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## **A Street Child's Revolt Against Her Mother and Society: Lessons from Amma Darko's *Faceless***

**Philomena Yeboah Ama Okyeso**

The writings of Amma Darko rank among Africa's great literature. In *Faceless*, Amma Darko uses conflicts that bedevil mother-daughter bonds to address larger issues such as streetism, patriarchy, government indifference, irresponsible parenting, and inefficiency in the police service. *Faceless* may appear to be primarily an investigation of the causes, effects, and solutions of streetism, yet it also has important things to say about both the destructive and regenerative potentials of mothers. The benefits of male-female collaboration in addressing developmental challenges are another topic that has acquired considerable space in this novel. It is these issues/topics that this study explores and draws lessons from.

Life experiences more often than not have found space and expression in fictional narratives. Amma Darko's novels, focus on the condition of mothers in Ghana, among other topics. For Darko, the trials of motherhood, as illustrated in *Faceless*, her third novel, comes from within and without. Darko lashes out at those mothers who have internalized a socially constructed sense of self that makes them consciously accept subservient roles and maltreatment at the hands of their men. Pitched against these "failed mothers" are the victorious mothers who dare to create change by refusing to internalize dominating norms and practices which would render them "helpless" and "unproductive."

In *Faceless*, then, Darko sets herself a double task. She portrays with very little compassion the manner in which some mothers allow themselves to be burdened by discriminatory cultural, social, and even religious structures. The end result of such behavior is mothers' failure in the eyes of their daughters in whose judgment such mothers stand forever condemned. Darko's second task is to portray victorious mothers who apply foresight, courage, and reasoning in their determination to confront and overthrow those socially constructed norms and practices which undermine mothers' sense of self. Darko elevates these victorious mothers as role models for their daughters. Indeed, what distinguishes *Faceless* from its two predecessors (*Beyond the Horizon*, 1995 & *The Housemaid*, 1998) is that in *Faceless* we have mothers whose life stories teach readers that a people's awareness of the value of mothers will ultimately and substantively transform their societies in positive ways. Thus the role of mothers is not limited to only the nurturing of children but is made to encompass their contribution to solving national problems and contributing towards development. Additionally, if in *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid* men are featured as oppressors of women, in *Faceless* not all men are oppressors. A few men believe in the value of women and help them carve out dignified images for themselves.

The story in *Faceless* is divided into four parts. The various divisions of the novel also strengthen the marginalized nature of Maa Tsuru's life. Book One introduces the reader to Fofu and how, through pilfering, she bumps into Kabria, the lady working with MUTE (a non-governmental organization interested in information gathering and documentation), whose acts of generosity set Fofu on a new road towards rehabilitation. Also, in Book One we meet Sylv Po, the media man who publicizes the issue of Fofu's murdered sister (Baby T), and who, together with MUTE, assume the diligent role of detectives rummaging through shanty towns to find the murderers. Dina, the founder of MUTE, fondly refers to the organization as an alternative library.

Book Two is mainly a flashback made up of only three chapters (Chapters 14 to 16). It is the background story of Maa Tsuru: The mysticism surrounding her birth and her exploitation by the very man she expects to care of her. It is also the story of how Maa Tsuru's children came into the world only to be thrown onto the streets to eke out a living. It is this Book Two which we will focus on to find out whether Darko, through flashback, defends Maa Tsuru or blames her the more. Book Two is sandwiched between Book One, which is made up of thirteen chapters and Book Three, which has nine chapters (Chapters 17 to 25). Book Two provides us with a classic template of form agreeing with content in that Book Two, taken up by only three chapters, speaks about the constricted life of Maa Tsuru. It is also noteworthy to point out that the form of the novel as per its division into books also reflects the kind of style preferred by feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous (1976). Even though the novel comprises three books and an epilogue, the story does not follow the linear plot method but rather exhibits the non-linear plot or *l'écriture féminine*. Indeed, the story begins at the end of Book Three (in Chapter 25) where we finally understand why, where, and how Baby T was killed after readers have been informed of her death repeatedly in earlier chapters. Perhaps too, the choice of the non-linear plot or circulatory plot is meant to reveal the complexities of motherhood. Motherhood and its joys, but particularly its woes, come in various forms. In the Ghanaian context, too many forces are at war against motherhood making the irresponsible falter every step of the way. Right from conception, Maa Tsuru's life seems accursed and riddled with foreboding fear as though she is doomed to end badly. However, we have used the auxiliary verb "seems" carefully here because, in fact, Darko downplays the role of superstition in the life of Maa Tsuru. Darko juxtaposes issues in such a way as to demonstrate Tsuru's own irresponsible choices that are made to culminate in her failure as a mother rather than the power of superstition or fate.

