



HAL
open science

Reconstituting the Self: of Names, Discourses and Agency in Amma Darko's Beyond the Horizon

Rogers Asempasah, Christabel Aba Sam

► To cite this version:

Rogers Asempasah, Christabel Aba Sam. Reconstituting the Self: of Names, Discourses and Agency in Amma Darko's Beyond the Horizon. International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2016. hal-02551082

HAL Id: hal-02551082

<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02551082v1>

Submitted on 22 Apr 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Reconstituting the Self: of Names, Discourses and Agency in Amma Darko's

Beyond the Horizon

Rogers Asempasah

College of Humanities and Legal Studies
Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
rasempasah@ucc.edu.gh

Christabel Aba Sam

College of Humanities and Legal Studies
Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
krislulv12324@yahoo.com

Abstract

*What "Mara" signifies and how this is constitutive of the quest for a conscious but problematic postcolonial transnational subjectivity has rarely reverberated in the burgeoning critical commentary on Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. This paper explores how 'Mara' functions in *Beyond the Horizon* as a name and concept that summons a specific biblical discourse that foregrounds female migratory subjectivity, vulnerability, dispossession and redemption, and a Fanti concept of a beleaguered and ethical subjectivity that emerges from complicity, radical decision and agency. The paper demonstrates that these discourses are pertinent in determining how Mara reconstitutes her subjectivity at the margins of Empire. The paper contributes to our understanding of how literary names designate and conceptualise experience, function as archetypal and intertextual coda that gesture, to borrow Judith Butler's words for our purposes, to "a world beyond themselves [and] their boundaries," and therefore have rhetorical and thematic force. How Mara negotiates the problematics of capture is therefore crucial to Darko's narrative of awakening.*

Keywords: Amma Darko, Mara, agency, postcolonial, vulnerability, discourse, corporeal liberation.

There is no closure of discourse, discourse only ever being a compromise—or bricolage—between what it is legitimate to say, what one would like to contend or argue, and what one is forced to recognize. Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*

Introduction

Two deep structural logics drive the narrative dynamics in Amma Darko's debut novel, *Beyond the Horizon*: the demythologization of Europe as the privileged place of redemption for marginalised subjects from the periphery of the global system, and the possibility of corporeal redemption or liberation and reconstituting the self. The two trajectories are not mutually exclusive. They are intimately linked and interdependent: the disappointment of the initial fantasy and hope becomes the precondition for Mara's awakening and reconstitution of the self and identity. At the end of the novel, we are confronted with a beleaguered postcolonial subject, Mara, the narrator and protagonist, who is trapped in Germany, Europe, and abandons Ghana and Africa for fear that her forced illicit prostitution activities might be exposed (139). As a result, she resigns herself to sending "material things" (140) to her relations in Ghana. Mara thus disavows and redefines intimacy and filiation. Instead, what is entrenched is a structure of dependency that problematically bypasses the question of integrity and responsibility.

From the above perspective, Mara's experiences and abnegation of home constitutes Darko's interrogation of Europe as the horizon of hope in the imagination of the postcolonial subject, and a critique of the fetish of "The Cargo" mentality or consumerism that Ayi Kwei Armah, in his *Fragments*, identifies as the curse of Africa. Europe emerges in Darko's novel, then, not as the "privileged topos" (Chambers 14) but as the locus of shame, solitude, invisibility and annihilation of peripheral people like "economic migrants, exiles and refugees" (Odamtten 104)¹. This interpretation, which is representative of the dominant reading that has crystallised around *Beyond the Horizon*, presents Mara as a tragic victim of fantasy and naivety, patriarchal violence, and contemporary global structures of dependency and flows of illicit labour (Odamtten 1, 53, 104). Thus, it is unsurprising that Angsotinge, Dako, Denkabe, and Yitah have described the novel as "a tale of exploitation, broken hopes and promises" (86).

