
COMMODIFICATION, SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION AND THE IMAGE OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN *BEYOND THE HORIZON*

RHEMA F.E OGUCHE

rhema365@yahoo.com

PROF. ISMA'ILA A. TSIGA

UMMA ABUBAKAR, PHD

abubakarumma123@gmail.com

Abstract

The 21st century, being in a constant flux, has continued to witness various display of human relationships, especially as it relates to gender. Compared to the past, issues relating to gender practices and projections could be said to have taken a new dimension. It is, therefore, pertinent to argue that, the fluidity of the 21st century, no doubt, projects gender related issues in a more highly sexualised tone and texture than ever before. In other words, creative writers, in attempts to capture this highly sexualised society, have variously showcased a society where images of erotic codes, symbols, messages and artefacts permeate and continue to pervade the sights, senses, sensibilities and spaces of the society. This presupposes, therefore, that, the society becomes highly sexualised, especially where women are constituted as sex objects and commodities, not only for monetary gains, but also for sexual pleasure. This paper, drawing from new historicism and feminist ideologies, interrogates the notion of sexual objectification, commodification and the image of the African woman, as exemplified in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*.

Keywords: sexual objectification, commodification, African woman, new historicism and feminist ideology

Introduction

Feminist writing has always been replete with issues around representation. In fact, one of the arguments of most early African feminist writers revolves around how the woman is projected by African male writers. Feminist literature, like other African literatures before it, could be regarded as a protest literature, which seeks to defend dignity and integrity, especially as it relates to misrepresentation of women. For instance, Alkali (2012:13), in defense of dignity and integrity, holds that, for those who are not married, they are usually represented as prostitutes, seductresses and women of easy virtue, despite being highly placed career women. These arguments have, therefore, not only become recurring, but continued to give voice to African feminism. African male writers have equally argued on the premise that male characters are unfairly represented in the writings of their female counterparts; hence, the growing arguments on gender representation in African writing. For instance, the perception of African female writers is that, in a patriarchal structure, the woman is ideal as a wife, if she is subservient, useful and serviceable to her husband and his relatives. Indeed, this buttresses Chukukere's (1995:9) claim that, "the unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life has spilled into imaginative literature". Thus, on this basis, Peter (2010:30) advances that, feminism "wants society to change its ideas on patriarchy and accept women as being a valuable part of society."

It is instructive to note, however, that the corpus of literature allows for contemplations of perceptions, philosophies and ideologies. In fact, literature thrives in the desert of controversies occasioned by

divergent and opposing ideas. The ingenuity of a critic and/or writer is, therefore, reflected in the controversy he/she generates or advances in his/her writing. It is on this premise that one can argue that every literary text, reflecting whatever ideology, is replete with notions of representations. In other words, every literary text is a representation of issues; one of which might be gender-based. This is because the literary writer, being a product of a changing society, reflects in his writing, issues as he perceives them; and the drivers of these issues are his characters.

In view of the foregoing, it is worthy to note that stereotyping or representation is, in fact, an expression of creativity, as every literary writer, whether female or male, enriches the corpus of his/her writing through stereotypes. One could, therefore, contest that every literary writing is an expression of varying dimensions of representations and stereotypes. Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, is, arguably, a reflection of dimensions of representations, graphically illustrated by the characters; their actions and inactions, especially the female characters that are projected as objects. It is worthy to note that all bodies (male and female) are controlled and could be commoditised, as seen in the media and advertising. The concern of this study is, however, to illustrate the way the woman's body is controlled by the man, as exemplified in *Beyond the Horizon*.