Riche (1976) has asserted that, "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy" (p. 240). The Maa Tsuru tragedy is linked also to the curse invoked by Maa Tsuru's mother on Tsuru's father and his descendants. As the eighty-four-year-old Naa Yomo tells us, Maa Tsuru's mother had, before passing on to the other side, cursed the man who had impregnated and betrayed her. Maa Tsuru is a woman with a penchant for making excuses for her irresponsible lifestyle and the curse is one of the often invoked excuses. This penchant contributes to her daughter Fofu's resentment because she considered her an irresponsible mother.

As noted, Darko begins her novel in the middle of her character's story; then, in a flashback movement, takes us back in time before she brings us into the present. We meet the street child, Fofu, Darko's protagonist, as she discusses with Odarley, a co-street child, her agenda for the day. Fofu's plan is to see her mother and tell her about Poison's

failed attempt to rape her. Poison is introduced as “the no-nonsense street lord.” Scared that Poison will probably kill her because of the anguish she had caused him in her struggle to escape from being raped, Fofu decides to see her mother whom she overheard discussing Poison with Fofu’s stepfather. Gradually, we move from an outside view of Fofu, a view that sees her as carelessly strong-willed, to an inside view, in which her strong-willed behavior makes perfect sense within the context of her present circumstances.

Readers’ first encounter with Fofu and her mother, Maa Tsuru, reveal that there is a lot of loathing on the part of Fofu for her mother who she considers to be an exploiter of her own children and a failure as well. Maa Tsuru’s plea that Fofu run away from Poison results in a tensed verbal exchange between mother and daughter, with the daughter’s voice subduing her mother’s:

“Why should I go away, mother? Who are they?”

Maa Tsuru wiped away her tears with the back of her hand and blew her nose into her cover cloth. “It’s Baby T,” she said eventually.

“Baby T?”

“Yes. Maami Broni . . .”

“The fat fair woman she lives with?”

“Yes. She came to me last week.”

“So? Doesn’t she sometimes come to . . .”

“I know Fofu. I know. Oh God!”

“Don’t bring in God’s name, mother. You knew what you were doing when you chose him over . . .”

“It was for their sake.” She pointed at the baby and the sleeping boy. “What should I have done?”

“I don’t know. But you should never have fed him and his sons at Baby T’s expense. You don’t see her. We don’t know how she has grown to look like. All for what, mother. For what?”

Maa Tsuru didn’t respond. She wiped away fresh tears from her face and resumed from where she left off. “Something happened, Fofu.”

“Something is always happening, no? Always and had I not gotten the good sense to leave home, who knows, he probably would have made you send me away too to work for some woman to make money for you four to live on. No?”

Maa Tsuru choked on saliva and coughed violently. “I don’t have the strength to fight you with words Fofu,” she spoke slowly. “And even if I did, I wouldn’t do it.” (Darko, 2003, pp. 46-47)

In the excerpt above, Fofu’s confrontational reaction to her mother’s reason behind the plea that Fofu run far away from Poison underscores the toll that Maa Tsuru’s exploitation of her daughters had taken on the relationship between mother and daughter. Maa Tsuru’s acceptance of guilt in the presence of her daughter, though represents a true confession, also reveals that the mother has lost total control of her daughter- she knows she dares not react to her daughter’s accusation because she has failed as a mother. The dialogue reveals a breakdown of communication between mother and daughter. Fofu’s cutting questions to her mother reveal that she is bent on revolting against her mother by judging her actions and proving to her mother that the latter is an exploiter. We learn later that the reason for Maa Tsuru’s inability to mother her children is because she was abused and abandoned by her husband and therefore views herself as an unsatisfactory

role model for her growing daughter. Lacking confidence and afraid of losing her daughter, she fails to provide effective discipline or guidance for her children. In this excerpt, Fofu subtly blames her mother for making herself available to an irresponsible man. Fofu's stepfather is the cause of Fofu's woes. A man who is only interested in feeding off the sweat of his stepdaughters deserves criticism. It is her stepfather Kpakpo whose irresponsible behavior culminates in Fofu's decision to eke out a living on the street.

