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Les soulignement et mise en gras de quelque caractère que ce soit, dans le texte, ne sont pas acceptés.

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La structure d'un article, doit être conforme aux règles de rédaction scientifique, selon que l'article est une contribution théorique ou résulte d'une recherche de terrain.

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Exemples :

En effet, le but poursuivi par M. Ascher (1998, p. 223), est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

Le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakit , 1985, p. 105).

Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

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Références bibliographiques

AUDARD Cathérine, 2009, *Qu'est-ce que le libéralisme ? Ethique, politique, société*, Paris, Gallimard.

GLEM-POIDI Honorine Massanvi et KANTCHOA Laré, 2012, *Les langues du Togo : état de la recherche et perspectives*, Paris : l'Harmattan.

AWIZOBA Essobozouwè, 2019, « Fonctionnement du nom d'emprunt dans le système classificatoire du kabiyè, *Lɔngbou : revue des langues, lettres et sciences de l'Homme et de la société*, n° 008, pp. 97-110.

DIAKITE Sidiki, 1985, *Violence technologique et développement. La question africaine du développement*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

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URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/corela/4141>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/corela.4141>

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« Was ist Kultur? Einführung und Denkanstöße », 2018,
file:///C:/Users/hp/Documents/DOSSIER%20ARTICLES/DOSSIER%208_Interkulturalität_Grenzen/Was_ist_Kultur (23.01.2018).

Remarques :

En cas d'une publication réalisée par deux auteurs, leurs noms sont séparés par la conjonction de coordination « et ». Lorsqu'il y a plus de trois (3) auteurs, il est souhaitable de ne mentionner que le nom du premier auteur apparaissant sur le document suivi de la mention « *et al.* ».

Seules les références des documents cités dans le texte apparaissent, par ordre alphabétique du nom de famille du premier auteur (s'il y en a plusieurs) dans la bibliographie, à la fin de la contribution.

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LITERATURE

Re-examining masculinities in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Amma Darko's First Three Novels.

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Abstract

In fictional narratives gender is often addressed as a sum of masculinity and femininity to the extent that men-women relationships are more understood in terms of hierarchies than wholeness. Since African communities are mainly said to be patriarchal, masculinity is more investigated in men's male characters who perform stronger roles whereas female characters are mere subordinate, passive and obedient. Not surprising then that African writers deconstruct this one-legged portrayal of female characters. It is as if African writers' sex determines characters' masculinity in African fiction. This paper examines how Chinua Achebe in his debut novel, *Things Fall Apart* (2008) and Amma Darko in her first three novels *Beyond The Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) and *Faceless* (2014), construct masculinity as a non-sexist concept in an African context. The main objective is to show that masculinity is not related to the male sex. In order to achieve this, Judith Butler's performative theory and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction are the literary tools to be used. According to Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, being born a male or a female does not determine one's behaviour. As for Derrida, he shows that a text can have multiple interpretations. In contrast with traditional criticism, female and male characters rank high social status. Female characters tame life in a city successfully, meet criteria to be qualified as senior while sometimes men fail out of fear or narrow-mindedness.

Key words: Gender, masculinities, performativity, deconstruction, Achebe, Darko.

Résumé

Le concept du genre est souvent abordé comme la somme de la masculinité et de la féminité dans les récits fictionnels au point où les relations hommes-femmes sont perçues plus en terme d'hierarchie qu'un tout. La société africaine étant par excellence patriarcale, la notion de "masculinité" est plus étudiée dans les œuvres des hommes où les personnages masculins évoluent dans des rôles forts alors que les personnages féminins sont présentés comme de simples subordonnées, des êtres passifs et obéissants. Il n'est pas alors surprenant que les femmes écrivains déconstruisent cette représentation unijambiste des rôles. Le présent article aborde la question de la masculinité dans le premier roman de Chinua Achébé *Le monde s'effondre* (*Things Fall Apart*) et les trois premières œuvres de la Ghanéenne Amma Darko notamment *Beyond The Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) et *Faceless* (2014). L'objectif principal de cet article est de montrer que la masculinité n'est pas liée au sexe masculin. Pour atteindre cet objectif, la théorie de la performativité de Judith Butler et la déconstruction de Jacques Derrida sont les outils littéraires convoqués. Selon Butler, naître mâle ou femelle ne détermine pas le comportement social de l'être. Quant à Derrida, sa théorie montre qu'un texte peut être interprété de diverses manières. Contrairement à la traditionnelle critique littéraire, des personnages féminins et masculins occupent un rang social élevé, des personnages féminins réussissent à sortir de la jungle urbaine, obtiennent le titre de 'senior' alors que des hommes n'y parviennent parfois pas à cause de la peur ou de leur étroitesse d'esprit.

Mots clés Genre, masculinités, performativité, déconstruction, Achebe, Darko.