However, this dominant critical attitude obscures and occludes the novel's essential structural logic of awakening and possibility or redemption that revolves around Mara's negotiation of apparatuses of domination and exploitation. If, as O'Connell and Odamtten have insisted, *Beyond the Horizon* is "primarily a coming-of-age narrative" (49), then it is crucial that, in addition to the issues of patriarchal violence and betrayal, exploitation, shame, and the demythologization of Europe, we pay attention to the novel's mechanics or rhetoric of

reconstituting a postcolonial transnational female subjectivity at the heart of Empire.² Otherwise, it is problematic to characterise the novel as a narrative of awakening without adverting to the inscription of agency, voice and emergence, however tenuous that may be. This is because the coming-of-age narrative hinges on a transformational structure that inscribes difference in terms of cognitive awareness and valuation of moments, events and incidents that define the character's maturational trajectory.

To focus on the novel as a coming-of-age narrative that emphasises the protagonist-narrator's reconstitution of the self or identity is to raise the crucial issue of the place of the proper name, Mara, and its relation to discourses of migratory subjectivity, precarity, vulnerability, agency and corporeal redemption. Unfortunately, although various theoretical perspectives have been brought to bear on *Beyond the Horizon*, rarely has attention been drawn to the proper name Mara as the central axis around which the rhetoric and discourse of the crisis of hope and identity, and the quest for liberation revolves. In this paper, therefore, we propose to explore the semantics of 'Mara' in the construction of *Beyond the Horizon* as a narrative of awakening that traces Mara's transformation from a compliant village girl in Naka, Ghana, to a perceptive reader, in Germany, of the multifaceted patriarchal and transnational regimes that exploit women. We contend that 'Mara' functions as a translinguistic³ concept that invokes a specific biblical discourse of female migratory subjectivity, vulnerability, dispossession and the possibility of redemption, and a specific Fanti notion of a beleaguered and ethical subjectivity that revolves around complicity, responsibility, radical decision and agency. We demonstrate that these cultural texts are pertinent to determining not only what 'Mara' signifies but also what "history" Mara makes in the novel. By "making history" we are drawing on Marx's seminal insight that "Men (sic) make their own history, but not of their free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted" (185). Our analysis will reveal that Marx's notions of structure and agency, history and the mechanics of the constitution of agency and freedom are relevant to understanding Mara's appropriation of the biblical story of Naomi and the Fanti discourse of problematic and ethical subjectivity to reconstitute her identity. However, rather than the grand or revolutionary history that Marx dwells on, we argue that Darko focuses on *herstory*; how the making of *herstory* depends on negotiating diabolical normative structures and ideologies of oppression or corporeal commodification of the female body. What constitutes 'history' making in *Beyond the Horizon* must, therefore, be seen not as a radical rapture but as an ethical investment that revolves around Mara's deliberate acts or tactics that interrogate the foundational logics of the patriarchy that use women as "objects in male transaction" (Gough, 69).⁴

Focusing on the semantics of names as central to Mara's reconstitution of the self or

identity therefore places emphasis on how Darko explores the possibility of corporeal redemption from ideologies and figures that produce “corporeal vulnerability” (Athanasios 98). Semantics of names in this paper refers to the multiple discourses and meanings inscribed in ‘Mara’ as a personal name in Darko’s novel. Mara does not just designate an entity in *Beyond the Horizon*; it also posits a form of migratory subjectivity, ethical attitude and awakening. To arrive at this conclusion requires an appreciation of the discourses that Mara as a name summons. As Anderson rightly points out “the use of names can serve various functions, and this may be reflected in our knowledge concerning a particular name-referent” (83). Following Anderson, we are interested in the discursive referents invoked by Darko’s deployment of Mara as a proper name. In pursuit of this objective, we have disaggregated Mara into its biblical (Jewish) and Fanti semantic frames not only to highlight their dialogical, thematic and rhetorical ‘dramatization’ in the novel but, crucially, to indicate how they contribute to Darko’s exploration of female migratory liminality, crisis of identity, and reconstitution of the self. Perhaps it is worth stressing that this disaggregation is as germane for analytical purposes as it is for showing that the success of Darko’s craft in *Beyond the Horizon* is the interpenetration of these discourses in a manner that make their identification almost indiscernible to the uncritical reader. Finally, we use ‘agency’ in terms of Emirbaýer and Mische’s reconceptualisation of human agency as “temporally embedded” practices of “social engagement” that are informed by the past and the present, but oriented toward the future, alternative configurations or ways of being (963). It is our view that Darko’s framing of her protagonist-narrator’s experiences around Mara as a name and a concept is critical to appreciating not just the nature of Mara’s inventiveness and choice with a view to redefining what it means *to be*⁵, it also emphasises the interconnectedness of experience, discourses of migratory subjectivity, complicity, ethics and radical decision. The paper concludes by drawing attention to some implications of focusing on the significance of Mara to the reading *Beyond the Horizon*.

