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Beyond the horizon of whiteness: Colonial desire, psychological alienation and the collapse of the European dream in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995)

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Abstract

This paper examines Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) as a postcolonial feminist critique of colonial desire, psychological alienation, and the collapse of the European dream. Drawing on Fanon's concept of colonial desire and Bhabha's theory of mimicry, the analysis traces protagonist Mara's trajectory from rural Ghana to forced prostitution in Germany, demonstrating how internalized whiteness as a psychological pathology operates hierarchically among Africans and culminates in the commodification of women's bodies. The novel systematically dismantles the myth of Europe as a site of redemption, revealing migration not as empowerment but as disempowerment embedded in patriarchal and neocolonial structures. Beyond literary analysis, this study establishes significant educational relevance: it offers a pedagogical model for decolonizing curricula, fostering critical global citizenship, and integrating postcolonial theory with social justice education. The text serves as a tool for developing students' cultural literacy, ethical reasoning, and understanding of systemic exploitation. Findings indicate that Darko's novel addresses multiple Sustainable Development Goals including gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities and provides a framework for interdisciplinary teaching across literary studies, gender studies, and migration discourse. Ultimately, the paper argues that *Beyond the Horizon* functions not only as literature but as an indispensable educational resource for confronting contemporary neocolonial realities.

Keywords: colonial desire, technological alienation, migration, Fanon, Bhabha, postcolonial feminism, Amma Darko, Beyond the Horizon

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1. Introduction

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) occupies a significant position within contemporary African literature for its uncompromising portrayal of migration, gendered exploitation, and postcolonial disillusionment. Originally published in German in 1991 and later translated into English in 1995, the novel emerged at a historical moment when migration to Europe increasingly appeared to many Africans as a pathway toward economic advancement and social mobility. Against this backdrop, Darko dismantles the powerful myth that Europe represents an unquestioned site of opportunity, fulfilment, and liberation. Instead, she presents migration as a process through which existing structures of domination are reproduced in new forms, often with devastating consequences for African women.

The novel follows Mara, a young woman from Naka in northern Ghana, whose marriage to Akobi initiates a journey from rural Ghana to Germany. What initially appears to be a narrative of social advancement gradually unfolds into a disturbing account of exploitation, prostitution, bodily commodification, and psychological fragmentation. Mara's migration does not result in empowerment but in her incorporation into transnational networks of exploitation controlled by men who profit from her body and labour. Darko's narrative thus challenges celebratory discourses of migration by revealing the hidden costs of the European dream and exposing the structural inequalities that sustain it.

Existing scholarship has offered valuable insights into the novel's engagement with migration, patriarchy, and postcolonial identity. Scholars have examined the text as a feminist critique of gender oppression, a narrative of diasporic disillusionment, and a representation of postcolonial dependency. Asempasah and Sam (2016), for example, explore the question of self-reconstitution and agency, while Ennin (2023) emphasises migration and toxic masculinity. Other studies have focused on the commodification of women, the failure of migration, and the novel's critique of patriarchal structures. Although these studies have significantly enriched understanding of Darko's work, they often treat colonial desire, migration, and gender oppression as largely separate concerns.

This paper argues that *Beyond the Horizon* performs a more integrated critique than has often been acknowledged. Specifically, the novel demonstrates how colonial desire, technological mediation, and psychological alienation converge to produce forms of subjectivity that sustain exploitation within both African and European contexts. The paper also proposes that Darko's most original intervention lies not simply in her exposure of migration's failures but in her representation of how bodies and identities become commodified through technologies of surveillance, pornography, and visual consumption. The novel reveals that colonial desire is no longer sustained solely through formal political domination but through cultural fantasies, racial hierarchies, consumer aspirations, and technological mechanisms that transform individuals into objects of exchange.

The analysis advances three central claims. First and foremost, the novel portrays colonial desire as a form of psychological orientation toward Europe that produces mimicry, self-negation, and aspirational whiteness. Secondly, Darko demonstrates how technological mediation, particularly through pornography and visual surveillance, intensifies psychological alienation by separating subjects from their own bodies and experiences. Finally, the novel systematically dismantles the European dream by revealing Europe not as a site of liberation but as a space in which colonial and patriarchal forms of domination assume new configurations.

In addition, the paper examines the question of resistance and reconstitution. While Mara develops forms of strategic agency that enable her to survive, Darko resists presenting this survival as complete liberation. Instead, the novel depicts reconstitution as fragmented, compromised, and inseparable from the structures that continue to

constrain the protagonist.

