

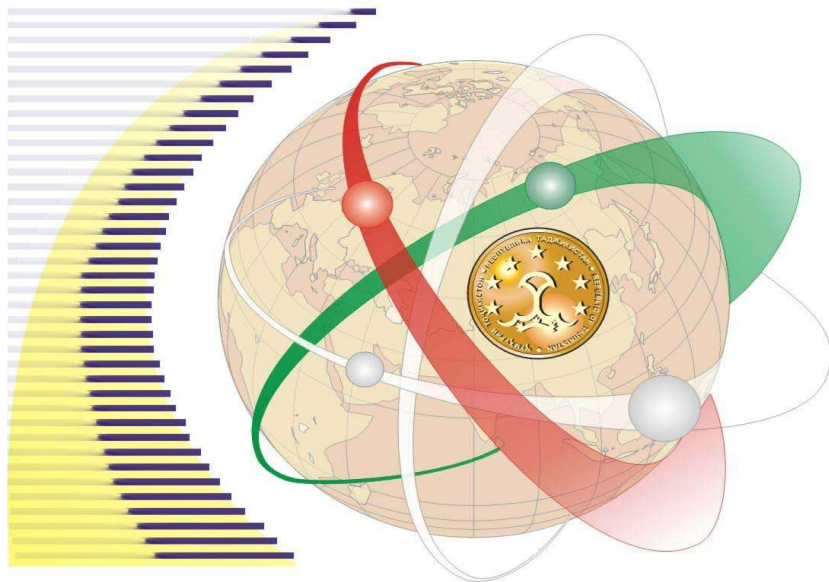


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EXPLORING THE ISSUE OF MARRIAGE DECLINE IN AMMA DARKO'S *BEYOND THE HORIZON* AND *THE HOUSEMAID*.

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ABSTRACT

*This paper aims to highlight and analyse marriage decline in post-colonial literary works in the English language. The works under consideration are Amma Darko's *Beyond the horizon* and *The housemaid*. Marriage decline is evident nowadays and rampant worldwide. Decline in terms of marriage is a situation caused by the partners or due to circumstances of the wedding. Marriage decline in Amma Darko's *Beyond the horizon* and *The housemaid* is expressed through lack of love, ill-treatment, betrayal, economic exploitation, and family dislocation. The reader-oriented theory has been used to explore the issue of marriage decline in the present study. As a result, marriage does not sustain in a context which the relationships are profit-oriented and the goal of forming a peaceful family is not a shared vision within the couple.*

Key words: Marriage decline, relationship, lack of love, consent, family.

RESUME

*Cet article vise à mettre en relief et à analyser le déclin du mariage dans les écrits postcoloniaux en anglais. Les romans du corpus sont *Beyond the horizon* et *The housemaid* d'Amma Darko. Le déclin du mariage est une évidence et est répandu dans le monde entier. Le déclin en termes de mariage est une situation causée par les partenaires ou en raison des circonstances du mariage. Le déclin du*



mariage dans Beyond the horizon et The housemaid d'Amma Darko, est perçu à travers le manque d'amour, les mauvais traitements, la trahison, l'exploitation économique, et la dislocation du tissu familial. La théorie de la réponse du lecteur a été utilisée pour explorer la question du déclin du mariage. En conséquence, le mariage ne dure pas dans un contexte où les relations sont axées sur le profit et l'objectif de former une famille paisible n'est pas une vision commune au sein du couple.

Mots clés: déclin du mariage, relation, manque d'amour, consentement, famille.

INTRODUCTION

Social issues are now the concern of many researchers worldwide. Changes in human's life appear as a key element of surviving and adaptation. Creative writings take those issues as their preoccupation, especially the contemporary ones. Contemporary writers, especially the female ones, depict social issues in the modern life through their literary works. Committed contemporary African writers are generally concerned with the topical issues of comfort, economic independence, exploitation and marital instability. Chudi-Oji Chukwuku emphasises that "*the institution of marriage is virtually universal in human societies.*" It has existed throughout human kind and continues to do so. In African traditional viewpoint, marriage is the union of two persons of the opposite sex as husband or wife; the mutual relation of the husband and wife; the institution whereby men and women are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence to found and maintain a family. But in present-day Africa, the rock of marriage is threatened to breakdown from its traditional form. As a matter of fact, the institution of marriage and the family are being affected by the high rate of marital instability in almost all societies in postcolonial Africa due to the impacts that colonialism has had on African culture. In this wake, Ashcroft, *et al.* (2007) contend that "*Post colonialism deals with the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies*" (p. 168). Undoubtedly, marriage decline is a growing social ill in African societies which is