1.1 Echoes of Naomi: Framing postcolonial migratory subjectivity, bitterness and dispossession

The first discourse that Darko invokes for her protagonist-narrator through the strategic choice of the name Mara is the biblical migratory narrative of Naomi. The significance of the biblical account of Naomi’s transformation to a reading of Darko’s novel is multidimensional. It functions as a typology of how precarity or crisis at home becomes the incentive for positioning another country as the horizon; a site that generates a specific conceptual figure that addresses female dispossession and shame in the context of migratory subjectivity; a frame for exploring the horizon as a problematic and therefore how the foreign country as the redemptive place may be disappointed.

According to the Book of *Ruth* in the Old Testament, Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, are forced by famine in Bethlehem, Judea, to migrate to Moab. Tragedy, however, strikes as Naomi loses her husband and two sons. On hearing that the situation in Judah has changed for the better, Naomi returns to Bethlehem but this time a destitute accompanied only by Ruth, her widowed daughter-in-law. So deteriorated has Naomi become that when she arrives in Bethlehem, the womenfolk register their consternation: “Is this Naomi?” (1:19). Perhaps ashamed of and embittered by the dramatic reversal of her fortunes which positions her as a failure, without social status and recognition, Naomi takes the radical step by changing her name to Mara which means “Bitter”: “Don’t call me Naomi, she told them, call me Mara because the Almighty (Shaddai) has made my life very bitter. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty (1:20). Since Naomi means “Pleasant” Mara, for Naomi, represents the supreme designation for a calamitous state of dispossession and shame. By this singular act Naomi taps into a dominant Old Testament conceptualisation of catastrophe, misfortune, or radical degeneration or devaluation of being into bare life — Mara (Job 3:20; 7:11; 10:1; 21:25; 1; Sam 15:32; Isa 38:17). Naomi’s act of self-naming or constitution marks the first time in the Bible that *Mara* occurs with reference to a woman’s situation. What is more, it is also the first instantiation of a character deliberately assuming *Mara* as a proper name to describe her terrible circumstances that results from migration. This originary convergence of migration, gender, bitterness, dispossession, shame, alienation and the crisis of identity makes the biblical Mara, as an archetypal female figure and as a concept, which articulates a particular form of contingent existence, significant for Darko’s interrogation of transnational travel and the postcolonial female subject.

By invoking Naomi’s story Darko not only constructs an interpretive community; she also sets in motion the potent trope of repetition and difference that highlights the parallels and, especially, the differences in the conceptualisation of the source of the bitterness of the tough situation Mara is confronted with in Germany. Three issues stand out in this recontextualisation of Naomi’s story in the dynamics of global mobility. The first relates to how crisis at home becomes the push factor for migrating to the ‘beyond’ for greener pastures or a better life. In “Amma Darko: Writing Her Way, Creating a Writing Life,” Louise Allen Zak situates Darko’s life and the writing of *Beyond the Horizon* in Germany within the larger historical context of the socio-economic and food crisis that hit Ghana in the 1980s. In an uncanny echo or repetition of the drought that forced Naomi and her family to migrate to Moab, Zak argues that the “several seasons of drought and bush fires had created severe food shortages” in Ghana forced Amma Darko to move to Germany in search of greener pastures (13). In Zak’s view, then, what we read in *Beyond the Horizon* is the fictionalisation of the real: the re-presentation of Amma Darko’s first-hand experiences of the fate of postcolonial women trapped in what Odamtten has aptly

described as the “blank of whiteness” (120). In both the biblical and Darko’s stories, it is easy to see how precarity at home forces the characters to view the foreign country as the place of redemption.