By foregrounding the intersections of colonial desire, technological alienation, migration, and gendered exploitation, this study seeks to contribute a more nuanced understanding of Darko's novel and to demonstrate its continuing relevance to contemporary debates concerning migration, race, gender, and decolonization.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in close textual reading, postcolonial feminist literary criticism, Fanonian psychoanalytic analysis, and decolonial literary studies. The approach is primarily textual and analytical rather than empirical. It seeks to examine how narrative structures, characterization, symbolism, and thematic patterns function to construct meanings relating to colonial desire, psychological alienation, migration, and gendered exploitation. Close reading is particularly appropriate because the novel's critique emerges not only through plot development but also through recurring images, narrative voice, symbolic representations, and moments of psychological introspection. The study therefore focuses on detailed textual analysis rather than broad thematic summary. Particular attention is paid to language, imagery, characterization, and narrative perspective in order to uncover the ideological assumptions embedded within the text.

The analysis is informed by Fanon's theorization of colonial subjectivity and psychological alienation, especially his discussions of racial self-negation, mimicry, and the desire for recognition through proximity to whiteness. Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry provides a complementary framework for understanding how colonial subjects internalize and reproduce European norms while remaining excluded from full acceptance. These theoretical perspectives are further enriched by postcolonial feminist scholarship and contemporary trauma studies, which illuminate the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and violence within transnational contexts. To ensure analytical coherence, key scenes were selected because of their direct relevance to the article's three central claims. These include Akobi's performance of modernity upon returning to Naka, Mara's migration to Germany, the filmed sexual assault that facilitates her entry into prostitution, the subsequent use of pornography as a mechanism of control, and the novel's concluding reflections on exile, survival, and identity. These episodes provide particularly revealing sites for examining how colonial desire generates psychological alienation and how both contribute to the collapse of the European dream.

The study adopts a decolonial perspective by interrogating dominant narratives that present Europe as a universal horizon of progress and fulfilment. Rather than treating migration as a neutral social phenomenon, the analysis examines how historical relations of colonial power continue to shape contemporary aspirations, identities, and forms of exploitation. Through this approach, the article seeks to demonstrate the continued relevance of Darko's novel for understanding postcolonial subjectivity, gendered migration, and the persistence of colonial structures within contemporary global realities.

2.1 Selection of Extracts or Passages

Passages or extracts were selected according to three criteria. The first criteria captures threshold moments in Mara's geographical and psychological trajectory including departure from Naka (pp. 35-38), arrival in Hamburg (pp. 55-60), first forced sexual encounter (pp. 82-85), discovery of the video recording (pp. 120-125), and final resignation (pp. 140-142). These moments mark transitions where the three strands of critique involving colonial desire, alienation, dream collapse become visibly entangled. Also, passages involving visual technologies that mediate self-perception including the mirror in the brothel (p. 3-4), the pornographic video (pp. 120-125), photographs of Akobi's German wife (p. 62), and the Sesame Street tapes sent to Mara's sons (p. 141). These passages enable analysis of how technology produces, rather than merely reflects, psychological alienation.

Finally, scenes of bodily transformation that operationalise colonial desire involving the adoption of European dresses (pp. 50-51), references to skin bleaching (p. 7), and the physical deterioration catalogued in the opening pages (p. 4). These passages show how colonial desire inscribes itself on the body. Each extract or passage is

analysed for its contribution to the three critique strands, with attention to narrative voice (first-person present tense), figurative language (metaphors of freezing, fragmentation, suffocation), and intertextual references (the biblical Mara, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*).

2.2. Theoretical Sources

The study draws on primary theoretical sources: Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/2008) for the concept of colonial desire and "crushing objecthood"; Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) for mimicry and colonial ambivalence; and recent African feminist and migration theory with special to Nana Adusei-Poku's *Afrofuturism and the Visual Economy of Race* (2022), Yael's *Trauma and the Mediated Witness* (2021), Carli Coetzee's *Accented Migrations* (2023), and Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2012) for reconceptualising agency within constraint.