Theoretical Framework

The emergence of new historicism could be seen as a response to the limitations of the earlier literary theories, such as New Criticism and Formalism. These approaches tended to focus on the literary text itself and its formal elements, rather than the social and historical contexts in which it was produced. It is an interdisciplinary approach to literary criticism that examines literature in the context of the historical and cultural circumstances in which it was produced. Accordingly, new historicism emphasises the interrelationship between literature and history and the ways in which power relations, social norms and cultural practices are reflected and contested in literary texts. New historicists, thus, believe that all cultural artefacts, including literature, are embedded in the social and political structures of their time. Thus, the new historicist explores how cultural texts participate in the shaping of social and political power relations.

Significantly, new historicism, as a literary theory, is based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. Based on the literary criticism of Stephen Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michel Foucault, New Historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances, but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs, and prejudices. As a literary theory, it argues that literature should be understood and interpreted within its historical and cultural context; this involves examining both the context of production and the context of reception. In *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982), Greenblatt discusses literature in relation to "self-fashioning" in renaissance period. Self-fashioning is used to explain how individuals create their identity in line with societal norms and cultural expectations. For example, nobles would dress in a way which denoted their station and fashioned themselves to reflect the identity they wanted to convey, and what was expected for someone of that class.

In view of this, *Beyond the Horizon*, from a new historicist perspective, lend itself to an introspection of the manifestations of the complex and complicated prevailing socio-cultural conditions that the African woman is grappling with. Accordingly, *Beyond the Horizon* yields itself to concerns of feminism;

hence, its deployment as another tool for interrogating the experiences of the African woman. Considering the nature of the text, therefore, Martha Nussbaum's (1995:275) paradigm of feminism, for which she describes how women are sexually objectified, is deployed. She identifies these seven features, depicting how a person is treated as an object: *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes; *denial of autonomy*: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination; *inertness*: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity; *fungibility*: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects; *violability*: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity; *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold); and *denial of subjectivity*: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

Feminist critical theory examines the oppression of women in literature. Tyson (2006:86) argues that the society is so immersed in patriarchy that it is programmed "not to see the way women are oppressed by traditional gender roles". Some feminist critics consider this oppressive culture against women as patriarchy; hence, the pursuit by African feminist writers in raising the consciousness of women on the stifling grips of patriarchy, which is perceived to have trapped so many women. Feminism is, thus, "tied to raising consciousness about the patriarchy in which many women feel trapped". In other words, it reveals how literary texts demonstrate the repression and powerlessness of women in different periods and cultures (Gardner, 2004:42-43).

For some feminist critics, therefore, the restoration of the dignity of the woman is what drives their philosophy, as they perceive feminism to be far more than either a search for mere social equality within the status-quo or individual fulfillment. It is against this backdrop that Bunch (1981) claims that, one of the goals of feminism is hinged on the premise that,

The freedom from oppression for women involves not only equity but also the right of women to freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives within and outside of the homes, having control over their lives and bodies is essential to ensure a sense of dignity and autonomy for women. (249-252).

Premised upon the foregoing, *Beyond the Horizon* has been located within the purview of the theories of new historicism and feminist critical theory to examine the cultural conundrum, as well as oppression and exploitation of the sexuality of the African woman. Sexual objectification is a concept that is hinged on the radical feminist theory. It focuses on how a person, especially a woman is treated as an object. Consequently, Dworkin (2000: 30–1) puts forward that, sexual objectification:

Occurs when a human being, through social means, is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold. When objectification occurs, a person is depersonalised, so that no individuality or integrity is available socially or in what is an extremely circumscribed privacy. Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination: those who can be used as if they are not fully human are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being diminished.