Secondly, while for Naomi the assumption of the name Mara is a temporary marker of what Victor Matthews has aptly described as her “doubly liminal based on physical location and social status” (cited in Lau, 126), the same cannot be said for Darko’s protagonist-narrator. Following Matthews, Lau contends that, for Naomi, Mara “symbolises the way she feels [and] also corresponds to her liminal phase” (126). We find confirmation of this when toward the end of the Book of *Ruth* Naomi no longer objects to being called Naomi. This is because her status has changed and she has become more integrated into the community (4:14-17): she has regained her social recognition. Mara is no longer appropriate for her. On the other hand, in *Beyond the Horizon*, when Mara has transformed herself from being “totally green” and her status recognised, she declines the suggestion from Kaye, her friend, to change her name to commensurate with her new identity: “You are no more you, Mara. You’ve changed.” Unlike the biblical Naomi, Mara objects: “No, Kaye. I’m still me. I have just understood the world better” (127). As we show in our reading of ‘Mara’ as a Fanti word, Mara’s refusal to change her name is important to how she reconstitutes herself. While Kaye’s suggestion for a change of name indicates that, she rightly interprets ‘Mara’ as bitterness, shame, naivety and exploitation, Mara’s insistence on holding on to her name suggests a perceptive understanding of the multiple connotations of the Fanti word unavailable to Kaye. Furthermore, Mara’s insistence on maintaining her name is a recognition that genuine liberation is a process and not a single dramatic event.

Thirdly, the other key departure Darko introduces in her subtle appropriation of the Naomi narrative is Mara’s refusal to return home for fear of the shame that will come with the potent Naomi-like question “Is this Mara?” This is not to suggest that by refusing to return Mara averts shame. The difference lies in Darko’s strategic relocation of the source of the shame. For Mara, shame is not triggered by the community’s failure to recognise the returnee (she does not return anyway) but by a deeper personal realisation that she has been made dirty, made impure sexually, and that she is complicit in that corporeal devaluation.

The invocation of Naomi’s story therefore seeks to highlight the enormity of Mara’s situation. Unlike Naomi who eventually decides to return home, Bethlehem, to pursue a different redemptive path, Mara denies herself that possibility for fear of shame. In a way, then, Darko disrupts the emplotment we find in the biblical narrative. This emerges by comparing Darko’s reconfiguration of the structure of the Naomi’s story. The Naomi story has a tripartite structure: an “Israelite in her home country; to Israelite sojourner in Moab; to Israelite repatriate” (Lau 121).

To heighten the complex condition of the postcolonial female migratory subject, Darko's novel leaves out the returnee phase.

While Mara's liminality is important to reading *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko's emphasis is more on Mara's growing awareness of the multifaceted players in her oppression, her complicity in her own oppression, and the decisive actions she initiates to reclaim some integrity and ownership over where the money that accrues from her prostitution goes. It is precisely in the context of these thematics of complicity and radical decision that the biblical story of Naomi becomes inadequate as a framing and interpretive device. In addition, unlike Naomi who frames her bitterness within the Jewish epistemology of the relationship between the Jew and her God, Mara contextualizes her bitterness within the matrix of patriarchal domination and the precarious conditions at home that make postcolonial subjects to view Europe as the horizon. For Naomi the Almighty has a hand in her bitterness. In other words, while Naomi's bitterness emanates from her bereavement, disempowerment, and loss of social recognition as a returnee, Mara's bitterness is the result of male domination and betrayal, her complicity and the impossibility of returning home. Nonetheless, for both figures, at the core of their bitterness and sense of humiliation or shame is the feeling of nothingness or loss of a former status. As Naomi aptly put it: "I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty" (1:21). Similarly, Mara describes herself as this "bit of garbage that once used to be me" (3). So convinced is Mara about her degeneration that she concludes that, "Material things are all I can offer them, as for myself, there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them" (140). For Darko, therefore, it is this corporeal indignity; this reduction of the body to a commodity or an object of exploitation and abuse that constitutes the very nadir of devaluation.