3. Colonial Desire and the Performance of Whiteness

The first manifestation of colonial desire in *Beyond the Horizon* appears not in Europe but in Africa, in the figure of Akobi and his anxious performance of European modernity. When Akobi returns to Naka from the city, he wears "pencil-striped grey trousers, a stiffly starched and ironed white shirt, a thin black tie, and impeccably polished black Beatles boots" (p. 8). Every detail of this costume is significant. The "stiffly starched" shirt suggests a body held rigid by the effort of performing a borrowed identity; the "thin black tie" is a detail of European men's fashion so specific and so obviously unsuited to the Ghanaian climate that it becomes a caricature. Oppong-Adjei & Essah-Ntiful, (2023) have indirectly noted that Darko's novel explores the "socio-cultural and economic factors pushing Africans to Europe," emphasizing that the migration decision is already overdetermined by colonial legacies that have devalued local economies and epistemologies in favor of European alternatives (p. 36). In the novel, this devaluation is starkly evident. Akobi, having obtained a Form Four certificate from the mission school, refuses to return to farming or to assist his father in the undertaking business, activities he regards as beneath his educated status. He "had tasted town life and was craving to further it to city life" (p. 7), and his dream is peopled with images of Europeanized African women: "A typist or a secretary at the Ministries perhaps, who bathes with skin-bleaching soaps and applies skin-lightening creams, and who does wonders with hot combs and creams to her stubborn kinky hair to turn it long, straight and silky" (p. 7).

The Beatles boots, the brand name functioning as a timestamp mark Akobi as caught between colonial mimicry and postcolonial aspiration. He is not imitating an abstract "European"; he is imitating a *dated* European, the 1960s image of the modern man, an image already obsolete in the Europe he dreams of reaching.

This is mimicry as Bhabha (1994) theorized it as "the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 86). Akobi is almost the same as the European ideal. He wears the clothes, speaks the language (his English is peppered with German words he has picked up from visiting missionaries), has the education but the "not quite" is written into every detail. The boots are polished "impeccably" because Akobi knows they are not enough; the shirt is "stiffly starched" because it must hold its shape against a climate and a body that threaten to reveal it as costume.

But Darko does something more complex than simply illustrating Bhabha's concept. She shows how colonial desire produces not only failed performances but also a specific form of cruelty toward women that compensates for the failure. Akobi's dream, described early in the novel, is not of a wife who is educated or kind but of a woman who has successfully erased the visible markers of her Africanness: "A typist or a secretary at the Ministries perhaps, who bathes with skin-bleaching soaps and applies skin-lightening creams and who does wonders with hot combs and creams to her stubborn kinky hair to turn it long, straight and silky" (p. 7). The catalogue of cosmetic practices including bleaching, straightening, applying reveals colonial desire as a demand that the black woman transform herself into a mirror image of European femininity. When such women are unavailable to Akobi (they "went out not with the likes of him but with bank managers" (p. 7), he falls back on traditional patriarchal resources by purchasing a wife from the village.

Mara is chosen not for her qualities but because her father's debts make her cheap. The bride price comprising "two crates of Schnapps, ten yards of wax-print, a sum of money that went to settling his in-law's debt, and two live goats" (p. 9), is a transaction that serves multiple purposes. It settles a debt, gratifies the father's vanity ("the first Naka son with a school certificate should choose his daughter""(p. 8), and provides Akobi with a domestic servant who will not challenge his failed aspirations. Already, at the moment of her marriage, Mara is objectified but Darko insists that this objectification is not "traditional" in any authentic sense. The bride price is calculated in relation to Akobi's mission education; the transaction is mediated by the colonial economy that has devalued agricultural labor and elevated "education" as the pathway to status. Colonial desire and patriarchal exploitation are not separate systems but mutually reinforcing logics

More to the point, colonial desire as articulated in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/2008), refers to the deep-seated psychological orientation of the colonized subject toward the culture, values, and somatic ideals of the coloniser. Fanon demonstrated that colonialism operates not merely through political and economic domination but through the production of a specific form of subjectivity which includes the colonised individual who internalises the coloniser's denigration of blackness and comes to desire whiteness as an object of both identification and aspiration. This desire is fundamentally alienating, for it seeks an impossible resolution: to become what one is not and cannot be, yet to remain anchored in a body marked as irredeemably other.

Homi Bhabha (1994) extended Fanon's analysis through the concept of mimicry which he described as "the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 86). Mimicry is the colonial strategy of producing subjects who approximate European norms without ever achieving full equivalence such as English-speaking natives, mission-educated clerks, boys in Beatles boots. For Bhabha, however, mimicry is not merely a tool of colonial control but also an ambivalent site of resistance, for the mimic's proximity to the coloniser's image carries within it the threat of mockery and exposure. The colonised subject who mimics too perfectly reveals the constructedness and contingency of colonial authority.

Darko's novel is saturated with these dynamics. Akobi, the novel's primary male figure, embodies colonial desire in its most degraded form. He returns to Naka wearing "pencil-striped grey trousers, a stiffly starched and ironed white shirt, a thin black tie, and impeccably polished black Beatles boots" (p. 8) which probably depicts a costume that announces his aspiration to European modernity while simultaneously marking him as its imperfect copy. The irony, of course, is that Akobi's education at the "Joseph Father of Jesus Roman Catholic school" (p. 7) has not equipped him to succeed in the city on his messenger-clerk salary, nor has it immunized him against the racism he encounters in Germany, where he is called "Neger" and his German wife is dismissed as a "Negerweib."