Commodification and Sexual Objectification of the African Woman

Oftentimes, the projections of the African woman in both literary texts from African male and female writers have always showcased the African woman in a light that evokes a sense of critical assessment. For, while the argument from African female critics has been that, African male writers are biased in their projections of the African woman, as subservient, docile and lacking in self worth, it is also important to also note that, some of the writings from female writers are also replete with the same ‘damaging’ image of the African woman. This may however, be to probably further their critique of the African man as one who does not respect the sensibilities of the African woman, as in the case of Mara and other African women in *Beyond the Horizon*, where they are not only commoditised, but are meant to face very dehumanising and psychological sexual experiences. In other words, *Beyond the Horizon* is couched with different layers and nuances of sexual objectification and dehumanisation against the female characters. This could possibly be seen as an indictment on the male characters, who are projected as lacking in empathy, especially for women, who they see as mere commodities for sexual gratification. This reinforces one of Nusbaum’s (1995:275) positions on the description of the concept of sexual objectification, wherein a person is treated as an object. She refers to this as, *instrumentality*, which is considered as the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier’s purposes. This further aligns with Kant’s claim on objectification, which, for him, focuses largely on *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a mere tool for the lover’s purposes. Objectification, for Kant, just as Nusbaum also advances, involves regarding someone “as an object, something for use” (Herman 1993:57). It, therefore, seems as though, *Beyond the Horizon* seeks to demystify and deconstruct the existing patriarchal mores by projecting men as irresponsible, worthless and wicked, in order to evoke a new social order.

As exemplified by Mara, the protagonist, it is pertinent to note that, sexual objectification, which implies, among other things, the commercialisation of the human (woman) body for financial reasons is a recurring issue in both Darko’s *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon*. For, while Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* is lured into prostitution in Germany by her husband, Akobi, Baby T, in *Faceless* is forced to sell her body within the shores of Africa. This shows that the same ‘sex trade’ takes place in two different locations, wherein African women are projected as the victims of this highly organised cartel. In other words, the two societies (Africa and Europe), as depicted in these texts, are entrapped in a quagmire, where materialism becomes the new language; and money the new god. It is on this ground, therefore, that both Mara and Baby T illustrate Nusbaum’s concept of *instrumentality*.

For Mara, who is far away in Germany, unlike Baby T whose life gets twisted on the African soil, life seems very complicated, especially in a society that the woman is also highly sexualised and constantly abused. Through her inner contemplations, she reveals how psychologically downcast she has become. She does not only express self-hate, but also the wreck she has become as a result of the constant exploitation of her sexuality. This is captured thus:

I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – what is left of what once used to be my image. And from my left and right, all about me, I keep hearing chuckles and pantings, wild bedspring creaks, screaming oohs and yelling aahs. They are coming from rooms that are the same as mine, rooms where the same things are done as they are in mine. And in all of them there are pretty women like myself, one in each room waiting to be used and abused by strange men. They are all about me. And yet here

by myself, alone inside my room, I feel so very, very far away on my own. So friendless, isolated and cold (*Beyond the Horizon*, 1).

As depicted above, it is obvious that, through the eyes of Mara, the depravity in the society is described. For, Mara is not only a victim who has been “used and abused by strange men”, other women like her are also constantly being sexually objectified. This situation has forced her into becoming a psychopath, as she is now withdrawn, “so friendless, isolated and cold”. It is within this light that the level of transnational sex slavery that has characterised the 21st century, of which African women are victims, is showcased. In other words, *Beyond the Horizon* does not only catalogue the transnational sex slave cartel; it equally exposes how some African women who traversed the boundaries of Africa have become victims of this trade; hence, trading their human dignity in foreign lands.

The opening chapter of the novel vividly explores the current state of Mara, the commercialisation of the woman’s body and the damaging effect this has on her psychology as well. Using her mirror as a symbol to painfully illustrate and report the transformation in her body, especially from the constant use and abuse, she exposes how other women like her are also victims, as captured in her description of the actions going on in other adjoining rooms, thus: “...there are pretty women like myself, one in each room waiting to be used and abused by strange men” (*Beyond the Horizon*, 1). It is, therefore, through Mara’s eyes that the sex cartel is exposed. In other words, cast in a journalistic narrative, one could say that Mara, having transformed from a greenhorn into a whore in a German brothel, takes the posture of a journalist and a victim to report the incidents as they are taking place. She gives a firsthand account, as she reveals that,

I am just in my brief silky red underpants, so I’m virtually naked, but that is not why I feel so cold...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. Yes! I’ve used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer (*Beyond the Horizon*, 1).