Introduction

Since the emergence of gender studies in literature, there is an abundant literary production on a sexist character depiction. Gender is then addressed as a sum of masculinity and femininity to the extent that men-women relationships are more understood in terms of hierarchies than wholeness. Consequently, most African fictional narratives reflect the patriarchal dimensions whereby male characters perform masculine duties such as rulers, breadwinners, hardworking and open-minded whereas female characters are mere subordinate, passive and obedient. In addition, there is a scanty production on masculinity in African women's fictional narrative. It is as if male characters in women's fiction are different from men's. The utmost reason may be related to the traditional perception of the concept of masculinity, which is often understood as "social expectations of being a man. It refers to the roles, behaviours and attributes that are considered appropriate for boys and men in a given society."¹ Sylvester Mutunda (2009) examined the range of masculinities in Francophone African women's fiction and though he is critical of men's thirst for dominance, he defines masculinities as only ways of being men. Then, "masculinity **does not exist except in contrast with femininity.**" (R. W. Connell, 2005, p.68). Such a definition seems one-legged because it postulates that only human beings with male body can be associated with masculinity, strength, breadwinning, wealth, courage, intelligence, etc. In the same vein, only women are carriers of weaker attributes, roles and behaviours. It is as if social roles like reproduction ones are fixed and universal.

In this twenty-first century, it would be both a little bit awkward and backward to keep defining masculinity as a unique and universal male notion. In fact, "masculinity is neither tangible nor an abstraction whose meaning is everywhere the same." (A. Cornwall et N. Lindisfarne, 2003, p.12). Clearly, the singular form of masculinity seems to be outdated for all human communities are dynamic. Therefore, time and history affect gender construction as J. Beynon clearly stipulated:

Masculinity is always interpolated by cultural, historical and geographical location and in our time the combined influence of feminism and gay movement has exploded the conception of a uniform masculinity and even sexuality is no longer held to be fixed or innate. As a result, it is becoming more fashionable to employ the term 'masculinities' both to reflect our new times and to expose the cultural construction and expression of masculinity. (J. Beynon 2002, p.1)

Be it in precolonial or postcolonial time, in Africa, masculine and feminine attributes can be associated with both men and women. Corroborating this perspective, Segwick (cited by J. Beynon 2002, p.8) repudiates this automatic equating of masculinity with men, arguing that "when something is about masculinity, it isn't always about men." Backing this argument, MacInnes (1998, p.45) wrote: "If it[masculinity] comprises essentially social characteristics or capacities, we have to explain on what grounds women have been incapable of, or prevented from, acquiring them. Masculinity is something for the girls as much for the boys..." For sure, men and women in traditional and modern African communities enact daily MacInnes'

¹ The Meaning of Masculinities https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/ACFrOgAZ9X_S2Bl-K9iPv3XhiQ140Fw6QWeUNSOwJwuNXzShO1b_Wv9-Vbsw1KX0rkmdxRZ-nlwzPhL-WIQLh1agPgzn5s70jFg-wYO0cIafAvyfqfNvFQOX_UYSZKGjzuPLlyl2J_UFqRjaCxNs.pdf:

perception of masculinity. Interestingly, African writers reduplicate this actual construction of masculinity in their fictional narratives since literature is the product of the society in which it is published. Especially, the novel is known as the “microcosm of society and as such it can offer an encounter with life in all its aspects” (S. Mutunda, 2009, p.13).

This paper examines how Chinua Achebe in his debut novel, *Things Fall Apart* (2008) and Amma Darko, in her first three novels, *Beyond The Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) and *Faceless* (2014), construct masculinity as a non-sexist concept in an African context. Although both writers grew up and were brought up in different African cultures and different eras, they share some similarities in their formulation of their characters’ masculinity even if their stories take place at different time and place in Africa (*Things Fall Apart* is set in precolonial and colonial Africa and Darko’s mentioned novels in postcolonial Africa). By masculinities, then, I mean both men and women’s abilities and capabilities for cultural conditioning and social expectations are more important than biology in shaping women and men’s behaviours. The purpose of this paper is to show that masculinity is not related to the male sex. The main research question is then: in what ways do Achebe and Darko address masculinities in their fiction? More particularly, do they systematically equate masculinity with male characters? What are the different versions of masculinity in the novels under scrutiny? All these questions cannot be answered unless some literary tools are used. For this sake, Judith Butler’s gender performative theory and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction theory are invited to help decipher meaning.

According to Butler’s gender performativity theory, being born a male or a female does not determine one’s behaviour. Gender is a matter of act, of performance as she said: ‘‘ If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.’’ (1988, p.520) In other words, being masculine or feminine is not predetermined by essence but it comes into being through repetitions. Gender can be said to be an unstable and dynamic even if it is culturally constructed. In this vein, there is a connection between Butler’s gender performativity theory and Jacques Derrida’s Deconstruction theory because both argue against universality and fixed notions. According to Derrida (1991), deconstruction ‘‘is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject.’’ (cited by G. Rolfe 2004, p.274). For him, a text has no fixed meaning because language itself is infinite. He coined the concept of text undecidability the purpose of which, Tyson explained, is ‘‘to show that the “meaning” of the text is really an indefinite, undecidable, plural, conflicting array of possible meanings and that the text, therefore, has no meaning, in the traditional sense of the word, at all.’’ (L. Tyson 2006, p.259). Deconstruction means then the dismantling of traditional constructs as a means of providing alternative interpretations and meaning.

This paper is threefold. First, life in post independent African cities is investigated to find out whether it is only male characters’ prerogative. Second, social status is addressed as both women and men’s achievement. Third and at last, seniority is discussed.

1. City dwellers in post independent Africa

Etymologically, a city is a place associated with advanced governance, trade and social organisation. A city is then not only a place where industries, commercial centres, tarred roads, schools (secondary schools and universities) are located but it is also a milieu where white collar jobs, good husbands and wives are found. It encompasses politics, economic power, class struggles which are often regarded as male's prerogatives. In this context, a successful person is he/she who finds a shelter in an urban area, no matter the job he/she is doing. Then, Africa's contact with the western world affects its administrative and political organisations.