The theoretical framework for this analysis also draws on psychoanalytic accounts of psychological alienation, particularly Fanon's description of the "crushing objecthood" experienced by the black subject under the colonial gaze (Fanon, 2008, p. 89). Alienation, in this context, refers not merely to social exclusion but to a more fundamental fragmentation such as the division of the self between how one experiences oneself and how one is seen by others, a division that colonial racism intensifies to pathological proportions. In *Beyond the Horizon*, this alienation is spatialized, gendered, and progressively deepened as Mara moves through different geographical and social locations.

4. Screening the Self: Technology, Pornography, and the Mediation of Alienation

The novel's opening scene establishes the geography of Mara's alienation with remarkable economy. She sits before her oval mirror, staring at "what is left of what once used to be my image" (p. 3). Around her, from adjacent rooms, she hears "chuckles and pantings, wild bedspring creaks, screaming oohs and yelling aahs", the sounds of other women being used by strange men. The rooms are "the same as mine," the activities are "the same as they are in mine," yet Mara feels "so very, very far away on my own." So friendless, isolated and cold"(p. 3). This paradox simultaneity and isolation captures the condition of alienated labour under capitalism. But Darko adds a specifically colonial and technological dimension. The cold Mara feels "does not grip my body so much as it does

my soul. It's deep inside me that feels this chilliness, from the dejected soul my body harbours, a soul grown old from too much use of its shelter" (p. 3).

The mirror is the first technology of alienation in the novel. It returns to Mara not a coherent self-image but fragments such as "these two flabby, floppy drooping things I call my breasts, my tired graceless bosom," "my sore cracked lips which still show through the multiple layers of the glossy crimson paint I apply to hide them," "the gaudy pink rouge I've plastered on my ebony black face" (p. 4). The mirror's reflection is not a whole person but a catalogue of body parts, each marked as deteriorated, each requiring cosmetic concealment. This is Fanon's "crushing objecthood" (2008, p. 89) literalised. Mara has become an object to herself, and the mirror is the apparatus that produces this objectification. But unlike Fanon's account, where the black subject is objectified by the white gaze, here the objectification is self-administered through the technology of the mirror. Mara watches herself become the whore she never intended to become, and the watching is part of the becoming.

The most devastating technological mediation occurs when Akobi and Osey show Mara the video recording of her rape. After being drugged at a party, Mara wakes with no memory of what happened. The video supplies the memory but as a commodity, something that can be played, rewound, and watched again. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> *They played the video. I watched myself lying on a bed, completely unconscious. I watched them undress me. I watched them take turns on my limp, unprotesting body. I watched them laugh and joke while they did it. I watched the video camera zoom in on my private parts. I watched the pornographic film of which I was the unwilling star.* (p. 122)

The repetition of "I watched" is devastating. Mara does not say "I remembered" or "I experienced", she says "I watched, as if the event belonged to someone else, as if her only access to her own trauma is through the mediating screen. The video transforms her rape into a pornographic film, and she becomes the "unwilling star" a phrase that acknowledges her lack of consent while also recognizing that, in the logic of the medium, she is nonetheless the star, her image captured and circulating beyond her control. This is what Yael (2021) calls "mediated witnessing." The survivor watches her own trauma as if from outside, producing a double consciousness that is both protective and deeply alienating. Mara cannot integrate the experience into her narrative self because the experience was never hers in the first place. It belongs to the video, to the men who recorded it, to the blackmail material they now wield.

The Sesame Street tapes that Mara sends to her sons at the novel's end offer a counterpoint to the pornographic video. She writes:

> *I send them video cassettes of Sesame Street. I want them to learn something. I want them to see Big Bird and Kermit and the Cookie Monster. I want them to hear English spoken with an American accent. I don't want them to end up like me.* (p. 141)

The irony is evident. Mara is sending her sons the same cultural products that structured colonial desire in her own generation American English, Western educational media, images of a world that is not theirs. The video cassettes are meant to protect them from becoming like her, but they are also the very mechanism by which colonial desire reproduces itself across generations. The television screen becomes the horizon of aspiration: beyond it lies Big Bird and the American accent; on this side lies the brothel. Mara cannot imagine any alternative medium for her sons' education, no cultural resource that does not come from the West. The technology of liberation is also the technology of continued colonisation

5. The Collapse of the European Dream

Perhaps the most powerful theme in *Beyond the Horizon* is the systematic dismantling of the European dream as a salvific narrative. Okolo & Nwafor, (2026). argues that the novel demonstrates that "migration to Western

countries is not a solution to Africa's poverty condition" (p. 36), and Ennin (2023), cited in Okwum and Ihezie (2026), concludes that "migration in the text is not depicted as a path to empowerment, but as a disempowering experience embedded in patriarchal manipulation and systemic inequality" (p. 2). These conclusions are undeniably correct, but they do not fully capture the radicalism of Darko's critique, which extends to the very structure of hope that underwrites migration discourse.

