It is fascinating that instead of Mara venting her spleen on Akobi and her father, she rather compounds these feelings and pours them on her fellow woman. She tells us:

Actually I don't know where I got the strength for the fight considering my pregnancy. But when I started to fight with her I think I saw her as an enemy that was part Esiama, part Akobi and part my father. (Darko, 1995, p. 27)

Apart from Mara's ability to defend herself physically, she as a woman has empowered herself financially and could break away from Akobi. Mara at the time of her abuse is already engaged in a sustainable trade of selling boiled eggs. It is through this trade that she is able to pay back Akobi the capital he gave her for her trading. She also provides for their daily meals. Obviously, Mara at the time of her abuse, unlike other women, has financially empowered herself and is in a better position to break away from Akobi. In a victim centered analysis on domestic violence in Ghana, (Ajayi & Soyinka-Airewele, 2018) reveal that financial subjugation is one of the key triggers of domestic violence in Ghana. In the case of Mara, she is not financially dependent on Akobi in any way since she alone provides for her own needs and even takes up Akobi's responsibility by providing their daily meals.

In the opening of the novel, Mara's narration of what has become of her as a result of her husband invites us to pity her. However, when events unfold in the novel, it becomes clear that Mara, although initially trapped by Akobi into the profession, it is her own decision if not to become but to remain a prostitute in Germany. Why this position? Indeed a critical assessment of Mara's speeches, decisions and actions in the novel speak to the fact that it was her own choice to be and remain a prostitute. Through her narration it is quite clear that although she is blackmailed to become a prostitute by her husband, it is the cargo mentality that made her remain as a prostitute in Germany. She admits to this when she says:

I had made the long journey from home to here. What for? I hadn't done anything for the people who helped me to come; my family, my mother. My two sons too were waiting for me. For them, too, I

had done nothing. And if I could do nothing for them at all, one thing at least, I should have been left with for myself_my dignity. Now that too had been robbed of me. So was this my fate? Was this all that I was to derive from the many hens and cocks and goats whose blood had been spilled for my sake? (Darko, 1995, p. 115)

From such a perspective of Mara, it is obvious that it is not actually the recorded sex tape of her that finally made her give in to Akobi and Osey. In fact, it is palpable that Mara's fantasies, founded on the cargo mentality are what made her to decide to become a prostitute. She is looking at the material gains and the esteem she would lose if she should return home empty handed. Mara, just like Akobi, Osey, Kaye and Vivian, is clearly influenced by this idea of the cargo mentality just like her people back home. It is this mentality that keeps Mara in the profession of prostituting just for her to fight off poverty and to gain material things.

Additionally, it is interesting that Mara decides to remain in prostitution after she gets Akobi arrested. One would expect that if indeed Akobi forced her into prostitution, then she would leave the profession after hiring the services of a private detective to extract information on Akobi's financial and private deals. In fact she has no reason to remain in prostitution according to her:

Akobi is in jail here in Germany. He attempted to sneak out while still owing money to the bank and a couple of mail order houses and was caught. I am sure that he wanted to follow Comfort when she got deported. Everything he and Gitte owned has been taken by the bank. Gitte has divorced him and returned to her family. (Darko, 1995, p. 138-139)

This quote signifies that Mara is now a liberated, independent woman who has succeeded in eliminating her main tormentor in her life. She can now decide to stop prostitution and get some decent menial jobs to do if she feels prostitution is not meant for her. Even more interesting is the fact that she has eliminated the one big threat of Akobi ever revealing her indecent life in Germany to her family back home in Ghana. Instead, it is exactly at this point that Mara runs back into the arms of another pimp in the person of Oves and even takes prostitution to another level by being "seen on a couple more sex videos" (Darko, 1995, p. 139).