The image of a psychologically and emotionally traumatised woman is enunciated through the eyes of Mara, whose pain has become synonymous with the pain every woman in her ‘profession’ goes through. Each time she looks into the mirror, she sees an image of a woman whose body has “grown old” as a result of “too much use”. Mara’s observation of her body as being ‘worn out’, reflects Nussbaum’s (1995:275) description of sexual objectification within the concept of *instrumentality*, as well as Langton’s (2009:228-229) description of it as, *reduction to body*, which he refers to as the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts. Significantly, one could say that, Mara might not have had a good reflection of her present state, were it not for the mirror in her room. She has been able to see how worn out and out of shape she has become, due to the constant abuse by men. This situation has further created a ground for her to create a false image of herself, by hiding certain features she deems unattractive. She affirms that, “I fear what I see when I look at myself.

I shiver at the sight of my sore cracked lips, which still show through the multiple layers of the glossy crimson paint I apply to hide them”. It is obvious that the sexually objectified Mara does not seem happy with her present physique and, as such, in a bid to look like her past, which she probably relishes, she further resorts to deception, as she would apply “multiple layers of the glossy crimson paint” on her “cracked lips” in order to hide them (*Beyond the Horizon*, 1-2). This implies that, even

though she is caught in the web of this undignified ‘profession’, she sees her past as more dignifying than her current state; hence, her decision to live a deceptive life. This presupposes, therefore, that, following the trend of deception that characterises the society, Mara becomes a symbol, as she conceals her identity in “layers of the glossy crimson paint”. Accordingly, this shows how the ‘profession’ encourages women, especially, to lead deceptive lives, probably in order to attract ‘clients’ (*Beyond the Horizon*, 1-2).

Just like it is captured in *Faceless*, where young girls are not only forced into selling their bodies, but depicted as tools or properties to be bought in exchange for money, *Beyond the Horizon* also projects this picture, as women are depicted as objects and properties. In a contrastive manner, *Faceless* and *Beyond the Horizon* display the sexual abuses that women go through, although the level of psychological pain depicted seems different. Whereas in *Faceless*, young teenage girls are the victims, *Beyond the Horizon* focuses on adult women as victims. Similarly, it seems the psychological trauma experienced by Mara differs in high proportion from that of Baby T. This may be due to the fact that, being outside the shores of Africa, Mara’s ordeal is more compounded as she may not really have anyone to run to, like Baby T, who would sometime run to Maa Tsuru to complain of Onko’s untoward advances.

The psychologically downcast Mara, from a contrastive standpoint, evinces the likely situation back in Africa, while she faces her ordeal in Germany. Through her eyes, the two different worlds - Africa and Europe are showcased. She worries about how her mother would feel, given her present condition, wherein she has not only become a constant object for sexual gratification, but also physical abuses, as she contemplates thus:

What my mother back home in black Africa would say to these hideous traces of bites and scratches all over my neck, should she ever have the misfortune of seeing them, I fear to imagine. They extend even far beyond the back of my ears, several bruises and scars left generously there by the sadistic hands of my best payers, my best spenders...I have yet another handicap too, my little left finger...the injury was done to me by one of my best spenders...(*Beyond the Horizon*, 2).

To further reinforce the treatment meted out to her, which has put her in a psychological cocoon and a state of aloneness, she reveals how Oves, one of her “payers and spenders” treats her as his exclusive property. This treatment by Oves further depicts one of the descriptions of sexual objectification as illustrated by Nussbaum (1995:275). For Nussbaum, this situation is referred to as, *ownership*, which she claims to mean: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold). Each time she is sexualised and brutalised, she takes solace in crying; revealing her helplessness and her being at the mercy of her ‘payers’. This gory and horrid experience of Mara does not only exemplify the pain of the African woman; it also reinforces the terrible experience some African women are made to go through in the quest for greener pasture. Mara, one could say, becomes a metaphor for modern slavery, as she narrates that “...he does horrible things to me...I bear it because it is part of my job...even when he puts me in pain and spits on me and calls me a nigger fool, I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he’s just called me a princess” (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3).