The biblical story of Naomi thus sheds light on Darko's focus on the bitter experiences of Mara in a foreign land. Naomi's migratory experience thus functions as a subtle hermeneutic and epistemic code that partly speaks to the existential crisis of postcolonial subjects like Mara whose precarious or embattled subjectivity interrogates the notion of the beyond. Although this is the case, we must emphasise that what is at stake in the two narratives is not the abandonment of the desire for the beyond. Rather it is how the trope of the beyond functions as the mechanism for plotting the incorporation of the other in a grand genealogy of redemption (the biblical story), and as a critique of the systemic inequities in the postcolony that create the conditions for the emergence of Euro-America as potent charms for postcolonial subjects (Darko's story). Herein lies the political in Darko's title: by deconstructing the privileged status of Europe, by secularizing the biblical Naomi discourse and thereby placing it in a postcolonial and contemporary temporality of global mobility of persons (licit and illicit) or transnationalism, Darko forces us to rethink the very notion 'beyond', especially of its depiction of Europe as

redemption.

Furthermore, by subtly invoking Naomi's story as constitutive to *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko establishes a transhistorical dimension for exploring female migratory experiences, bitterness and oppression. Like Naomi, for whom Moab fails to deliver the promise of liberation, Mara's initial fantastic conception of Europe as a kind of Eldorado for the postcolonial subject evaporates when she comes face-to-face with the reality of life in Germany. In the opening scenes of *Beyond the Horizon*, the reader is confronted with Mara staring painfully at what is left of what once used to be her image:

I am sitting here before my large oval mirror. I like oval things... I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – What is left of what once used to be my image and from my left and right, all about me, I keep hearing chuckles and pantings, wild bedspring, creaks, screaming oohs and yelling aahs, they are coming from rooms that are the same as mine, rooms where the same things are more as they are in mine. And in all of them, there are pretty women like myself (p.1).

The significance of this passage is that Mara registers her personal devaluation and at same time captures, within the poignant economy of her narration, the terrible plight of a mass of pretty women caught in the prostitution of their bodies. It is a dark world dominated by a perverse libidinal economy run by bodily oligarchs who parade as Lords, masters, and pimps over vulnerable women reduced to the degrading status of pawns, slaves and property (3). Caught in this painful situation, Mara as 'bitter' signifies a particular form migratory subjectivity.

The Fanti Mara: Framing Vulnerability, Complicity and Radical decision

We have suggested that although Naomi's narrative of transformation is pertinent to interpreting *Beyond the Horizon*, it is also fundamentally inadequate. The limitation lies in its inability to grapple with and foreground the issues of complicity and radical decision, corporeal integrity and liberation that are critical to Mara's migratory subjectivity and reconstitution of the self. It is here that Darko makes her most radical rhetorical and interpretive move by incorporating an indigenous Fanti conception of the emergence of a beleaguered and ethical subject. We must stress that we are not the first to point to Darko's appropriation of Fanti (Akan) concepts or notions in her novel. Louise Allen Zak has shown that "beyond the horizon", or overseas" (13) is the English rendition of the Akan word *aburokyire*. Unfortunately, while this is illuminating, Zak does not explore the subtlety of this notion to subjectivity and identity formation in the novel. The concept of *aburokyire* transcends the spatial (as overseas or beyond

the horizon); it is intimately associated with a particular structure of feeling wherein the sojourner to the Whiteman's land is the bringer of the material boon of the West that radically transforms her personal and family social status. Mara's particular sense of complicity, failure, shame and abnegation of home partly derives from this social definition of *aburokyire*. However, *aburokyire* is not the only Fanti notion in Darko's novel. *Mara* functions as another important Fanti concept in *Beyond the Horizon*. More than naming the protagonist-narrator, *Mara* as a Fanti word functions, rhetorically, as the ethical conceptual horizon through which we are to view Darko's novel as narrative of awakening and self-constitution. While *aburokyire* emphasises migratory discourse and transnational location of hope and redemption, *Mara* speaks to the notion of voice, responsibility, agency and embattled subjectivity. To grasp the specificity of these meanings we need to unravel the context of application.