Since colonization, the topography of African countries has had a dual structure: the city versus the village. These social and spatial mutations in the urban environment are inherent to modernity, which has significantly polarized the African space. European modernization has imposed a new urban rhythm on local populations, ...and generating a new way of thinking and inhabiting the world. (I. Majdoubi, 2024, p. 6670)

What matters, as it can be guessed from the above quotation, is the contrastive dimension ingrained into people's minds about villages and cities since villages are projected as places of no hope where life is simply boring. Darko's second novel, *The Housemaid*, illustrates this symbolic contrast between the boring village life and the attractive life in a city.

Kataso, a village in the eastern hills, had no flowing water, no electricity, no entertainment centre, nothing. Only the chief owned a television set – old, black and white, and 100 per cent out of order. There would have been no power to run it, even if it had worked... Which therefore left sex the only affordable entertainment in Kataso. Everyone- young, old, mature and immature- indulge in it freely, making the two midwives the busiest of the village professionals. The young men, when they could no longer stand this bland, grey life, would leave for Accra, Kumassi and Takoradi, to work as shoe-shine boys, truck pushers or hawkers of items such as popcorn, dog chains and air fresheners along the cities' streets.” (A. Darko, 1998, p.29)

It may be said the administrative reorganisation of Africa has impacted African youth's conception of labour. Then, in the earlier years after African independences, till now, the white-collar job is established as masculine. Being a city dweller is seen as a sign of success, a form of masculinity. In most cases, those living in the cities during their regular visit bring some ‘loaves of bread’, as the best present to be offered. Young people have no other choice than settle in urban areas which are referred to as ‘the home to seek greener pastures.’ (A. Darko 1998, p.31) even though this means getting only petty jobs because these latter are not only uneducated, but they also have no trades. What accounts in these cases is being a town/city dweller. For this reason, according to I. E. Majdoubi, ‘the city occupies a key place in African fiction, so much so that many novels feature the city as a central theme or character.’ (2024, p.6670).

This is the reason why Akobi's father in Darko's debut novel, *Beyond The Horizon*, is held in high esteem because he sends his son, Akobi, to the town where he gets his Form Four General Certificate, which was a rare occurrence and achievement at that time. As it can be expected, only men are expected to migrate to new African cities where they can get better education to have white collar jobs. As for women, they have to join their husbands as wives. Mara's marriage with Akobi is an illustration of this mindset because, for Mara's father, it is a matter

of pride and esteem in his community. He who has his children living in a town or a city is granted great respect. A family is simply looked down on or deemed a failure when none of their children lives in a town/city as a girl recounted in *The Housemaid*. "Where I come from, when two women are quarrelling, do you know how they insult each other? "Who told you you can compare yourself to me? How many of your children are in the city? (Darko 1998, p.31) Clearly, this female character's statement explains how much important one's child's presence in an urban area is a luxury and a performance among Africans. Furthermore, the narrator's use of the word 'children' illustrates Darko's deconstruction of this form of masculinity as a male's privilege. In *The Housemaid* both girls and boys are allowed to settle in a town/city because the more city dwellers there are in a family, the better it is.

As for Kataso, the ultimate is when the city-dwellers return for the yam festival. The household with the most returnees gets the most honours and attention. And as for the dance at the Queen Inn.... A dance and entertainment hall at Osiadan. The dance that crowns the festival is called "showtime", because that's when returnees put on their best clothes and compete with each other... (A. Darko, 1998, p.31)

Still, according to Majdoubi, "the urban, space beyond its spatial and temporal connotations, becomes a metaphor for radical, even cruel otherness. (*op.cit.*, p.6670) and for this sake women are believed to be unable to cope with it. If life in a city is similar to a jungle where cruelty rules, and this does not prevent female animals to survive, then women's incapacity to succeed in a city is a mere machination. A text can then be interpreted in diverse ways as Tyson says while explaining Derrida's Deconstruction: "

Meaning is not a stable element residing in the text for us to uncover or passively consume. Meaning is created by the reader in the act of reading. Or, more precisely, meaning is produced by the play of language through the vehicle of the reader.... Furthermore, the meaning that is created is not a stable element capable of producing closure; that is, no interpretation has the final word. Rather, literary texts, like all texts, consist of a multiplicity of overlapping, conflicting meanings in dynamic, fluid relation to one another and to us... (L.Tyson 2006, p.258-259)

Deconstructing such a misconception about women shows that they can not only establish themselves in cities, but they can be successful as well. J. Butler convincingly asserts:

Considering that "the" body is invariably transformed into his body or her body, the body is only known through its gendered appearance. It would seem imperative to consider the way in which this gendering of the body occurs. My suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic. (J. Butler 1988, p.523)

Mama Kiosk's great achievement in *Beyond The Horizon* testifies to women's great capacity. She settles in Accra sub areas where she builds her own house, which is smarter and better structured than men's: " Her home was not Alhadji's but her own. It wasn't all corrugated-iron sheets but part blocks." (A. Dako 1995, p.10) In addition, she owns and runs her own shop which makes people name her Mama Kiosk as it is commonly done in African communities. Like Mama Kiosk, Mami Korkor in *The Housemaid* qualifies as a male in Kumassi city where she earns her life as a fish hawker whereas her husband is a mere runaway who never minds

feeding a single child as the heterodiegetic narrator recounts: ‘‘she had to hawk fish from dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and her four children. They all depended on her. Not a pesewa came from their father.’’ (A. Darko 1998, p.11) Both women like tiger tame city whereas men find it hard to survive it. As Wole Soyinka (1962) says: ‘‘A Tiger does not proclaim its tigritude. Its pounces on its prey and devores it.’’ In short, being a successful city dweller is not a matter of sex but that of ability, skills, cleverness, which are strong values.