Indeed, the image painted here is that of slavery and it characterises what some African women are made to go through by some human traffickers like Akobi, who, ironically, is her husband. For, as a victim, she creates an escapist route to always surmount her predicament. Being helpless, therefore, she

resorts to crying as a means to let out her pain, in order to forge ahead. She says: "...when I've got my crying to do, I sit here alone before my large oval mirror and stare painfully at this bit of garbage that once used to be me and I cry" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3).

Furthermore, cast in the image of a property, Mara exemplifies and advances the claim by feminist writers that holds that, women are perceived by men as personal items; hence, their treatment as such. The height of this is revealed through the contemplations and lamentations of Mara, who is not only repeatedly traumatised by a man that claims to be her husband, but by other men too, to whom she has been sold by the same husband, as a tool for sexual gratification and exploitation. As a result of this constant objectification and sexualisation, Mara expresses a defeatist tendency by affirming that she is, indeed, a property. She affirms that, "this man I call Oves... He is my lord, my master and my pimp... I am his pawn, his slave and his property. What he orders, I do" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3). Indeed, riddled with a series of sexual abuses that have psychologically enslaved her, Mara, like Baby T and Maa Tsuru in *Faceless*, does not only lose her voice, but also her dignity and power of resistance and coordination. In other words, having been psychologically and emotionally enslaved, she loses direction as she is no longer in control of her mind; hence, she becomes Oves' "pawn" and "property", as she declares, "what he orders, I do". From her reflection, it becomes obvious that she used to be the property of another lord; an indication that reflects how women are reduced to items that can be transferred from one hand to another, as money exchanges hands (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3). Similarly, through a flashback technique, she indicts even her own father as a culprit in her present predicament. She recalls that:

Once, before I started to walk my road all on my own, I believed mother. But that was before I was given away to this man who paid two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin to my family, and took me as his wife from my little African village... (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3).

Predicated against the foregoing, it becomes instructive to note that, from Mara's recollections, those responsible for her present woes are all men. This, no doubt, advances yet again, the feminist argument, where women are projected as always at the mercy of men. For Mara's father to be indicted in this mess is a depiction that reinforces and heightens the proposition of injustice, marginalisation and objectification of the woman, being advanced by African female writers, among others. This presupposes that she has come to the realisation that all the men with whom she has had experiences, have always taken advantage of her; seeing her as their "pawn", slave, and "property" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3). Her journey into this lifestyle of prostitution and sexual enslavement begins from the day her father marries her off to Akobi, to whose father he is indebted. This, no doubt, is a clear manifestation of Nussbaum's (1995:275) idea of *fungibility* (the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects). By this, Mara becomes an object that is interchangeable with another object (her father's indebtedness). This is brought to light as Mara explains:

I don't know why of all the eligible women in the village his father chose me. I only know that the choice, for my father, could not have come at a better time. A man he owed money to had come and forcefully claimed his debt in the form of eight of father's eleven goats. So my dowry came in handy... I later learnt that, drunk from palmwine and belching boisterously, he had proclaimed that he would gladly have given me away even for one goat. But like I said, Akobi's father bought me off very handsomely (*Beyond the Horizon*, 6-7).

Mara's situation reveals her insistence on the grounds that she has been 'thingified', as lucidly enunciated in her choice of words. For, it is glaring that she is only valued as a "property" comparable to just "one goat". This gives credence to Nussbaum's (1995:275) paradigm of sexual objectification, which she refers to as *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold). Thus, she acknowledges that, indeed, "Akobi's father bought" her "off very handsomely". This is far above the value placed on her by her own father, who equates her for just "one goat". Although expressed lightly, there is an undertone of a biting sarcasm attached in her statement. For, she says of her husband – Akobi, "three weeks later he came straight from work on a Friday evening, arriving in Naka on Saturday, and left for the city on the same Saturday with me as his wife...and property" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 7).