Unlike the biblical meaning of Mara as bitter, Mara in Fanti, although superficially a pronoun, is complex in terms of the associated meanings it generates or summons. Mara is the Fanti word for the emphatic I and Me. In its extended form it means "It's me" or "I'm the one" Although used in various contexts or discourse situations, it acquires its criticality when deployed as an emphatic riposte to a question or situation that explicitly or tacitly demands the affirmation or denial of ethical responsibility. Consequently, to say *Mara* ("It's me" or "I'm the one") is to refer to either of two things or both simultaneously: first, an acknowledgement of complicity in an act or situation that is ethically degrading or shameful. Second, an audacious act that signals ownership of an action. In other words, it is a subtle form of defiance or contestation of ideologies of silence and invisibility. *Mara* thus reifies agency and voice in a problematic situation that otherwise demands subordination and silence. In a deeply epistemological sense, Mara is no just a proper name but a positionality, a manner of responding to a problematic world and one's place in it. Mara, then, as a Fanti word is structured by dialogism in the sense that its condition of possibility as an utterance is founded on the existence of the Other that enforces the interdiction or prohibition which devalues and makes Mara as a subject invisible. Our contention then is that when Darko names her protagonist-narrator Mara, she is doing something more than assigning a proper name. She is signifying a specific form of beleaguered subjectivity in whom we have the paradoxical coexistence of Mara as complicity and Mara as the radical emergence of agency and voice in a challenging world that views one's place as insignificant or ethically compromised.

Perhaps a few examples from the novel will suffice to substantiate our claim. First, we will focus on Mara as an acknowledgment of the protagonist-narrator's complicity in her shameful state in Germany. Contrary to Mawuli Adjei's criticism of Darko of male bashing, Mara in telling her plight focuses on how her fantasy and naivety contribute to her manipulation by her husband,

Akobi. Mara's complicity derives from two sources. Firstly, her assumption, partly through the advice of her mother, that "a wife was there for man for one thing...to ensure his well-being and pleasure" (13). The result is that Mara comes to regard suffering as an essential part of being a wife (13). Secondly, Europe has such a potent hold on the imagination of Mara and the people of Naka that the possibility that Europe could be anything other than redemptive is not entertained. As Mara regretfully recalls; "Ah, when we were young in Naka we used to imagine Europe not just to be near Heaven but Heaven itself...That is why people who go there return very beautiful" (55). This magical hold of Europe has consequences. Not only does Mara willingly agree to her husband selling off her clothes and jewellery to make possible the dream of going to Europe but as she confesses, "[I]f Akobi had suggested there and then a wish to sell me...I would gladly have agreed" (35). By these examples, Mara indicates her complicity in her enslavement and liminality in Germany. Indeed, Mara in this context means, "I am partly responsible or to be blamed for my degradation."

At the same time, that Mara signifies taking ownership or responsibility for an act in order to emphasise agency, voice and ethical investment is also exemplified in the novel. While the interpretation of Mara as complicity has negative connotations and indicates passivity in the Spinozian sense of being acted upon, this second meaning of Mara is largely positive. Mara in this context foregrounds the deliberate actions the protagonist-narrator takes to ensure her limited freedom: the imprisonment of Akobi, her husband; the fraudulent measures she takes to acquire a five-year resident's visa to stay in Germany; and her final radical decision to make prostitution her profession. These agential acts place her in a good position to send material things to her relations back home. Indeed, the possibility of narration in *Beyond the Horizon* stems from the acquisition of voice or the emergence of a Mara who understands "the world a bit better" (127). Part of the advantage of learning to negotiate the problematic world in which Mara finds herself is the acquisition of "allowance of audacity" as "a parcel of civilisation" that manifests itself in her ability "to assert my opinions and get away with it...to ask relatively daring questions" that back home would have been considered an anathema (80, 81). With these attainments, we can appreciate the significance of Mara as defiance, contestation, agency and voice. In fact, voice in Darko's novel is inseparable from this idea of Mara as contestation and audacity to assert her opinions. As Giroux argues:

The concept of voice ... points to ways in which one's voice becomes an elaboration of location, experience, and history and as well constitutes forms of subjectivity [...]. To speak of voice is to address the wider issue of how people become either subjects who are agents in the process of making history or how they function as subjects oppressed and exploited within the various discursive and institutional boundaries that produce dominant and subordinate cultures

in any society” (70).

Our reading so far indicates that rather than simplistically focusing on Mara as a proper name, Darko draws on Fanti epistemology of naming to inscribe in “Mara” the double function of voice to which Giroux refers. In radical sense, “Mara” encapsulates perspective and voice; it criticises the system and the self, and reifies or points to the emergence of self or subjectivity.

Conclusion

We conclude by focusing on the implications of our emphasis on the semantics of the name Mara to a critical engagement with *Beyond the Horizon*. Firstly, the paper suggests that a nuanced reading of Darko’s novel calls into question the charge of male bashing. We have demonstrated that placing the name Mara within Fanti cultural and epistemological context reveals an insistence on Mara’s complicity in her state of affairs. In “Male-bashing and narrative subjectivity in Amma Darko’s first three novels,” Mawuli Adjei demonstrates the narrative utility of the highly subjective fictional *I* in Darko’s works. However, Adjei’s fundamental thesis that Darko deploys the first person narrative voice in order to “bash” men needs to be interrogated - especially in relation to *Beyond the Horizon* - as our reading has shown that such conclusions appear hasty and simplistic. In other words, simply focusing on the *I* without also paying attention to how that subjective voice is supplemented and undermined by other key notions or ideas embedded in the name that deploys the *I*, for example, may lead to a tenuous conclusion. This means that to grasp the totality of the text we must advert to the intricate interplay among the various aspects make up the text.

Secondly, our reading shows that literary names can function as narrative or discursal sub-texts in a literary work. A perceptive attention to the discursal or narrative referents of Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* is therefore essential to the narrative of awakening and reconstitution of identity in the novel. Rather than seeing Mara as operating only as a proper name, we have demonstrated that it may be exegetically rewarding also to view it as an intertextual node that summons series of sub-texts that open up areas of blindness in the novel. To borrow the words of the literary critic Terry Eagleton for our purposes, what we have tried to do by focusing on the semantics of Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* is to construct

what may be called a “sub-text” for the work—a text which runs within it, visible at certain “symptomatic” points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis, and which we as readers are able to “write” even if the novel itself does not. All literary works contain one or more such

sub-texts, and there is a sense in which they may be spoken of as the “unconscious” of the work itself. The work’s insights, as with all writing, are deeply related to its blindneses: what it does not say, and *how* it does not say it, may be as important as what it articulates; what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meanings (178).

In other words, it is when we make the name ‘Mara’ central to the narrative of awakening that the biblical story of Naomi’s transformation emerges as essential to the mechanics of Mara’s reconstitution of her identity.

In sum we have demonstrated that placing the name Mara within the biblical and Fanti cultural epistemological contexts reveals an acknowledgment of Mara’s complicity in her shameful state of affairs as well as representing a delicate form of boldness in responding to issues in an otherwise prejudiced world. Such a reading then complicates the tendency to characterise her as a passive character. ‘Mara’ as a proper name in *Beyond the Horizon* does merely designate the narrator-protagonist, it speaks to the experience of migratory subjectivity, vulnerability and also posits a radical re-positioning of the character from a compliant and passive subject to an active agent determined to redefine her place in the libidinal economy of exchange. Mara is therefore a history-making subject who, compelled by the circumstances that reifies a pernicious form of corporeal exchange, redefines who she is and her position in the scheme of things.