Female attributes like laziness, and idleness are illustrative of male characters. African youth’s laziness started long time ago when traditional occupations like farming, fishing and many others were regarded as men’s. In *Things Fall Apart* Nwakibie condemns young men’s laziness as they flee from any trade that requires physical strength:

It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. any young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them they think I am heard-hearted. But it is not so. Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching. I have learnt to be stingy with my yams... (C. Achebe 2008, p.17)

This is not a feminist reading but evidence of some men’s preference to idleness and softness. A slight comparison between these two female characters (Mama Kiosk and Mami Korkor) and Akobi in *Beyond The Horizon*, highlights Akobi’s failure before these women in spite of his certificate and his messenger clerk job. Mama Kiosk and Mami Korkor’s capabilities to survive in a city are like that of a lioness whose ferocity is no longer in doubt. Akobi lives in a place which is less of a house, and he cannot even dare date a city girl as his wife, Mara says:

Life in the city, Akobi soon realised, was not the glamorous days and nights he had seen in his dreams. Reality hit him and hit him really hard that the furthest he could go with his level of education was a messenger clerk at the Ministries, at best. But the worst confrontation of all for him were the women.... It was a passionate dream Akobi soon realised he could never fulfil on his messenger clerk pay.... Even accommodation he soon realised, never came easy without the right amount of money in the pocket. And what accommodation the money in his pocket could afford, Akobi felt was too demeaning for someone like him with the kind of status he enjoyed in Naka.... To say I was shocked when Akobi brought me to his home in the city would be an understatement. I was stunned. Our homes in the village were of mud and leaves but no one needed to tell a visitor they were houses. Akobi had to tell me this was his home before I believed it... a cluster of shabbily-constructed corrugated-iron sheets shelters that looked like chicken houses....(A. Darko, 1995, p. 5-8)

This long passage subverts the biological construction of masculinity. Akobi’s male predatory feature is even questioned. Under such circumstances do men convert their inferiority and incapacity into violence to secure their so-called male masculine attributes. In short, it is not surprising then that female characters rank Big people status in the selected novels to illustrate women’s achievement in present-day African societies?

2. Social status as a genderless concept in the novels

The term ‘status’ is commonly defined as an individual rank or position. This not only includes a set of privileges, but it also influences one’s relation with other members of a community.

‘Social status’ then refers to an individual position in a given society and his relationship with others. Ranking a specific position is neither biological nor genetic. In Achebe’s debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the status of priest or God is not specifically male. Indeed, women hold a leading position in Ibo spirituality. Although Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, is a he-god, a priestess sits in his stool to serve as his mediator as it can be read:

“No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess.... His priestess stood by the sacred fire which she built in the heart of the cave and proclaimed the will of the god.... The priestess in those days was a woman called Chika. She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared.” (C. Achebe, 2008, p.13)

Such women have qualified as men and this position does not prevent them from being a wife and a mother. In the narrative, Chielo is currently the priestess of Agbala as well as a widow with two children. In case of a she-god a man is the mediator like Ezeani who is Ani’s priest. Ani controls production and fertility among the Ibo. A comparison of her divine function with that of Agbala shows that their gendered dimension is only grammatical in the English language with the use of the suffix ‘ess’ to differentiate male from female. In African ontology and in terms of power, a she-god can hold more powerful than a he-god as the narrator explains:

It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth. (C. Achebe, 2008, p.29)

As for Agbala, he is referred to just to find out the causes of a miserable or bad harvest. This duality instead of binarism explains the system of complementarity in African religion. This underlying principle is evidence there is no room for discrimination and sexism in African spirituality.

Status is also a matter of one’s achievement and hard work. Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* symbolises young people’s ability to rank the highest position in their community if they are hardworking. Family background and age do not systematically determine one’s social status in a community. Indeed, Unoka, Okonkwo’s father is a lazy man but his son’s devotion to hard work secures him a good place among the elders in Umuofia as it can be read:

“But it was not really true that Okonkwo’s palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself. Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky. If ever a man deserves his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo says yes strongly; so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands.” (C. Achebe, 2008, p.21)

The last sentence of this quotation reveals the importance of hard work in African community and success is not related to biological determinism. Since precolonial times, idleness and laziness have never been tolerated. For this reason, among the Ibos, “ a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.” (ibid, p.7) Such an

orientation is praiseworthy because it makes young people stands up for their future. Okonkwo is a model that can inspire future generations. The following passage is very expressive of it:

Okonkwo was clearly cut for great things. He was still young, but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders. (C. Achebe, 2008, p.7)