addressed by many researchers. Several factors, including childlessness, adultery, quarrelling, lack of love, irresponsibility of spouses, and forced marriage are the root causes of marriage deterioration in contemporary African societies. Needless to point out that marriage decline brings about the breakdown of the family unit and causes the loss of an intimate relationship in the couple. This paper aims therefore to address the issue of marriage decline in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid*. The theoretical approach used to carry out this study is the reader-response theory through which the narratee and the text share a transactional experience in drawing meaning from a literary text (Bressler 72). Thus, the interpretation of the novels under scrutiny will be based on our reading experience. In the analytical interpretation, we are going to highlight two aspects: we will unveil the reasons for marriage downfall in the focus novels and then we will explore the profit driven relationships in marriage.

1- REASONS FOR MARRIAGE DOWNFALL IN *BEYOND THE HORIZON* AND *THE HOUSEMAID*

In the focus novels, the phenomenon of marriage downfall mostly stems from the lack of love and consent of the participants. Indeed, the absence of consent between the partners involved in matrimony is one of the causes leading to instability and divorce. Moreover, arranged or forced marriage, most of the time, brings about disputes and the disorganization of the family unit in that the spouses have not mutually decided upon their being together. In the light of the foregoing, this section sheds light on the reasons for marriage breakdown in the novels under scrutiny with specific emphasis on the lack of love and consent between the spouses on the one hand and on the arranged or forced marriage, on the other.

1.1 Lack of love and consent of the involved partners

Originally, marriage is a relationship between two persons, especially a man and a woman who are in love, stay together and



establish a family. It *“is therefore the means by which a man and a woman come together to form a union for the purpose of procreation”* (Ayisi, 1980, p.7). The sense of the union therefore implies that the partners love each other and live in a perfect harmony. On this score, Aja Gabel, quoting Wilcox, points out that *“marriage conveys a sense of meaning, purpose, direction and stability that tends to benefit adults and especially children. People who get married have an expectation of sexual fidelity, and that fidelity tends to engender a sense of trust and security.”* Traditionally, marriage in Africa South of the Sahara is not only the concern of just the bride and the bridegroom but the concern of their respective families. Marriage is therefore based on a process that brings two families together. Mutual respect and dignity are woven into the process, and the love between the man and the woman is expanded to include the immediate and extended families. This involves some rites to be performed before the union with the consent of the two lovers.

Surprisingly, in *Beyond the Horizon*, the marriage between the characters Mara and Akobi, even though the established rules in traditional societies are observed, is not based on love and mutual consent of the partners. Strangely, Akobi does not care for ‘his wife’ and does not show any love for her. Though they live in the same house as wife and husband, there is quite often bad blood between the two. They do not very often share the same bed; this happens only when Akobi feel like having sex. This behaviour of the husband toward his wife does not prove love. As a matter of fact, the character Mara, in her married life, has always been considered less important by her husband. She is aware that Akobi is the master. The first-person narrator obsequiously declares:

“He is my lord, master and my pimp. And like the other women on my left and right, I am his pawn, his slave and his property. What he orders, I do” (Darko, 1995, p. 25).

Akobi’s phallocentric behaviour toward his wife stems from the fact that he considers himself as *“the organizing and ruling power”*



(Klages, 2012, p. 65). On this score, the male character Akobi in Darko's novel under scrutiny is authoritarian toward his wife that he oppresses. The female character Mara has no regard from her husband in that they do not fall in love with each other before getting wed; they are just joined in a marriage arranged by their fathers. Consequently, Mara suffers a lot in her marital life. The story begins with Mara confronting a reflection of her battery in an oval mirror, the result of several years of physical abuse by men, especially by her husband. She courts the reader's pity and support through the overly sentimental and lyrical narration of her experiences, first with Akobi in Accra, and then with Akobi and his accomplices in Germany where she is forced into prostitution. In fact, Mara never deserves Akobi's care. He simply ill-treats his wife; a proof that he is not in love. Darko presents Mara as a young, innocent, illiterate, trusting, and unassuming woman trapped in a violent and exploitative relationship. She bears all the caprice of her husband as she narrates:

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

As the above passage plainly shows, the male character Akobi rules his household with a heavy hand and at the slightest mistake, the oppressed female character Mara suffers a corporal punishment from her abusive husband. The female character Mara can therefore be viewed as the prototype of the oppressed African woman in literature and as Peters (1993) relevantly points out Amma Darko like Buchi Emecheta gives her support to the *"common woman, whom she portrays as a victim in a male-dominated society"* (p. 37). This leads then to infer that Akobi is a kind of husband who is callous, brutish, sadistic and exploitative. Indeed, the greatest part of the story in *Beyond the Horizon* is devoted to Akobi's capacity for physical



violence on the one hand, and Mara's extraordinary capacity for endurance, on the other. Akobi is so consumed by a passion for violence that most of the time the reasons he resorts to such behaviours are shocking. This is the case when his wife becomes pregnant for their first child. Any normal and loving husband will feel elated with such news, but oddly enough Akobi appears rather furious and asks Mara: "[...] *why did you get pregnant?*" (Darko, 1995, p. 17). When the bewildered female character Mara has no answer for the rather surprising question, Akobi beats her up. This is the account given by the autodiegetic narrator:

"I thought: I couldn't have heard right. 'Pardon?' I replied spontaneously, and before I knew what was happening ...Wham! first slap ... wham! wham! wham! three more in succession. And I scurried into what had now become my favourite corner, slumping to the floor. What had I done wrong? But I was to be given neither reasons nor explanations" (Darko, 1995, p. 17).

In this male-dominated arena, battery, psychological violence, and domination have become the routine of Mara's marital life, they are part and parcel of her daily lot as a wife so much so that when Akobi has eventually left for Europe, instead of a relief, there is rather a kind of emptiness in her. She cries endlessly to fill that void because Akobi's unceasing beatings, kicks, slaps, scolds and humiliations have become a permanent feature of their marital relationship. The Ghanaian novelist presents here two antithetical pictures of these partners: the male partner as an oppressor and the female partner as a victim. Indeed, while the male partner is characterised by a spirit of violence and abuse without any human compassion, the female partner, in spite of her suffering, is affectionate. In this wake, Mara declares:

"I had grown wholly attached to Akobi, to his unfairness, to his bullying, to the strength he possessed over me. I didn't like what he meted out to me with that strength and yet, at the same time, that same strength made me acknowledge him as the man of the house; as my husband" (Darko, 1995, p. 44).



Facing the crushing patriarchal system in which she lives, the female character Mara accepts her submission and becomes fatalistic. On the strength of the submissive character of the African woman in a patriarchal or postcolonial society, Gbaguidi (2018) posits that:

“African women are seen only as helpful companions and subjugated mercilessly to men’s authorities in their communities; their drudgery is always viewed as a must. They are indeed seen as nonentities in the communities with no social rank” (p. 41).

The representation of Mara in contemporary Ghanaian literature is in perfect connection with the patriarchal nature of the traditional African society where men have the last word and rule without sharing. What can the female character Mara do if the man she is living with does not love her or marry her reluctantly? Indeed, Akobi has his lover outside, somebody he really loves and is able to do everything for her. He has been under her control, in that on the eve of his departure for Germany, he chooses to spend his last night with her, and does his best to stop Mara from seeing him off at the airport:

“I knew without being told that if I wasn’t welcome at the farewell party two days ago then I wasn’t welcome at the airport either [...]. Even though in the past he never left messages for me when he was going out in my absence, I felt that since this involved a journey, he definitely would make an exception of it [...]. And when the clock ticked 11p.m., the time I knew his plane would be taking off, I rose slowly, picked up the bowl of soup, and walked to the farthest end of the stinking gutter and emptied the entire contents of the bowl into it (Darko, 1995, p. 43).

It turns out that since Mara has been imposed upon Akobi, he does not show any love for her but has abandoned her for another woman. Furthermore, in Amma Darko’s novel published in 1998, *The Housemaid*, the goal of building up a peaceful and tuneful family is not a shared preoccupation of Sekyiwa and Tika’s father. Truly, Sekyiwa does not love her husband. Her marriage with Tika’s father



rapidly turns into fights and quarrels. Oddly enough, the female character Sekyiwa constantly commits acts of physical violence against her husband pushing the omniscient narrator in *The Housemaid* to point out about Tika, their only daughter:

“All the screaming and yelling had come from her mother; the imploring and pleading from her father. She remembered her mother’s hand flying at her father’s face in time with her insults” (Darko, 1998, p. 19).