Furthermore, in Darko's *Beyond the horizon*, although prostitution is portrayed as an undignified profession, a comparative analysis of Mara's life in her father's house and her matrimonial home, makes prostitution a more dignifying profession. Mara's own emotional and physical assessment of her image and in a broader picture in her life clearly pinpoints to the fact that prostitution is a dehumanising job any woman will dare to engage herself in. In assessing her life, she indeed reflects painfully on her transformation from a naïve young woman and an obedient wife to a prostitute. Mara informs us of parts of her physical body that have been totally disfigured for she has sore cracked lips, a bent finger, horrendous bruises and scars all over her body by her best payers (Darko, 1995, p. 2). At this point, Mara's reflection of her life as a prostitute convinces us of no dignity in that profession as she herself claims to be dirty, old and overused (Darko, 1995, p. 3)

However, comparing Mara's life of suffering and abuse in her own father's house and in her matrimonial home to the life of a prostitute, her decision to engage in that trade becomes a far more honorable decision. After all, she did not enjoy any form of dignity in her own father's house and in her matrimonial home. It is in a flashback of events that Mara narrates how she is virtually traded in marriage. According to her, Akobi's father "bought me off very handsomely" (Darko, 1995, p. 7) as she is "given away to this man who paid two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin" (Darko, 1995, p. 3).

Mara's narration of how she is bought and given away in marriage portrays her father as a man who is devoid of love and affection for her daughter. It is clear that what Mara's father is interested in is the money and as a result, he has no qualms commoditifying her daughter. One might argue that as a father, he is doing what is customary by demanding the pride price for her daughter. However, fascinatingly, Mara tells us that:

But father, it appeared, had a different formula for choosing or accepting husbands for his daughters, which took more into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man. (Darko, 1995, p. 4)

Clearly, Mara's own father has given away the dignity of her daughter by commoditifying her and trading her off in marriage just as goods are done. It is not the custom that Mara's father is interested in satisfying; he wants to trade off his daughters and use the benefit that comes with such barter in drinking. At this point, Mara's decision to become and remain a prostitute in Germany becomes a better option because after all, it is through this undignified profession that she is able to cater for her children, her mother and her brother. Mara, through her profession, does not only make money and send it back home to cater for her family but also she is able to finance the building of "a cement-block house for my [her] mother in the village" (Darko, 1995, p. 140), buy a Datsun salon car for her brother and also issue "instructions to them to find a small cement house in town which I can buy for my two kids" (Darko, 1995, p. 140). At least in her prostitution, she decides how to spend the money she earns, she decides what goes on in her life and she is of great help to her children, her mother and brothers. All these possibilities can never be realised in her bondage to Akobi and her father, and by extension, the extremities in patriarchy.

Also, in drawing a comparison between Mara's marital life and her current situation as a prostitute, the latter appears a better option. Indeed, in the opening of the novel, Mara gives a picturesque description of abuses she suffers in the hands of her clients because of her profession. Interestingly, she suffers the same act of maltreatment and abuse in the hands of Akobi. In a flashback of events, Mara narrates how her marital life is subjected to countless abuses by her husband. Rather than being a wife, Mara becomes a housemaid in her own marital home. As if that is not enough, Akobi always enjoyed the pleasure of abusing her upon the least provocation. She narrates her ordeal when she says:

When I didn't bring him the bowl of water and soap in time for washing his hands before and after eating, I received a nasty kick in the knee. When I forgot the chewing stick for his teeth, which he always demanded be placed neatly beside his bowl of served food, I got a slap in the face. And when the napkin was not at hand when he howled for it, I received a knuckle knock on my forehead. (Darko, 1995, p. 19)

Clearly, Mara's ordeal at the brothel is not different from the ordeal she experienced in the hands of Akobi, her husband; there is no difference in her life as a prostitute and that of an obedient wife. In both scenarios she suffers the same physical and mental pain. In addition to the abuses Mara suffers in the hands of Akobi, it is extremely sad that her own husband treated her like a prostitute even before she enters into prostitution. All the sexual encounters between Akobi and Mara are devoid of love. Sex between Mara and her clients and sex between her and Akobi, her husband, is virtually the same. At least in the prostitution, Mara gets paid for services rendered even if she is abused by her clients; in the case of sex with Akobi, Mara offers her body freely, she is not paid for her services and neither is she appreciated by her so-called husband. Mara narrates one out of the many sexual rapes she had with Akobi when she tells us that:

Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and lay out my mat because he wanted to sleep alone. (Darko, 1995, p. 22)

Undeniably, such a picturesque description of sex is so disdainful and humiliating for any woman to suffer such fate. In Mara's case, she is not just any woman but Akobi's wife but she is treated like a sexual object to be used and discarded. From the two scenarios, there are no differences between Mara's sexual life as a married woman and her sexual life as a prostitute. In fact, prostitution in Mara's case becomes beneficial as she gains material things from prostituting compared to her marital life where she wallows in poverty because her husband refuses to take care of her material needs.