The more time goes, the more social norms in human communities change. In Achebe's debut novel, social status is associated with physical strength. In contrast, in Darko's selected novels it is related to economic power, cars, houses, etc. Unfortunately, most communities wrongly associate these possessions with the male sex. On this basis, 'Big women' are less celebrated than 'Big man' as if wealth was gendered. 'Big man' encompasses "imported drinks, rich cloths, gold ornaments, and a large number of wives, children and dependents." (L. Ouzgane et R. Morrell, 2005, p. 122) as if women cannot have access to these listed above materials. In addition, in fictional narratives 'Big men' use this power relation to often look down on their wives, children and concubines because wealth is a sign of supremacy over others. These are elaborated conventions to make women belittle themselves. K. Holland posits that "though it is masculine, it is not exclusively male." (2005, p.1132). Darko in *Beyond The Horizon* and *The Housemaid* condemned such a narrowed interpretation. Be it one's spouse or relatives, wealth makes its owner develop and establish a hierarchical relationship between him/her and the other people. It should not then be surprising that Madam Sekyiwa in *The Housemaid* lures her husband into domination beating him as the narrator recounts:

Little Tika remembered the fights and arguments she had witnessed between her parents. 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. It was her father who had wept. After one such argument, her mother had stormed past her and out of the house, without so much as a glance... (A. Darko, 1998, p. 19).

Wealth is often considered as a tool of domination over another sex, then women's performance in this domain is neither an insubordination nor an insult to manhood. It is just an expression of the rank somebody has achieved. To put it short, it is actually human to dominate s/he who is economically dependent on someone else. Under such circumstances are women granted like men with the ability to pick and choose their sex partners. Madam Sekyiwa's sexual appetite is simply her expression of her economic power as it can be read:

By the third year, Sekyiwa had become one of the wealthy market mummies. Young, good-looking male gold-diggers began to vie for her attention. Her husband's libido was waning away, so she gave in. She gave them good money; they gave her good sex. (A. Darko, 1998, p. 18)

Madam Sekyiwa's attraction for younger men is often interpreted as a feminist attitude in a patriarchal community where women no matter their social rank are expected to bow their heads. For most of the African scholars, it is her response to male chauvinism. Backing this scholarship, C. Gbaguidi wrote "the female character Sekyiwa is taking her revenge, on behalf of all the oppressed African women, for all the ordeal African women suffer from their male

counterparts in that she plays her intrigue and gets pregnant for the man to make him stick with her” (2018, p.28-29). According to Gbaguidi, A. Darko therefore “reverses the torturer-victim relationship by making her female characters take the lead even in things being traditionally men’s prerogative.” (2018, p.31). Darko herself strongly agrees with this viewpoint because she thinks, and she is convinced that it is time women express their anger as she confesses during an interview with Raymond Ayinne:

We’ve started writing from our point of view because, for a while, you were writing for us [...]. So [...] if we are writing, probably there is some pain that has to come out. And I think rather than take it as male-bashing, you must take it as a means to better understand the women folk of Africa [...]. You were always portraying us as all-enduring, all-giving mothers and that is the attitude we find in males [...] but I don’t want to be all-giving all the time, I don’t want to be all enduring, I want to be angry, I want to react. (M. Adjei 2009, p.49)

However, this male bashing (Adjei’s words) interpretation seems a little bit narrowed because rich men always run after younger females on the pretence that their wives are old and useless. What makes the difference between Attui’s attitude to women in the passage below:

Attui, however, had two wives, with a total of twelve children between them, and two concubines. He was always insulting his wives, dropped the two concubines when he met Tika, and made no bones about his desire to marry more women and add to his children. .. Lost in ecstasy, he would insult his wives as stupid old women with dull bodies (A. Darko, 1998, p.25)

and Madam Sekyiwa’s sarcastic response to her husband : “Enjoy what life ? What life is there to enjoy with the dead penis? That was how the squabbles started. No day passed without a fight or an argument.” (Darko 1998, p.18). Obviously, Madam Sekyiwa’s reply is not welcomed. Needless to say wealth goes hand in hand with insolence and arrogance. Anyway, Tika’s father has his own share of the cake because he is a former businessman and is aware of the rules that govern this world.

Indeed, business is male because it requires among other skills competition, courage and a permanent quest for profits. There is nothing like softness, kindness and gentleness. In this vein, while introducing his younger wife into business, which is not bad, Mr. Sekyiwa, Tika’s father, knows what was awaiting his wife. In business, the rule is that of ‘give and take’. Men give money whereas women, in case the customs officer is a man, has no other choice than pull down their pants. Tika, Madam Sekyiwa’s daughter, learns this rule later when she embraces her career as businesswoman, which the narrator recounts as follows:

In fact, until she [Tika] got into it, she had not realised that business could entail so much unpleasantness. It took her a while to understand that in order to stay in business and perform well, she had to consent. And she needed to perform well because she wanted to prove, to Owuraku especially, that her failure had ended with her exams. For example, when she first started in business, Tika used to think that women who imported goods to sell in Ghana paid all their customs duties to the letter... It was only when she got into it that Tika realised profits made on imports were negligible if all customs duties were paid to the pesewa. Some customs officers accepted cash bribes in exchange for the 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 offer and indicated that what he wanted from her was sex. She needed his help, so she consented. (A. Darko, 1998, p.23)

Roughly, this long passage is an illustration of the saying ‘no pity in business’. Be it a man or a woman, success in business depends on one’s ability to overcome barriers as Niccolò Machiavelli said in his well-known book, *The Prince* “The end justifies the means.” Darko unveils this darkened dimension of business to reveal the hidden reasons why women are excluded from these so-called male spheres. In a word, sex rules business and this is not a secret as it can be read:

She[Tika]...settled on four useful ‘steady’ lovers. Samuel, the son of an apostolic church, was her customs officer on the Ghana-Togo border. Riad, the half-caste, was a shop owner with several outlets. And through Eric, the struggling musician, she remained on the favoured customers list of the commercial bank headed by his elder brother. But it was Attui, the factory owner, who helped her get good credit rates on the goods she bought... all had a wife each, wore wedding bands, ... and wanted only lust from Tika. Just keep giving it to me good,’ he [Attui] would moan during their love-making. (A. Darko, 1998, p.25).