¹ As our reading demonstrate this negative perspective on Europe is undermined by the fact that Europe also functions as the locus where the juridical system allows Mara to prosecute her oppressors especially her husband, Akobi, who lured her to Germany. Europe, therefore, functions simultaneously as the locus of invisibility and liberation.

² By Empire, we are not referring to imperialism, colonial expansion or acquisition of territories and domination of others. Rather as Negri and Hardt have argued Empire refers to “a new global order, logic and structure of rule” wherein we witness the “irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges” (xi). In this form of globalisation, Europe and America appear as magical sites of redemption for people in troubled regions of the world.

³ See Julia Kristeva’s important essay “The Bounded Text” for an elaboration of this concept. Translinguistic as used by Kristeva refers to a semiotic practice that regards the interpretive coverage of a word as operating “through and across language” (36). We adopt this concept in order to emphasise the multidimensional and “across language” signifiacnce of ‘Mara’ in *Beyond the Horizon*. Translinguistic emphasises the importance of the writer and the text as cultural product and accounts for the intertextual dimensions of the text.

⁴ See Kathleen Gough, “The origin of the Family” where she lists eight manifestations or features of male power: men’s ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor to control their produce; to control or rub them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movement; to use them as objects of male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of society’s knowledge and cultural attainment” (69-70)

References

- Adjei, Mawuli. "Male-bashing and narrative subjectivity in Amma Darko's first three novels" *SKASE: Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, 2007. 47-61
- Anderson, John M. *The Grammar of Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007
- Angsotinge, Gervase, Darko Karin, Denkabe Aloysius & Yitah, Helen. "Exploitation, Negligence and Violence: Gendered Interrelationships in Amma Darko's Novels" in Odamtten, Vincent O. (Ed). *Broadening the Horizon: Critical Introduction to Amma Darko*. UK: Ayebia Clark Publishing, 2007. 81-99
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York & London: Routledge. 1995
- Butler, Judith & Athanasiou, Athena. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013
- Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Darko, Amma. *Beyond the Horizon*. London: Heinemann, 1995.
- Durrant, Sam & Lord, Catherine (Ed). *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making*. Amsterdam, New York, NY., 2007
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa and Mische, Ann. "What is Agency?" *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 4, 1998. 962-1023
- Giroux, Henry A. "Reading Texts, Literacy, and Textual Authority" in David H. Richter *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1994. 63-74.
- Gough, Kathleen. "The Origin of the Family" in Reiter Rayna (Ed). *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.
- Hardt, Michael & Negri, Antonio. *Empire*. USA: Harvard University Press, 2000
- Huggan, Graham. "Unsettled Settlers: Postcolonialism, Travelling Theory and the New Migrant Aesthetics" in Sam Durrant & Catherine Lord (Ed). *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making*. Netherlands: 2007. 129-144.
- King, Russell, Connell John & White Paul (Ed). *Writing Across the World: Literature and Migration*. London, New York. Routledge, 1995
- Kristeva, Julia. "The Bounded Text" *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia Univ.,

Press, 1980. 36-63

Lau, Peter W.H. *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach*. Berlin/New York, 2011.

Le Doeuff, Michèle. *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. Colin Gordon, London, Athlone, 1989. 19

Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. England: Penguin Books, Great Ideas. 2004. 85

Odamtten, Vincent O. "Amma Darko's Beyond the Horizon: Vending the Dream and Other Traumas for the Obedient Daughter" in Odamtten Vincent O. (Ed). *Broadening the Horizon: Critical Introduction to Amma Darko*. UK: Ayebia Clark Publishing Ltd. 2007. 100-110.

"The Book of Ruth" *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Bibles, 2011.

Zak, Louise Allen. "Amma Darko: Writing Her Way" in Odamtten, Vincent O. (Ed). *Broadening the Horizon: Critical Introduction to Amma Darko*. UK: Ayebia Clark Publishing. 2007. 12-27