Fortunately, Fofu finds in Kabria, the social worker at MUTE, a valid gender model to look up to. We read that Fofu collapses into the arms of Kabria and Kabria responds by holding her close. This shows bonding between the two. The affectivity that is absent in the Maa Tsuru-Fofu relationship is seen in the Kabria-Fofu relationship. We read earlier on that Fofu freezes when her mother attempts to embrace her: "Inside the room, Maa Tsuru was made to embrace Fofu. Fofu went rigid. Maa Tsuru's face fell. She withdrew slowly from her daughter. There was pain in her eyes" (p. 185). This communicates an act of revolt calculated to make her mother feel guilty and alone.

Though Fofu revolts against and rejects her biological mother, she embraces Kabria. Kabria thus becomes to Fofu an alternative mother. Rapoport, Rapoport, and Strelitz (1977) have identified the beneficial roles of alternative mothers. They have proposed a broadening of the concept of parenting to include supplementary figures other than mothers and fathers emphasizing their need when there is a deficiency or inadequacy of family functioning like the one illustrated in the case of Maa Tsuru and Fofu. Rapoport et al. (1977) maintain that including supplementary figures in the parenting process implies "a recognition of the potentials for parenting by people other than fathers and mothers—inside and outside the family. Children, kin, neighbors, professional helpers, and friends may contribute to parenting" (p. 361). Kabria's relationship with Fofu manifests her role as a supplementary parent-figure and fits acceptably within Ghana's cultural norms that permit others to take on such roles when biological parents cannot.

In *Faceless*, Darko's portrayal of the mistakes that lead to Maa Tsuru's helpless state is also meant to subvert stereotypical notions about the sanctity of motherhood. She presents motherhood as a terrain which might incorporate excesses. Mothers, according to Darko's portrayal, are not always nurturers since some can be abusers and exploiters. What can make a mother an exploiter and abuser, especially of her own daughters? Rapoport et al. (1977) observe that values of self-actualization may conflict with those of caregiving provides us with a tangible answer.

For Maa Tsuru, her self-actualization lies in sex and monetary rewards. Motivated by money, Maa Tsuru pushes her children into child labor: her two sons were already running errands at the sea side before they attained the age of ten. At this same time, Baby T and Fofu were also performing petty chores for other family members in exchange for food leftovers and old clothes. With the departure of the boys from Maa Tsuru's room due to the discomfort they feel any time Maa Tsuru and Kpakpo make love, Fofu and Baby T become the automatic breadwinners doing menial jobs and pick-pocketing to bring in the money.

However, it is not a totally gloomy story, for the story of *Faceless* also encompasses the story of Kabria and her co-workers at MUTE. Whereas in Maa Tsuru we find an example of a mother unable to mother her children, especially her daughters, in Kabria we find a mother who makes sensible choices, and is able not only to mother her own children but to mother Fofu as well. In an interview with Amma Darko, I asked whether her

own life experiences mirror that of Kabria, given the impression that the character Kabria is created as a role model for modern working mothers. Though Darko (2010) declines to “openly” see herself as the “life image” of Kabria, she nevertheless agrees that Kabria is a very likeable character and even confesses this same question has been asked her by many interviewers:

I think the crux of the matter here is not whether I am Kabria or not. I like this character very much myself. I have been asked this same question by a number of interviewers. My only reply is that a character like Kabria deserves to be studied carefully and imitated by any woman who does not want to limit her roles to the kitchen and the bedroom. (personal communication, April 15, 2010)<sup>1</sup>

Indeed the portrait of the defeated, pitiable woman we glean from the portrayal of Maa Tsuru gives way to the more confident and assertive character, Kabria. In this novel, Kabria and her colleagues at MUTE respond to social change by rejecting all those strictures that militate against women’s self-realization.