It is glaring that a love-based marriage can never lead to that. To the relatives of Tika’s father, Sekyiwa is a wicked wife, a woman with a heart of stone. She is alleged to have caused her husband’s death because she is not faithful and that is a fatal fault in marriage. In fact, adultery is always a violation of the marriage rule and at the same time a proof of lack of love.

The marriage between Mara and Akobi in *Beyond the Horizon* and Sekyiwa and her nameless husband in *The Housemaid* is not sustained by love, hence disputes, fights and battery become the daily menu of those couples.

1.2 Arranged or forced marriage: case of Mara and Akobi in *Beyond the Horizon*

Marriage is a basic institution in every human society. It is a recognized social institution, not only for establishing and maintaining the family, but also for creating and sustaining the ties of kinship. Every man or woman who reaches adulthood is expected to get married for the purpose of reproduction. Marriage is an adult’s concern and is based on feelings and on mutual consent of the partners involved. But when the bride or the bridegroom get married without their consent or against their will, one speaks of forced marriage. Arranged or forced marriage is rarely radiant with joy and peace. This kind of marriage has existed since the early days of the world, when parents chose husband or wife for their offspring to rock the relationship between two families, villages, communities, etc. But this was not without consequences, in those days. In *Beyond*



the Horizon, marriage is viewed as an arrangement between families and parents. Meanwhile this arrangement is not without interest. As a matter of fact, Mara's father, "*who deliberately engages his under-age daughters in a marital relationship devoid of love, affection and sense of humanity*" (Cakpo-Chichi et al, 2017, p.124), argues that young girls must be sent into early marriage to a man who is not necessary their choice. In a word, for this character, in *Beyond the Horizon*, girls are to be given to men that their parents often choose for them. The consequence is that girls are destined to men who generally do not take good care of them. A proven example of this is the way the character Akobi ill-treats his wife, Mara, after their arranged marriage. Mara's father knows nothing except his propensity to marry off his under-age daughters, taking more into consideration "*the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man*" (Darko, 1995, p.4). On the strength of this, Gbaguidi (2018) highlights Mara's father's "*scornful and materialistic attitude as regards his female children's wedding*" (p. 45). In fact, in that patriarchal setting, Mara's father considers it as his duty to decide on the fate of his female children by marry them off to affluent men. It is clear that the forced or arranged marriage between Mara and Akobi is not to make the couple happy but is nothing except a means of settling a commercial deal between the fathers of the partners. Nowadays, some parents, like Mara's father, expect to make money when they give birth to girls. They are sure to collect their bride price when they grow up. The forced marriage is based on the profit of its arrangers. This is what Mara's father has done to destroy the life of his own daughter. Though Mara is a girl full of hope, in her village, she is pitchforked into a marriage by her father, who "[...] *had used the goats, the cows to remarry*" (Darko, 1995, p. 8). It is then plain that Mara's father is not seeking his daughters' happiness and welfare by sending her into marriage but he is primarily concerned with his selfish interests through the bribe price he collects bringing about his daughter into utter destitution beside her so-called husband. Mara then

"withstands the neglect and abuse that Akobi heaps on her because she believes, as a true conventional African woman,



that it is a wife's duty to put up with her husband's whims"
(Gbaguidi, 2018, p. 45).

This marriage is the beginning of Mara's ordeal. Indeed, the man who has been chosen for her as husband batters her a lot, maybe it is his manner to say *"let me collect my dowry price back"* for he too is forced by his father to marry the girl. If Mara's father has thought about his daughter, he will have analysed his way of doing. But relatives today are so blind with materials that they do not even care for their offspring's future. Such relatives are devoid of conscience and are the picture of Mara's father. The latter chooses a husband for his daughters without caring for their feeling or point of view as the homodiegetic character, Mara, declares:

"I remember the day clearly. I returned from the village well with my fourth bucket of water of the day when mother excitedly beckoned to me in all my wetness and muddiness, dragged me into her hurt and breathlessly told me the 'good news'. Your father has found a husband for you; [...] 'a good man!'" (Darko, 1995, pp.3-4)