The experiences of Mara oscillate within three geographical settings: the first being in her village, Naka, where she is 'sold' to Akobi; the second is the very harsh condition she is exposed to in the city by Akobi; and the third being the height of her ordeal in faraway Germany. Mara is, thus, introduced as a character that never had it well in life. In other words, her present predicament is a culmination of a process that began from her village in Naka. Whereas Mara's life in the village seems quite without so much oppression, her new life in the city, where one would expect her to be more comfortable, becomes couched in very horrid and harrowing circumstances. For instance, it is in the city where she expects civility and decorum, especially from her husband, who is admired by many in the village; being "the first Naka son with a school certificate" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 3), that she begins to experience the most harrowing forms of dehumanisation and humiliation. In comparing her mother's marriage to her own marriage experience, she reveals that:

Initially, many things that happened in my marriage appeared to me to be matter-of-course things that happened in all marriages and to all wives. I didn't see much difference from my parents' marriage either, so why should I think differently just because I was living in the city? ... So that even those nights when he ordered me to sleep on the thin mat on the hard floor, even if I laid there and could not sleep and suffered a splitting headache the next day because of lack of sleep, I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife... (*Beyond the Horizon*, 12-13).

As presented above, Mara's eyes become the window for showcasing the harsh experiences other women in Naka go through in the hands of men, in marriage. Similarly, through her lamentation and reflection, she contrasts the experiences of the women in the village to those in the city. While it seems that women in the village have been psychologically conditioned and hypnotised not to question the excesses of their husbands, some very few women in the city seem to have a little courage and the temerity to speak out. One of such women is Mama Kiosk, whose ideology and philosophy is in sharp contrast with that of Mara and other women in Naka. Obviously, Mara is also a victim of this psychological enslavement, as she believes in the ideology that whatsoever she suffers in her marriage is normal as a wife; hence, her opinion that, "I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 13). While one could argue that, while Mara, as well as her mother and other women in Naka are projected as symbols of respect for tradition, Mama Kiosk is depicted as a rebel, because she challenges the patriarchal inhibitions and restrictions that have kept the woman perpetually voiceless. For Mara, therefore, being in the city has not really translated into any form of mental growth. She still holds tenaciously, the words of her mother who has repeatedly cautioned her that, "a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his

pleasure". More so, while the woman is considered a tool for oppression, dehumanisation and humiliation, the man is idolised by the same woman whom he dehumanises.

This is what Mara also elicits, when she narrates how her parents and family elders caution her, saying, "obey and worship your husband" (*Beyond the Horizon*, 13). This action by her parents and family elders could be seen as a display of such kind of sexual objectification that Nusbaum (1995:275) describes as *denial of autonomy*, which she refers to as the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self determination. Langton (2009:228-229), however, describes this type of sexual objectification as *silencing*, which he confirms to mean, the treatment of a person as if they are silent and lacking the capacity to speak.

In order to challenge the stereotypical image of the docile woman, *Beyond the Horizon* imbues some of its characters, especially Mama Kiosk, with a radical ideology. In this breath, she is used to represent the radical feminist, as she does not exhibit any iota of docility and conservatism, as most female characters are known to; rather, she challenges the inappropriate use of tradition to enslave the women. She, thus, represents a break from the norm, while acting as the voice of reason. She reveals the manipulation of culture to gag women, as she brings to Mara's knowledge that her husband manipulates tradition to her detriment. This could be gleaned, thus:

Your husband is one of those who have no respect for village people. ...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 (*Beyond the Horizon*, 13).