Finally, the tactics and language used by Mara's father and Akobi in maltreating her and in objectifying her are the same language and tactics she uses to free herself. Through the same tactics and violent language, she succeeds in exposing Akobi and getting him imprisoned, thus liberating herself from Akobi's imprisonment. She is also able to liberate her relatives and other women folk from such an undesirable element as Akobi. In terms of material dialectics, she is able to liberate her mother, children and brothers, to some extent, from the bondage of poverty. Thus, in her crude tactics and use of violent language in the novel, Mara's efforts yield positive results as compared to the tactics and language used by the male chauvinists in the novel. She uses dirt, (prostitution) to clean dirt (male chauvinism, domestic violence, racism, discrimination and poverty).

Empirical literature on Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* has focused on gender based violence, patriarchy as the thrust of the sexual objectification and exploitation

of women, prostitution as a tool for resistance against exploitation, Mara as a rebel and on the linguistic resources and narrative techniques of the novel that contribute to the underlying meanings of the novel. In most reviews of the novel, Mara, the protagonist enjoys a level of pity as she is labelled a victim, the exploited and the sexually objectified heroine. To such scholars, Mara's choice of profession as a prostitute is due to the manipulation from her husband, Akobi and the patriarchal society which Mara belongs to. However, a deconstructive reading of the novel reveals Mara as an enigmatic character: she is exploited and objectified indeed, she is naïve at the onset of the narrative but she evolves into a smart, rebellious and independent woman who is not just interested in amassing money but in search of an identity. She ensures that those who constitute the vermin of the earth, be they men or women, are assigned to their rightful places. This paper maintains that Mara is not as naïve and stupid as Darko portrays her in the novel, and also, Mara's decision to remain in her marriage and in her occupation as a prostitute is solely her responsibility and nothing else. The fact that she stays in prostitution at the end of the novel is due to her decision to use dirt to clean dirt; she chooses the same dirty tactics used by the patriarchal world to liberate herself and her women folk from the clutches of patriarchy, racism and discrimination. The difference here is that her dirty tactics are aimed at liberating the society of *debris* who pretend to be men while the actions of Mara's father, Akobi and the others are aimed at enslaving women and by extension, the society at large.

E. CONCLUSION

This paper has established that contrary to the portrayal of Mara as naïve and defenseless in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, a deconstructionist reading reveals Mara, the protagonist, as otherwise. A study of Mara's character in relation to other characters such as Akobi, Mara's father and mother, Gitte, Oves, and others produces a myriad of relationships and interpretations that establish hierarchies of meaning. These hierarchies can be inverted in order to produce more valid and subtle meanings. Analysis of Mara's character has revealed that she is not so naïve and defenseless to the extent that she cannot free herself from an abusive marriage. In fact, certain actions and decisions taken by Mara in the novel prove that she is capable of freeing herself from an abusive marriage. In keeping with the tenets of deconstruction that state, according to Balkin, that deconstruction is all about hierarchical order in terms of meaning and privileging, we find that there are two major opposing terms here: marriage and prostitution. Marriage is the "superior" general case and prostitution is the "inferior" case. To Balkin, once these hierarchies are established, deconstruction then reverses such crucial hierarchies so as to elevate the "inferior" over the "superior". In deconstructing the case of Mara in *Beyond the horizon*, prostitution which is perceived as "inferior" is elevated over marriage which is perceived to be the "superior" meaning in the context of the novel. In much the same way, Mara who is initially presented as a naïve, simple village girl and a housewife turns out to be a complex, professional prostitute who takes full revenge on her oppressors but decides to stay in her profession because it

is “more dignifying” than marriage and it allows her to take control of her body and sexuality. Mara is now a complex character because several factors come together to mould the Mara we part ways with at the end of the novel. But even beyond that, life is not really a straight jacket for the average individual, and so in keeping with the technique of verisimilitude, Darko produces a protagonist with many different colours who continues to court our sympathy, admiration, disgust, criticisms and to fascinate us.

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