As the autodiegetic narrator confesses, her father chooses a good man for her but she knows her father does not care about the character of the chosen man but cares for the number of the cows coming as the bride price instead. Concerning forced marriage, parents consider the position the man occupies in the society; the social status of the groom counts a lot. And when a groom with a promising future, because he is from a well-off family, comes into marriage negotiations, the prospective in-laws cannot turn down the proposition as they think of what they will gain after all. Mara's father cannot reject the demand of Akobi's father because he is thinking of himself, how he can pay back his debts. Moreover, he is honoured that the first son of the fictitious village Naka with school certificate chooses to marry his daughter. His reflections stop when he realizes it. The materials impede his reflection as it does with some parents. When the groom is rich, automatically the in-laws agree on his demand, this is how some selfish parents drive their daughters into suffering like: ill-treatment; diseases and many other



bad conditions. As for Mara, she ends up as a prostitute, she is selling her soul for the devil, because her father forces her to marry Akobi, who has destroyed her life at a tender age, and she is living in a permanent lie, for once back home in Ghana she does not reveal the truth to her family and gains society's admiration on account of the money and other things she regularly sends home. One wonders what her mother, the rest of her family, the society and even her father would say if the truth of her condition is to be revealed to them.

Forced marriage is generally profitable for its organizers; nevertheless many drawbacks happen after such marriage. Darko showcases the suffering that the forced marriage can cause. Akobi, on his part, though he does not love Mara, is also obliged to accept her as wife to comply with his father's decision. This is why he will not be so blamed much because Akobi is a victim of the practice as well. Like Mara, he is obliged to live with someone he does not love. Likewise, Mara has married Akobi to satisfy her father's will. Even though she does not love him, she does not have a choice because she is a woman and as such she must learn to love this evil man as husband in spite of the ill- treatments. But this kind of union is doomed to failure.

2- PROFIT DRIVEN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE *BEYOND THE HORIZON* AND *THE HOUSEMAID*

Most relationships in the novels under study are based on interest. We can mention economic profit made from sexual partners and the destruction of the social fabric within the family.

2.1- Sexual partners as an economic source

Profit seeking leads many partners to set together. In *The Housemaid* and *Beyond the Horizon*, many sexual partners are in union for the sake of money, favour, sex, to say but a few. Marriage has become a



kind of business, because parents set children into marriage by envy to gain money from their dowry. Marriage therefore becomes a financial institution. Mara's father knows that his female children are an economic source for him. That's why he always tries to find "good men" for them. In such a condition, his daughters are considered as "goods" for sale. Marriage as performed in *The Housemaid* remains an issue of interest and profit for the two parties engaged in it. The relationship between the characters Cherry and Nsorhwe proves it well:

The daughter of a former minister of state, who had died suddenly of heart failure when a coup d'état saw the government in which he was serving out of power, Cherry suddenly found herself on the rough side of life. Plus she had the additional burden of an illegitimate daughter. Life was hell and anything that could take her away from it was heaven. So when she found out that Nsorhwe was unattached, doing his masters and doctorate, and had the guarantee of a good life ahead of him back in Ghana when his studies were over, Cherry saw him as her saviour. Without further ado, she invited a rather baffled Nsorhwe to her very gloomy apartment one evening. She gave him the night of his life [...]. What he didn't know was that Cherry had not chosen the date of their first night at random. She had chosen a day during her fertile period, because she was hoping to trap Nsorhwe (Darko, 1998, p.84).

The heterodiegetic narrator, through this quotation, showcases that Cherry's marriage with Nsorhwe is just an intrigue played by the former to catch the latter in her trap. For sure one can rightfully and rightly foresee the outcome of this love affair as it has no solid foundation. Moreover, Tika, the business lady, is driven by material lust, she schemes to recruit men to her cause and later dump them. Contrary to what one could think, it is Tika as a businesswoman who exploits men using sex as a bargaining tool. For her, men are useful as in commodities of exchanges. The physical appeal does not matter but only the money that will be earned counts for her. She does not