So, castigating women who indulge in sex for business’s sake or humiliating their men for their sexual incompetence is a mere hypocrisy. Interestingly, Darko denounces those hypocrite men who behave like the bird named Chichidodo in A. Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. In this debut novel, it is ironically claimed that this bird hates the excrement with all its soul though it feeds on maggots. The narrator in *The Housemaid* critiquing such men said: “Other women’s husbands just closed their ears and minds to it. Business was business. Period. For what would happen if they interfered and the women stopped their antics, the business went down, and the cash stopped flowing?” (A. Darko 1998, p.23) While social status is the outcome of hard work and merit in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, it is more and more money oriented in Darko’s first three novels. Time and history (colonisation) have gradually eroded Africans’ great attachment to some values. So does masculinity. Fortunately, some versions of masculinity like seniority encompassing wisdom, experience and righteousness persist to date which Darko showcases in *Faceless*.

3. Seniority in the novels

Most African languages encode seniority which “is the most important principle for the social organisation of status and hierarchy.” (O. Oyewumi, 2005, p.11). It is based on relative age regardless of sex. Then a senior is an elder; be it a man or a woman because he/she is a living model. S. Miescher rightly puts it: “Senior masculinity, the position of an *panyin* (elder), did not depend on a person’s specific age and wealth but rather on comportment, reputation, and the ability to mediate conflicts and provide advice.” (2005, p.11).

Seniority is first and foremost a question of greatness, open-mindedness, flexibility, rigor, humility and wisdom. Achebe elaborates on these qualities showing that there are important criteria to be met to qualify as a senior. Unfortunately, Okonkwo, despite his great achievement, cannot be referred to as a senior because of his lack of open-mindedness, flexibility, wisdom and humility as an old man criticizes him harshly through a proverb: “Looking at a king’s mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast.” (C. Achebe 2008, p.21) Okonkwo is so proud of his success that he looks down on unsuccessful men who do not have any titles for example. Furthermore, another oldest man in Umuofia resorts to a proverb meaning that Okonkwo’s success is by sheer luck or chance, and this should not prevent him from being humble: “Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble.” (C. Achebe 2008, p.21). As fate would have it, Okonkwo who

is popularly called the 'Roaring Flame' (Ibid, p.123) begot a son who is his opposite. Nwoye enjoys listening to women's stories instead of masculine ones, that is to say, those of violence and bloodshed. He even joins Christianity, which is an abomination for his father. For Okonkwo, there is nothing like the right to difference, that is why he read Nwoye's behaviour as a defiance. If he were mature enough, he would have had a different understanding of his child's comportment. His own nickname acts as a prediction and he gets the point finally as the narrator says: "Okonkwo's eyes were opened, and he saw the whole matter clearly. Living fire begets cold, impotent ash." (Idem)

Achebe and Darko address seniority through female characters because it is not the exclusive menu of men. It is not a matter of geographical location either. A city is often said to be unwise and opportunistic people's dwelling places where dishonesty and materialism go hand in hand. On this basis, new village settlers are referred to as "greenhorn", "Johnnie-just-come, 'villager-in-town'" (Darko 1995, p.10). In *Faceless* and *Beyond The Horizon*, Naa Yomo in *Faceless* combats this fixed representation showing that wisdom and honesty are still part and parcel of city life. She is an icon, a living library whose mind is still working as Kabria concludes at the end of their conversation: "If the contents in her head could be deciphered with the click of a mouse, she could fill up another George Palmore Library." (A. Dako, 2014, p.94). As the granddaughter of those rare Ghanaians who "shook hands with Sir Gordon Guggisberg" (Ibid, p.88), a colonial administrator, Naa Yomo champions honour more than anything else. Naa Yomo is not a wealthy woman, but her comportment and reputation endow upon her this crown of senior masculinity.

As a true elder, her conversation style which is of a rare occurrence in modern days provides MUTE women with reliable information on the study of streetism in Accra. Unlike Ms Kamame and MUTE women who stress poverty as streetism root cause, Naa Yomo points out an interesting and hidden issue, which is often neglected, each person's history. The whole story of Maa Tsuru, Fofu's mother, has showed the power of words since Fofu and her siblings are just victims of their dying maternal grandmother's curse of their maternal grandfather, a young irresponsible man who not only denies their mother's pregnancy but he also "insisted that he had never even seen Tsuru's mother ever in his life." (A. Darko 2014, p.92). Indeed, this unwanted pregnancy happened at a crucial moment in those days when puberty rites were celebrated. Maa Tsuru's mother feels dishonoured since she could not be initiated into womanhood. For Naa Yomo, there is a crucial time during labour pains when bad words must never be issued/uttered otherwise it is worn like cloth by the future generation as she recounts:

When the baby's shoulder burst through her and tore to shreds the lining of her womanhood, the curse was on her lips. She was fading away but wasn't going to go without a legacy. The cord was still uncut when she yelled lasting curses on her lover and his descendants after him, to suffer in more ways and in forms than he had made her suffer. Someone shouted that she was dying. I cried that she should be made to undo the curse first. But it was too late. She lay there dead, while they took the child away. The child with no mother and whose father and his lineage had just been cursed. A child cursed by her own mother. (A. Darko 2014, p.93-94)