Mama Kiosk's association with Mara, indeed, exposes Mara's naivety in many aspects. For instance, while Mara considers all that her husband does to her as normal, Mama Kiosk shares a different opinion. In Mara's words, "...all the things that I considered to be normal, Mama Kiosk did not find normal". Rather than align with Mara's idolisation of Akobi, her husband, Mama Kiosk would bluntly let Mara know that Akobi "is a man, but a bad husband", as there is no law that exempts him from buying things for his wife, or from taking good care of her (*Beyond the Horizon*, 13-14). From this standpoint, one could notice that Mara has, indeed, lost her individuality, as she has successfully been mentally conditioned and positioned by the ideology of not only obeying, idolising and worshipping her husband, but also seeing all his actions towards her as not only "normal", but sacred. This same cultural ideology, she observes, is what has kept so many women, including her own mother, in their marriages.

As a couple, the only time Akobi gets close to his wife is either when he wants to beat her, or when he wants to sleep with her. There is nothing that demonstrates that the two of them are husband and wife (*Beyond the Horizon*, 20). It seems Akobi only sees Mara, not as his wife, but his instrument for sexual gratification. This again confirms Nussbaum's description of a person treated in this manner as, *instrumentality*: a situation where a person is treated as a tool for the objectifier's purposes. In this regard, it is not only men like of Oves that use and abuse Mara sexually; she is equally sexually objectified by the man who paid her dowry – her husband (*Beyond the Horizon*, 22). This further underscores the view that Akobi is probably married to Mara, not to build a home, but to institute a business and an empire. To further this, Mara is subtly drugged and introduced into the transcontinental sex trade by her own husband (*Beyond the Horizon*, 111).

In fact, she is not only drugged by her husband in connivance with Gitte, she is also made a sex object for other men of different extractions to explore. So dehumanising is the fact that, not only is her emotion abused; her right as an adult to consent is equally violated. This action, one could infer, is illustrative of the view that the humanity of the woman is not valued by men, as she is only seen as an object for sexual gratification, not necessarily as a human being, without any fundamental right; she is not necessarily a human being whose emotions should be respected. To further his sex trade business, of which Mara is the object, Mara confirms that, she “was made the property of a good-looking dark haired man who owned a sex nightclub called Peepy” (*Beyond the Horizon*, 114)

It is pertinent to note that, the consent of Mara is never sought by her husband, in matters relating to her wellbeing. She is either forced into it, or deceived and manipulated into it. This reveals how much of a commodity she has been turned into. In other words, Mara exemplifies the commoditised woman, whose body has been reduced to an object of merchandise for monetary gain, and in this instance, by her husband, who commoditises, eroticises and sexualises her, as revealed thus,

Akobi returned some minutes later and brought me a glass of wine... which I finished... Then something started happening to me. I was still conscious but I was losing control of myself. Something was in the wine I had drunk. It made me see double and I felt strange and happy and high ... Then suddenly the room was filled with people, all men, and they were talking and laughing and drinking. And they were completely naked! There must have been at least ten men... Then they were all around me, many hairy bodies, and they were stripping me, fondling me, playing with my body, pushing my legs apart, wide apart... (*Beyond the Horizon*, 111).

Conclusion

African female writing has always projected the African woman as a victim of the patriarchal society, where she is constantly derided, oppressed, marginalised and assumed to be a second class citizen in the scheme of things, in comparison with her male counterparts. In other words, while it seems feminist critics have continued to register their voices in challenging this status quo, it is assumed that, the 21st century African society, in its dynamic and fluid state, keeps changing with new strategies and dimensions in its treatment of the woman. It is in this state of fluidity that one could argue that *Beyond the Horizon* periscopes a highly sexualised 21st century society, where images of erotic codes, symbols, messages and artefacts permeate and have continued to pervade the sights, senses, sensibilities and spaces of the society, wherein the woman, being sexually objectified and commoditised, is being used as the image of these codes.

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