love any of those men. She just sleeps with the purpose of having favours. Nsorhwe, one of Tika's lovers, does not deserve any self-respecting woman in marriage. He confirms: *"Whoever decides to be with me will undoubtedly be someone very desperate for something [...]"* (Darko, 1998, p. 83). Tika consents to have a love affair with Nsorhwe because he is a bank manager who can facilitate loans to her at any time. She knows that he is ugly and sterile but she chooses him just to get favours. And actually she has been granted loans to conduct her business. Besides, Efia, Tika's housemaid, accuses the same Nsorhwe of being responsible for her pregnancy simply because he is a well-off man. In this wake, Efia picks on Nsorhwe to use blackmail: *"Four of Tika's lovers were discussed. And, upon further scrutiny, the mantle of doom fell on Mr Nsorhwe. Mr Nsorhwe was stout, bespectacled and the manager of a big commercial bank [...]. All in all, he was the perfect bait"* (Darko, 1998, p.77). Interestingly, Tika does not choose her lovers at random, but purposely. The business lady can bribe with cash some officers but not all of them accept that condition. As a matter of fact, Samuel and Tika are sexual partners for the sake of business. The extradiegetic narrator declares:

"Some customs officers accepted cash bribes in exchange for reduced tariffs, but this did not apply to Samuel, the chief customs officer at the border, when the businesswoman involved happened to be young and pretty. He turned down Tika's cash offer and indicated lewdly that what he wanted from her was sex. She needed his help, so she consented" (Darko, 1998, p.23).

As it can be noticed, since Tika's cash cannot impress Samuel, her sex is a good asset to get satisfaction. Like Tika, many of other young girls make great use of their sex to entice men. Among them, we have the homeless female character Akua and her mates who give themselves to builders in charge of building sites against in exchange for sex. Indeed, as the extradiegetic narrator in Darko's novel published in 1998 ironically points out:



“Like her mates, Akua had no regular home. They all lived in unfinished buildings; when final completion work started, they moved out. Thanks to bribes of cash and sex, workers at the building sites regularly tipped them on the next place available for occupation” (Darko, 1998, p. 32).

It appears that:

the village immigrants, who invade the city, squat unfinished buildings in return for payment in cash or kind to unscrupulous builders because of the immigrants’ homelessness. Those ‘city invaders’, indulging in debauchery and living in not very commendable hygienic conditions, are continually in search of unfinished buildings to squat for fear the real owners might see them as they have to face the hard realities of city life (Gbaguidi, 2013, p. 174).

The confession made by the groundnut girl is a confirmation that “sex” is sometimes the only means to get a way out when the situation becomes hard in terms of negotiation. She asserts, “*The owner of my base has returned from abroad and wants to resume works on his building, so I had to bribe Atinga yesterday with a couple of quick rounds behind the blue kiosk to get him find me a new place*” (Darko, 1998, p. 95). In addition, before Akua gets a driver to give her a lift to the city, she is bound to seduce him with her body and then have sex with him as the following lines show:

‘Where to?’ the driver asked curtly.

‘Kumasi’

‘You have the money to pay me?’

‘No’

He grunted. ‘So you won’t pay me?’

Akua unbuttoned her blouse. The driver’s eyes blazed with consent. She removed her pants. He grinned, and stopped the truck in a secluded bend.

‘But don’t make me pregnant,’ Akua cautioned.

‘I won’t,’ and he covered her nipples with his lips. He sucked and fondled her body. (Darko, 1998, p. 31)



As for Sekyiwa, Tika's mother, she indulges in a clandestine love affair with Tika's father because of the barrenness of the latter's first wife. This is reinforced by the fact that the man is craving to have a child. The extradiegetic narrator then puts forth:

At the age of twenty-two she began a clandestine affair with a married man twenty-four years her senior. His wife was barren and rumour had it that this was the result of an abortion she had had when they were courting. Then Sekyiwa got pregnant. And the man felt his obligation to his unborn child transcending his loyalty to his life. He left her. 'I will live the rest of my life for you and our child,' he promised Sekyiwa. (Darko, 1998, p. 18)

The above passage reveals one of the most important aspects of marriage which is that the childless couple is likely to break up as marriage is to establish and maintain harmoniously the formal family. This traditional rule is observed and effective even in modern life. Meanwhile, their being together is determined by the pregnancy and there has been no history regarding the acquaintance of the two families and the rites preceding marriage. The relationship between Tika's parents is profit-driven. The husband craves for having children whereas the wife has desire for wealth. Besides, the fact that Efia's grand-mother and mother both ask Efia to get pregnant at all cost, no matter the perpetrator of the pregnancy, is a vivid proof that some parents are careless of who is or will be their daughter's husband. This inducement does not meet the fact that the bride's family must know the bridegroom's family and make arrangement with them. The dignity and the honour are no more their interest but money. Wedding which was perceived as a momentous ritual in the process of marital life is no more a preoccupation. Normally Efia's parents should worry about who will be their daughter's husband. Unfortunately they incite her to make a decision that will certainly jeopardise her life.