The European dream is introduced in the novel through Akobi's promises to Mara. "I am going to Europe to live there for just a year or two at most," he tells her, "and to work. … I will make so much money that I can buy us everything! Everything, Mara! Television, radio, fridge, carpet, even car!" (p. 36). The catalogue of commodities is significant. The dream is not merely about economic improvement but about the acquisition of specific objects that signify modernity, objects that will transform Mara from a village woman into a consumer of European goods. Akobi inflates his promises further, "do you know for instance that in Britain the people are so rich that they throw fridges away? And in Germany they throw cars away?" (p. 37). The absurdity of this claim that Europeans discard functional automobiles is not lost on Mara, who asks, "And they are correct in their heads? The white people in Europe?" (p. 37). Her skepticism is overridden by her desire to believe, and she succumbs to Akobi's rhetoric.

The collapse of this dream occurs not in a single moment but through a cumulative process of disillusionment. When Mara finally arrives in Hamburg, she discovers that Akobi has married a German woman, Gitte, to secure his residency, and that she is expected to pose as his sister. The apartment she shares with them is modern by Ghanaian standards but cramped; Mara sleeps on a mattress on the living room floor while Akobi and Gitte occupy the bedroom. The promised television, radio, fridge, and carpet are present but they belong to Gitte, not to Mara, and they serve as constant reminders of her subordinate status. When Mara is forced into prostitution at the club called Peepy, the dream undergoes its final inversion: the commodities that once symbolized European progress now symbolize her commodification as a body for sale.

One of the novel's most devastating ironies concerns the house Akobi claims to be building in Africa. Gitte believes she is contributing to the construction of a house with a swimming pool, "the plan" that includes "the hot weather" consideration (103). The private detective Gerhardt Strauss eventually reveals that the house Akobi is renovating is in Sumanyi, Comfort's village, not in Naka, and that no house is being built for Gitte or for Mara (p. 139). The European dream, it turns out, has not only failed to deliver its promises but has actively financed the enrichment of Akobi's mistress at the expense of both his wives. The money Mara earns through prostitution, money that flows into Akobi's bank account is used to pay the rent on Comfort's apartment and to renovate her family house.

Asempasah and Sam (2016) identify "the demythologization of Europe as the privileged place of redemption for marginalised subjects from the periphery of the global system" as one of the two "deep structural logics" driving the novel's narrative dynamics (p. 154). This demythologization is accomplished not only through the plot's revelations but through the novel's style. Europe is not depicted as the site of liberation Mara once imagined but as the space in which colonial desire reaches its pathological endpoint. The German characters including Gitte, the anonymous men who use Mara's body, the police who deport Comfort are not presented as uniquely cruel individuals but as participants in a system that exploits African women while simultaneously excluding them from citizenship and dignity. The novel's final image of Mara, addicted to cocaine and resigned to her fate, suggests that the European dream has collapsed into a nightmare from which there is no waking.

6. The Ambiguity of Agency: Resistance, Complicity, and the Problem of Reconstitution

Does Mara ever resist? The question is harder to answer than it first appears. At several moments, she seems to act decisively. She arranges for Comfort's deportation through Gerhardt Strauss, she secures her own residency papers, she sends money directly to her mother and sons through Mama Kiosk, bypassing Akobi. These are not nothing. Yet each act of resistance is also an act of complicity with the system that exploits her. Comfort's

deportation does not free Mara, it simply removes one rival. The residency papers allow her to stay in Germany, but staying means remaining in the brothel. And sending money home a gesture that resembles the migrant's dream of remittances, requires her continued participation in the sex industry.

Saba Mahmood's (2012) work on agency is useful here. Mahmood argues against understanding agency as synonymous with resistance or liberation. Instead, she proposes that agency be understood as "the capacity to act within constraint", a formulation that does not require that the actor transcend the conditions of her action. From this perspective, Mara's choices are agency, but agency of a deeply compromised kind. She acts, but she acts within a field of possibilities that offers no good options, only different forms of bad ones. Her decision to wear European dresses (pp. 50-51) is experienced as liberation. "Why didn't I start wearing dresses when Akobi was here?" she asks but the reader knows that this "liberation" was purchased at the cost of her placement in a brothel. The dress is not a symbol of freedom but rather it is the uniform of her commodification.