Two examples will be cited here to reveal the basic differences in lifestyles of Maa Tsuru and Kabria. Darko’s use of juxtaposition elevating one character and positioning her as a role model for her readership while condemning the other (Maa Tsuru) because of the irresponsible choices she makes is highly effective. Even though these mothers (Kabria and Maa Tsuru) are both bedeviled with the trials of motherhood, Kabria is able to strategize in such a way that she is not burdened by these trials. She surmounts all challenges and is able to raise her children properly. Maa Tsuru is a counterweight to Kabria in the sense that she allows the trials of motherhood to cower her into senseless submission. She is not only incapable of reasoning but she allows her children to suffer the repercussions of her irresponsible behavior. Darko (2003) describes Maa Tsuru’s inability to nurture her own child thusly:

In the midst of angry mothers and screaming children and bleating goats and sheep, Maa Tsuru looked like a soul drowned in torpidity. The baby in her arm didn’t seem to even impact into her oblivion. And but for the sounds from the child’s throat, her world was dead. A life dissolved in absolute lethargy. Odarley smiled sadly; then even the sad smile waned when she noticed the desperate scramble of one tiny hand to ferret for something loose almost non-existent in Maa Tsuru’s bosom. The weak grab of the loose and hanging breast. The searching mouth in the tiny lean face. The voracious draw on tired wrinkled nipple. The spurt of energy from the enervated body that was clearly the anger of a little child. And Odarley knew that the gurgling of Fofu’s half-brother was one of anguish. In process, was the nurturing of another prospective soul into the devouring jaws of the streets. A life brought forth for the sake of bringing forth. A hungry mouth created not out of want. (p. 42)

Anger and want become living realities of this baby’s life whose need for breast milk is obviously not fulfilled. Indeed his mother, we are told, is neither moved by her child’s hunger nor even bothered by the lack of milk in her breast. Maa Tsuru has literally allowed the trials of motherhood to sap both her energy and her breast milk: “And but for

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Amma Darko on “What motivates her to write irrespective of her tight schedules at work” at her office at Internal Revenue, Kaneshie Branch, Accra, April 15, 2010.

the sounds from her child's throat, her world was dead" (Darko, 2003, p.42). The stark language points to a mother's irreversible self-destruction impacting on a tiny baby. Maa Tsuru's soul is described as "drowned in torpidity"—she is "oblivious" also to reality and her world is "dead" (Darko, 2003, p.42). Her life is expressed as one "dissolved in absolute lethargy" (Darko, 2003, p.42). Thus her mental faculties are dulled resulting in physical slowness. These expressions reveal that Maa Tsuru has accepted her situation.

It is also the inactions of Maa Tsuru's bedmate, the child's father, who puts mother and child into this mess. At this time of her life, Kpakpo had left Maa Tsuru. But as has been pointed out earlier, Maa Tsuru herself is given a large chunk of the blame because she chooses Kpakpo in the first place as a bedmate. Darko's (2003) description of the baby as "A hungry mouth created not out of want" (p. 42), suggests that there really is no need for this child to be born only to suffer hunger. No prior preparations had been put in place to accommodate and nurture this child. Tsuru herself is poor and cannot adequately feed herself. This results in little or no breast milk for this child.

The fact is that Maa Tsuru's baby boy continues to search for milk irrespective of its frailty. He is not ready to give up the fight even though he knows that there really is no milk in those "loose and hanging breasts" (Darko, 2003, p.42). The child still invests his energy into the search, for the word "spurt" suggests a sudden burst of energy—energy devoted to an angry, illusive search. The fact is that this child is not ready to separate itself from the mother's breast; it clings to it with all the force it can generate. Though angry, he still grabs the breast. This scene shows that even in cases where a mother fails to provide the essential needs of a child, there can still be a kind of emotional link where anger co-exists with connection.

Darko's use of synecdoche has great effect throughout this novel. Parts of the body are made to function as the whole so as to create vivid pictures of want. The sound of a hungry child's throat jostles a mother from her dead world; the tiny hand of the child that ferrets for non-existent breast milk evokes malnourishment due to excruciating poverty. The hunger and disillusionment culminate in the paradoxical sentence—"In process, was the nurturing of another prospective soul into the devouring jaws of the streets" (Darko, 2003, p. 42). To nurture a soul with the aim of donating it to the devouring jaws of the streets is an imagery of real hopelessness.