3.2 - Deterioration of the family fabric

Establishing a family is not the goal of many young people nowadays. In *The Housemaid*, the concept of marriage as a basis for a family seems not to be the main objective of partners. The satisfaction of the sexual lust seems to be the outmost goal. Consequently, many young girls in the imaginary village of Kataso do not have the opportunity to remain virgin before getting married or having their children after marriage. Most of them lose their virginity in their adolescence. This issue has been raised by the tiger-nut seller; a young girl of about nineteen:

Go and look at my sister. She is only sixteen and already pregnant with her second child. The first one [the author of the pregnancy] disappeared as soon as he was told of it. And this second one too, he was a really nice man, till the pregnancy came. Then come and see! He too started talking strange talk. 'Ah! Didn't I do it with you all the way only once?' ... 'All the other times, didn't I remove my thing before the milk came?' Then declared that no, no, no, it sure was no him responsible [sic]. So tell me - only sixteen, two children, no husband. (Darko, 1998, p.8)

The narrator in this analepsis clearly depicts how the rites preceding marriages with young people are not any longer observed in Kataso and Osiadan, two imaginary villages in the novel under consideration here. Girls are not only married before pregnancy but also after the birth of the child. This illustrates somehow that the act of marriage is now perceived by young people as sexual satisfaction. Or a marriage without husband is rooted by the fact that the responsibility of the two families is not engaged at the beginning. In traditional African marriage the implication of families of the bride and groom have to play a pivotal role. A marriage is considered a union between kin groups. The offspring of the marriage are also considered belonging as much to their kin groups as to their parents. The African marriage customs allow the families of the marriage partners to get involved heavily. But sex for Katasoan remains a tool



of entertainment affordable by everybody. However, its abuse is not without punishment. Kofi Akorti, a perverted man, has been booted out from the village because of his gross offence:

One dawn, the palace announcer would shout out, 'Hear, oh hear, you good people of Kataso. The chief has asked me to bring this message to you all. Kofi Akorti has been asked to leave this village immediately. Mama Ama Mbroo reported he had impregnated her fourteen-year-old daughter. This brings to twelve the number of the young girls Kofi Akorti has so far impregnated in Kataso. The chief thinks it in the interest of the village that Akorti carries his wilful and undisciplined penis away from here before he impregnates another twelve girls (Darko, 1998, p.30).

It is clear that Akorti's goal is not to get married with all these girls but just to satisfy his sexual lust. Many girls that leave their village for the city end up in prostitution. Those girls do not have any comfortable job in general and that seems to be the reason why they engage in such an activity. But they are not preoccupied with finding a husband as well. They make the streets their business centre. These days, on account of rapid social changes, quite a number of women remain single and childless like Tika in *The Housemaid*. This affects the well-being of families which are the units of the society. For women who are lucky to get married young, they generally end up lonely with the responsibility of taking care of their children. One of the advantages of union is happiness and mutual responsibility. Paradoxically, Mami Korkor in *The Housemaid* ends up alone with four children. This raises the issue of men's irresponsibility in marriage. Indeed, the female character Mami Korkor "*had to hawk fish from dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and her children. They all depended on her. Not a pesewa from their father*" (Darko, op cit, p.11). This statement does not confirm that only childless union is doomed to failure. The case of Mami Korkor is a vivid example; her household, though full of children, has broken up as the husband fail his duty. This makes many street girls abort just



because there is no man responsible for help. The uncountable abandoned babies, dead or still alive, are greatly related to that fact.

CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, this paper has revealed the problem of marriage decline in Amma Darko's *Beyond the horizon* and *The housemaid*. Marriage as performed in the novels under study is in total decline due to many factors which are lack of love, forced marriage, profit-driven relationships. It has been proved that the lack of love and consent of the partners engaged in marriage leads directly to failure of the union. Arranged or forced marriage is not prosperous because the spouses do not decide themselves. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that marriage downfall is mostly due to the fact that many relationships are based on profits. Finally, this paper has demonstrated that the desire to get married is not the preoccupation of many young people, especially men who appear irresponsible. The family fabric is therefore in progressive deconstruction.

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