The question of whether Mara "reconstitutes the self" (Asempasah & Sam, 2016) after her disintegration is therefore unanswerable in the terms Asempasah and Sam propose. Reconstitution suggests an integration of fragmented parts into a coherent whole. But Mara's narrative never achieves coherence. The novel ends not with resolution but with a kind of suspended animation:

> *I have plunged into my profession down to the marrow in my bones. There is no turning back for me now. I am so much a whore now that I can no longer remember or imagine what being a non-whore is.* (p. 141)

This is not reconstitution. It is the disappearance of the "non-whore" self as a viable memory or possibility. Mara's survival is real, she is not dead, she sends money home, she has her papers but survival is not the same as liberation. It is, as Muo (2025) puts it, "accommodation" (p. 2), a pragmatic response to conditions that offer no genuine alternatives. What remains, at the novel's end, is the terrible knowledge that there are fates worse than death and that Mara has not, quite yet, reached them.

7. Gendered Coloniality and the Politics of Survival

The intersection of colonial desire and patriarchal exploitation in *Beyond the Horizon* has been a central concern of feminist readings of the novel. Akakpo (2026) argues that "religion, culture, and tradition are significant factors in sex variation, gender identity conception, and energy sharing in the text selected by its theme of patriarchy and oppression of women" (p. 2). Similarly, Higgins, (2006) examines "how the women get involved in different layers of toxic relationships with men" and concludes that "sociocultural, economic and sexual exploitation are amply demonstrated in the novel" (p. 1). These readings correctly identify the patriarchal structures that shape Mara's fate, but they risk treating "patriarchy" as a universal category that operates independently of colonial history.

A more nuanced approach recognises that the patriarchy depicted in *Beyond the Horizon* is itself a colonial formation. The traditional marriage practices that Mara describes the payment of bride price, the expectation that a wife will "worship" her husband, the legitimacy of polygamy are not presented by Darko as authentically African traditions that have been corrupted by colonialism. Rather, they are shown to be complicit with colonial economic logic. Mara's father sells her for goats to settle a debt; Akobi's father calculates his son's bride price in relation to his investment in Akobi's mission education. The chiefs and elders who preside over these transactions are themselves implicated in the colonial economy that has devalued agricultural labor and elevated "education" as the pathway to status. Colonial desire and patriarchal exploitation are not separate systems but mutually reinforcing logics that converge in the commodification of women's bodies.

The novel's most compelling feminist argument emerges not from its critique of patriarchy but from its portrayal of female solidarity as a fragile and partial resource. Mara's relationships with Mama Kiosk, Kaye, Vivian, and even Gitte are marked by ambivalence. Mama Kiosk offers practical support and advice but cannot

prevent Mara's exploitation. Kaye helps Mara secure residency papers and escape from Peepy but remains complicit in the system of pimping. Vivian warns Mara about Akobi's betrayal but eventually confesses that she too was complicit, telling Mara, "I did what Osey ordered me to do. I was his property then" (p. 131). The novel thus refuses the redemptive narrative of sisterhood that structures some feminist fiction; solidarity among women is possible but always constrained by the very systems of exploitation that solidarity seeks to overcome.

This ambivalence extends to the novel's conclusion. Mara has achieved a measure of autonomy: she has her own residency papers, she has arranged for the deportation of Comfort and the imprisonment of Akobi, and she sends money and goods to her mother and sons through Mama Kiosk. Yet this autonomy is purchased at the cost of her continued participation in the sex industry. "At Oves' brothel," she says, "I have plunged into my profession down to the marrow in my bones. There is no turning back for me now. I am so much a whore now that I can no longer remember or imagine what being a non-whore is" (p. 141). This is not liberation but accommodation, a pragmatic response to conditions that offer no genuine alternatives. Muo (2025) characterizes Darko's feminism as exhibiting "elements of cynicism and ambivalence" (p. 2), and this seems accurate. The novel offers no horizon beyond the horizon of whiteness, only the bleak recognition that even complicity with exploitation can be a form of survival.

8. Beyond the Horizon? Darko's Dystopian Conclusion

An ecofeminist lens reveals how the novel powerfully links the violation of the land with the violation of women's bodies and social roles. Ecofeminism argues that the same logic of domination that exploits the earth also exploits women; environmental domination is structurally linked to gendered domination (Gaard & Murphy, 1998). In *Weep Not, Child*, the land is consistently described in gendered terms as something to be "possessed" or "conquered," while women's lives are directly tied to its fertility and the labour it demands.