This passage is a testimony that only a knowledgeable person with the right mindset can keep in mind and be able to make a relevant report thirty years later. Naa Yomo's life experience allows her to keep her feet on the ground. Wisdom has then much to do with people's ability to listen, to observe and appreciate. Naa Yomo is a symbol of all these skills that Efi's

grandmother lacks in *The Housemaid*. These skills explain her interesting insights into Maa Tsuru's inability to turn down this curse. Needless to say, she believes in human beings' capacity to defeat a curse. Then, similar to existentialist philosophers, Naa Yomo thinks that human beings have the power to recreate themselves, change their situation from worst to best. She clearly explains it to MUTE women:

When the seed of a curse finds fertile ground in a human mind, it spreads with the destructive speed of a creeping plant. And while it does, it nurtures superstition, which in turn, eats all reasoning abilities and the capability of facing responsibilities. The only reason why my six living children are all living in their bungalows, is because, after the death of our fifth child, my husband, God bless his soul, stopped nurturing his superstitious mind and focused more on facing up to his responsibilities. (Darko 2014, p.91-92)

From this statement, Naa Yomo is simply making a call to the future generation who must not cross hands. The narrator uses Naa Yomo as a spokesperson, a representative of the old values which are in decay. Indeed, Honour is what people must seek for. By honour she means a successful education to offspring, the ability to keep one's household intact at the end of the day. For this reason, she criticises the type of education the younger generation is giving their offspring in the inner cities of Ghana where children are taught to fend for themselves. She is of the opinion that poverty cannot be a hindrance to children's upbringing. According to her, "a good man would never say to his child, there is no food, go out onto the street and find some money for food. He would say: 'there is no food, so we'll drink lots of water and go to bed. Tomorrow is another day. You will go to school, and I will make sure there's food to eat when you return home.'" (A. Darko, 2014, p.87). Simply put, an elder is a person who foresees upcoming dangers and warns future generation.

Similar to Naa Yomo, Mama Kiosk in *Beyond The Horizon* is representative of this category of youth who can see beyond their times. Mama Kiosk guides the protagonist, Mara, when she joins her husband, Akobi, in the merciless Ghanaian inner city where she is at loss. As a mother and an elder sister, she takes Mara under her wings in this city where rural people are thrown into a world where there is no room for village community life. Mama Kiosk's first domain of intervention is city life principles. As a village born and bred, Mara ignores that nothing is free of charge, generosity does not match with life in a city. Mama Kiosk advises her to earn her living from what any service people ask her: "you are in the city, and nothing is for free, you get me?" (A. Darko, 1995, p.10). Secondly, Mama Kiosk enlightens her on a husband's duties regarding her wife, which contrasts with Mara's vision. Village, indeed, symbolises the African milieu where women are taught to keep quiet. This conversation between Mara and Mama Kiosk shows her backwardness:

/Mama Kiosk: Hey, I have seen your Ministries man in a new embroidery shirt. / M: Yes, he bought it yesterday. Isn't it beautiful? / Mama Kiosk: And what did he buy for you? /Mara: Nothing. Should he have? / Mama Kiosk: Tell me, you find it normal that he buys for himself and buys nothing for you? / Mara: Because he is the man. / Mama Kiosk: Because he is a man, but a bad husband. (A. Darko, 1995, p.13)

Such a backwardness is no longer appropriate in this twenty-first century where there are so many challenges. There lies Mama Kiosk's heavy duty to bring her from darkness to light. Surely, a wife must submit herself to her husband, but a blind and extreme subordination is

simply unwelcome. Mara is suffering from a bad brainwashing on women's traditional roles and Mama Kiosk enlightens her as a true senior.

Your husband is one of those men who have no respect for village people', she said once. Tradition demands that the wife respect, obey and worship her husband but it demands, in return, care, good care of the wife. Your husband neglects you and yet demands respect and complete worship from you. That is not normal. And the closer our relationship became, the more effort she made to let me see and understand that my husband was not treating me right. (A. Darko, 1995, p.13)

Mama Kiosk's mentoring is to make Mara see things through her own eyes. Being a wife in an African sense has never been synonymous of slavery or starvation. Beating one's wife is not tolerated either as Evil Forest, the *egwugwu* leader told Uzowulu in *Things Fall Apart*: 'It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman.' (C. Achebe 2008, p.75). Though Mama Kiosk lives in a town, she sees to it that traditions are preserved. She is dismayed by the ways young married men behave nowadays. As a guardian of the African traditions, she reminds Mara of a husband's role in an African environment as she says "Men buy for themselves, Mara. There's no law that says they shouldn't. But they buy for their wives too, Mara. And there's a law that says they must. You have never peeled these clothes off since you came here, except on Saturdays to wash them. And you call that normal?" (Darko 1995, p.13-14) The more days pass, the more Mara becomes convinced of Mama Kiosk's role. Her monitoring has proved successful and fruitful because it does arouse Mara's awareness and her integration in the inner Ghanaian city as it can be read from Mara's own words:

Between Mama Kiosk and me now existed a mother-daughter relationship. I had grown to trust her and to talk openly with her about everything. Then too she was the one person I spent most of my time with since I left in the morning with her to go to the station and returned in the evening with her.... So it was that in my desperate need for a mother I saw a substitute in Mama Kiosk. And she took on the role wholeheartedly, advising me on what to do and what not to do; asking and searching for herbs, which she made me sniff and chew; bringing me up to date on hygiene and noting down for me things I could start buying. She was a true friend and a perfect substitute mother. And I valued her enormously.... I had become more liberal in my approach to the other tenants and turned into more of a conversationalist who now had various things in common with them to talk about: trade, people, pregnancy, I wasn't as naïve as before. (A. Darko, 1995, p.23-25).