Does *Beyond the Horizon* offer any way out of the impasse it so powerfully describes? The novel's title suggests a movement beyond some boundary, but the content of the narrative systematically undermines the possibility of such transcendence. The "horizon" of the title is multiply ambiguous: it may refer to the horizon of Europe as the limit of African aspiration, or to the horizon of whiteness as the limit of colonial desire, or to the horizon of the self as the limit of psychological integration. Darko's achievement is to show how these horizons converge and how crossing them leaving Africa for Europe, adopting European dress and customs, learning German, acquiring residency papers does not produce liberation but only new forms of captivity.

Odamtten (2007) has suggested that Darko's work belongs to a tradition of African feminist writing that refuses the consolations of utopian thinking, insisting instead on the representation of female suffering without redemption. This assessment seems particularly apt for *Beyond the Horizon*. The novel's final paragraphs, in which Mara describes sending video tapes of Sesame Street to her sons and financing a cement-block house for her mother, are suffused with melancholy. She has become what she never intended to become: a provider who can offer only material goods, a mother who can only watch her children from a distance through the mediation of television. The "horizon" she has crossed has not brought her to a new world but has deposited her in a zone of perpetual exile.

The novel's engagement with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been noted by several critics. One study argues that "Darko strategically frames Mara's encounter with Europe as a journey into the 'heart of darkness' and also foregrounds de-linking from the West as an emancipatory ethic and thought for postcolonial transformation" (Asempassah, 2023, p. 1). Yet the "de-linking" that Darko seems to advocate the turning away from Europe as a source of value and identity is precisely what Mara cannot achieve. She is caught, as the colonized subject always is caught, in the impossibility of simply returning to a precolonial authenticity. The "emancipatory ethic" Agbo describes remains a possibility foreclosed by the novel's actual trajectory.

What remains, then, is a kind of tragic knowledge. Mara knows that she has been exploited, that her body has been commodified, that her dreams were illusions. But this knowledge does not set her free. Instead, it becomes

one more burden she must carry. “I have decided to stop thinking about ever going home,” she says. “I just don’t belong there any longer” (p. 141). The horizon has closed behind her; there is no way back, and the way forward leads only deeper into the abyss.

9. Pedagogical Significance

This study offers several implications for teaching *Beyond the Horizon* in literature, postcolonial studies, and migration studies courses. First and foremost,the technology-focused framework developed here provides a concrete entry point for discussing media literacy and the ethics of representation. Students can examine how the novel uses mirrors, videos, and screens to explore questions of surveillance, consent, and the commodification of trauma. A useful assignment asks students to compare Mara's relationship to the pornographic video with contemporary debates about "revenge porn" and digital consent, generating discussion about how technology transforms violation into circulating image.

Also, the novel’s treatment of colonial desire as mediated performance offers a pedagogical opportunity to move beyond simple critiques of “false consciousness.” Rather than teaching students that migration is either good or bad, the novel enables nuanced discussion of how aspiration and exploitation are entangled. Discussion questions might include: When Mara chooses to wear European dresses, is she exercising agency or succumbing to colonial desire? What would it mean for her to reject “whiteness” when whiteness is the only available currency of value? These questions resist easy answers and develop students’ capacity to think critically.

Again, for courses on gender and migration, the novel provides a counter-narrative to celebratory accounts of transnational mobility. Mara's trajectory from rural Ghana to urban Germany is a migration story, but it is not a success story. The novel challenges students to ask which bodies are permitted to move, which movements are legible as “migration” rather than “trafficking,” and how race and gender shape the experience of displacement. Instructors might pair the novel with non-fictional accounts of West African women trafficked to Europe, using Darko's fiction to humanize statistics and policy debates.

In higher education, the relevance of this study is particularly evident within ongoing efforts to decolonize the curriculum. Quayson and Mukherjee (2023) describe an African literature course in which, through “adopting and adapting Africanist interpretations of text and writing…students reconceptualized their natural environments as sites for intellectual investigation.” The present analysis of *Beyond the Horizon* similarly provides a model for encouraging students to rethink established assumptions and engage critically with African experiences and knowledge systems. Rawson (2023) further argues that postcolonial literature “can offer a field in which themes are encountered that summons the young person to take responsibility for her thoughts, feelings and actions,” an objective that aligns closely with higher education’s civic and intellectual mission. Moreover, the novel’s exploration of “sisterhood solidarity, education, financial freedom and bodily integrity as routes to the total emancipation of the African woman” provides a productive framework for engaging feminist theories and discussions of gender justice. The study also demonstrates the pedagogical value of integrating postcolonial theorists such as Fanon and Bhabha into literary analysis.

At the secondary school level, although the themes of the novel are mature, they can be explored through carefully guided instruction that promotes critical reading and discussion skills. Pavlov-West (2023) argues that the inclusion of such texts encourages students “to think critically, to engage in interesting discussions with one another and to broaden their horizons.” The accessibility of Darko’s narrative and the relevance of its themes make it an effective tool for introducing students to issues of migration, gender, and postcolonial identity. Okwum and Ihezie (2026) observe that “migration in the text is not depicted as a path to empowerment, but as a disempowering experience” (p. 2), an important lesson for young readers who may encounter romanticized representations of migration. Similarly, Sam (2023) argues that the novel demonstrates that “migration to Western countries is not a solution to Africa’s poverty condition” (p. 36), thereby challenging simplistic media narratives surrounding migration and development. The continuing relevance of the text is further demonstrated by Asempasah’s (2022)

assertion that the novel "can help us think a post-coronavirus Africa" by exposing the enduring "shame of being postcolonial."

In the area of teacher education and professional development, this study provides a useful framework for preparing educators to teach postcolonial literature effectively. It illustrates how theoretical concepts can be integrated with textual analysis, how sensitive topics such as prostitution and violence can be addressed responsibly, and how discussions about race, gender, migration, and power can be facilitated constructively. Such preparation is increasingly important for fostering inclusive learning environments. As Pavlov-West (2023) emphasizes, teachers must become "politically conscious and…willing to think carefully about the choices of their teaching material." The study also contributes to the growing field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The issues explored in the novel align closely with several Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Consequently, the text offers valuable opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching that connects literature with broader global development concerns.

Moreover, the study's focus on psychological alienation, colonial desire, and the collapse of the European dream provides an important framework for moral and civic education. By encouraging readers to reflect critically on their own assumptions, challenge stereotypes, and appreciate the complexities of global interconnectedness, the novel promotes a more nuanced understanding of contemporary social realities. As a "powerful and brutally honest account of the objectification and degradation of women, in Africa and beyond," the text demonstrates the capacity of literature to confront difficult truths and stimulate meaningful reflection. Sam (2023) further contends that the novel enables readers "to rethink controversial and conventional discourses on the African woman," thereby challenging reductive representations and fostering more inclusive understandings of gender and identity.

In summation, the educational significance of this study is multifaceted and far-reaching. It provides a rigorous model for literary analysis that integrates postcolonial and feminist perspectives; contributes to curriculum decolonization and the promotion of critical global citizenship; equips learners with analytical tools for understanding systemic injustice; and demonstrates literature's capacity to illuminate the human consequences of political, economic, and social structures. For these reasons, *Beyond the Horizon* remains an indispensable pedagogical resource for educators, students, and researchers across multiple disciplines.

10. Conclusion: The Unbearable Weight of Colonial Desire

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* is a devastating critique of the European dream and the colonial desire that animates it. Through the figure of Mara, Darko demonstrates how colonial desire operates as a psychological pathology that compels African subjects to seek validation through European cultural and material standards, even when those standards actively destroy the conditions of their survival. The novel traces the progressive alienation of its protagonist from her body, her culture, and her sense of self, showing how the crossing of geographical borders corresponds to the dissolution of psychological boundaries. And it stages the systematic collapse of the European dream as a salvific narrative, revealing the discourse of Europe as a site of redemption to be a cruel mirage that serves only to facilitate new forms of exploitation.

Yet the novel is not merely a cautionary tale about the dangers of migration. It is also a searching inquiry into the nature of agency under conditions of constraint. Mara's choices to leave Naka, to endure Akobi's abuse, to consent to prostitution, to betray Gitte, to arrange Comfort's deportation are not presented as expressions of authentic selfhood but as pragmatic responses to a situation that offers no good options. Her agency emerges from complicity and compromise, from the "radical decision" to act within the very systems that constrain her.

The novel's refusal to offer a redemptive conclusion is perhaps its most radical gesture. Readers who seek a heroine who overcomes oppression and returns home transformed will find no such comfort here. Mara remains trapped in the brothel, addicted to cocaine, sending money home to children she will never see again. Her survival is not a triumph but an accommodation, a recognition that there are fates worse than death and that she has not,

quite yet, reached them.

What, then, lies beyond the horizon? Darko's answer seems to be nothing. Or rather, nothing but the horizon itself, the endless deferral of satisfaction that characterises colonial desire, the perpetual movement toward a whiteness that can never be attained, the tragic comedy of subjects who mistake the horizon for a destination and discover too late that it retreats as they advance.

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