Mama Kiosk's monitoring contributes to Mara's socialisation and her own empowerment even though she ends up in a prostitute house in Germany because of her narrow-mindedness. Just like Ma Tsuru, she is of the opinion that a parasite man by the sides of a woman is better than none. Unfortunately, she falls in an everlasting trap in Europe and here she is crying alone as she says:

I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – what is left of what once used to be my image.... Tears are building up in my eyes. They always do when I stare at what is left of me. They are blurring my vision and rolling down my face in an agonizing rhythm like the beating of the devil's own drums... (A. Darko 1995, p.1-2)

Mara's life bears many similarities with Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* who does not listen to his senior, Ezeudu, a great and fearless warrior in his time. As an experienced and wise man, he advises him not to bear a hand in Ikemefuna's death because the boy calls him father. For

Okonkwo, this can be understood as a sign of cowardness, femininity and weakness. Okonkwo craves much for his reputation than the paternal bond between him and Ikemefuna. Actually, Okonkwo is a coward whose life is dominated by the fear of failure and his father's laziness. This fear is so intense that it finally turns him into a maniac. The narrator's words about Okonkwo's fear are forceful and poignant:

Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself.... (C. Achebe 2008, p.11)

This permanent fear of loss of his masculinity leads to the tragedy that happens at the end of the story. Mara and Okonkwo's downfall is evidence that mentees should listen to their mentors as it is commonly said "The old man sitting sees further than the young man standing up." If you were born into this world a senior, you would achieve great and long-lasting things on this earth. But if you were not destined to greatness, you would sooner or later rank the position you deserve. In this respect, the narrator confesses:

His life had been ruled by a great passion – to become one of the lords of his clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then, everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*.... Here was a man whose *chi* say nay despite his own affirmation. (C. Achebe 2008, p.104)

Nonetheless, young people can also behave with great dignity and wisdom. Fofu's determination to put an end to her street life is evidence of this. The narrator's choice of this character allows him to address seniority regardless of age and setting. In her quest for a decent life and justice for her assassinated elder sister, Baby T; Fofu does not hesitate to disguise herself as a boy to meet Kabria at Agbogbloshie market. Streetism makes her grow up and speak like an adult to her mother who thinks that "a woman would rather maintain an unworthy man in her life than be seen as a woman with no man in her life." (Darko 2014, p.158) Fofu's response came out expectedly mature, vehement and poignant:

So you will do it again, won't you?" She wailed at her mother. "If he returned today, you would let him in and probably get yourself pregnant by him again, won't you? Why? Mother, why? What life have you been able to give those of us you already have? Look at the boys here. Look at me. We have no ideas where the two older boys are. Are they dead? I often wonder. Are they alive? Are they in prison? Are they killing people to survive? You don't even know. And Baby T? you offered us all generously to the streets, mother. You made the streets claim and own us. These two at your feet are already going hours without food. Only time, and they will also be venturing out onto the streets to fend for themselves. You grew too used to living off the sweat of your children, especially Baby T.... You couldn't even mourn her openly. You couldn't bury her decently. You couldn't talk about her death. What are you looking for, mother? Tell me... (Darko 2014, p.159)

In other words, Fofo's attitude to life confirms Rodrigue's utterance in P. Corneille's *Cid* "Aux âmes bien nées, la valeur n'attend point le nombre des années."² Life trials are the best teachers. The more people learn to overcome them, the better it is.

CONCLUSION

It is commonly acknowledged that literature is a mirror of the society in which it is published. For this reason, African fiction is often scrutinised under patriarchal lenses whereby male and female characters play roles in accordance with their sex instead of gender. In this respect, there is a distorted interpretation of the concept of 'masculinity' since it is wrongly understood and associated with the male body. Just as society itself is dynamic, literature as a discourse needs to be revisited to avoid it being lethargic. The present article investigated masculinity as a genderless mould in the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the Ghanaian woman writer, Amma Darko's selected novels including *Beyond The Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998) and *Faceless* (2014). Under Butler's gender performativity theory and Derrida's deconstruction lenses, diverse forms of masculinities have been identified and scrutinised in pre-colonial and postcolonial periods. Among others are life in city, social status and seniority as female and male characters' masculinities. Great achievement, honour, wisdom and abilities to tame life in a city are also female characters' features. In addition, Achebe reveals that god is genderless as it is the combination of both masculine and feminine principles. For this reason, a he-god has a priestess and she-god has a priest. Masculinity, in short, has nothing to do with the male sex. Be it courage, perseverance and hard work, they are human features and social standards. As it is said "practice makes perfect", performativity/performance comes into being after repetition.

This paper invites to a rereading of female and male characters' roles in literary scholarship. Stereotypes have so long governed literary criticism that in this twenty-first century it is time to revisit it. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Darko's novels under study prove that language is unstable because it does not always mean what people traditionally refer it to.

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² It is translated in English as follows : "For souls nobly born valor doesn't await the passing of years."
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