Darko's focus on portraying objective reality renders fictional distancing minimal as she is not apologetic about launching poignant attacks on a society where child abuse has become a matter of fact. We have here a challenging, controversial, and subversive discourse on automatic maternal love and devotion. This depiction of the mother as one who cares less about her children's needs, a mother with neither ambition nor nurturing abilities is really the thrust of the force that motivates Amma Darko to correct the atrociously misconceived notion that mothers are automatic nurturers and protectors of their children. The collapse of the Maa Tsuru/Kpakpo's family structure results in this pathetic situation. Darko's critique is not only directed at Maa Tsuru's inability to take better care of her children, but at the larger society's failure to ensure a decent life for its women who, by all intents and purposes, are subjugated in most contemporary societies. Darko demonstrates her consciousness as an artist by revealing the traumatic outcome of neglect from both mothers and fathers as well as government support systems.

Maa Tsuru epitomizes the failed mother crushed under the trials of motherhood. However, Kabria is portrayed as a successful mother who refuses to be defeated by the

trials of motherhood. Kabria is married with three children. She works with the NGO called MUTE who documents “serious” events that gain little attention from the government. Although she is not satisfied with her meager salary, Kabria continues with her work because she derives great job satisfaction from it. Her husband Adade is an architect whose belief and practice of patriarchy create tensions and sometimes deprives Kabria of her joy as a married woman. Added to the “Adade problem” is her children, two girls and a boy, each posing a different kind of challenge to Kabria. The icing on the cake, however, is Kabria’s troublesome car, affectionately called Creamy. Indeed in this novel, Creamy is not just an ordinary car as it sometimes behaves like a human being. This car, we read, has been to so many mechanical shops and has had so many surgeries that have left indelible marks on it. Kabria’s role in *Faceless* could be seen as one of the most revolutionary fictionalizations of the quest for African mothers’ self-realization. Kabria is a woman who knows her own mind. Even though she gets little support from Adade she still performs her nurturing roles creditably. The challenges she encounters with her children’s “demands” invigorate her to rise up to the challenges and surmount them. Moreover, irrespective of all the challenges she faces, Kabria still finds the time and energy to contribute to solving the problem of the street child Fofu. The portrayal of Kabria is particularly engrossing and enlightening. Darko is able to penetrate into Kabria’s psyche and display to readers the basis and motivations of her conduct.

Darko’s narrative technique in *Faceless* encompass first a listing of the character’s lifestyle and attributes and then a dramatization of the “list.” Indeed this method is colored by her sociological concern. Darko classifies Kabria’s character by her social statuses—as a mother, wife, worker, and car owner. She is presented as a distinct social type representing a cross-section of the middle class, modern Ghanaian working woman. The portrayal of Kabria presents the professional self as expressed in the personal. Thus we see a career woman whose career influences also her role as a mother and wife. The mother Kabria is extremely self-conscious about her career and the demands it makes on her. This kind of awareness helps her to work out things so that she is efficient both as a mother and a worker. The introduction of Kabria, quoted below, illustrates the above statement (Darko, 2003):

The mother of three children between the ages of seven and fifteen, events both in and outside the home sometimes got her thinking that those ought to be the most impossible of all ages.

Married sixteen years to Adade, her architect husband, Kabria passionately loved her job with MUTE, a Non-Governmental Organization that was basically into documentation and information build up. And with equal fervor, she loathed the figure that appeared on her salary slip. But topping it all was her shamelessness about her special attachment to her old-hand-me-down-thank-you-very-much-Adade 1975 VW Beetle nicknamed creamy.

The mother, wife, worker and battered car owner that she was, no day passed that Kabria didn’t wonder how come the good Lord created a day to be made up of only twenty-four hours, because from dawn to dusk, domestic schedules gobbled her up; office duties ate her alive; her three children devoured her with their sometimes realistic and many times very unrealistic demands; while the icing on the cake, their father, needed do no more than simply be your regular husband, and she was in perpetual quandary. (pp. 34-35)



Although some might perceive Kabria as privileged, clearly her life struggles as captured in the narrative reveal that she is burdened by her work, her husband, her children, and even her car.

As noted earlier, part of Darko's skills as a writer reside in her ability to create understanding through content and form. The entire last paragraph in the above quote is made up of seven lines in just a single sentence. Though we have one sentence, we can equally count as many as eleven punctuation marks. These punctuations so scattered in this sentence capture well the difficulty that the mother, wife, worker, and car owner goes through each day. It is thus no wonder that in her mind, Kabria cannot comprehend why God "created a day to be made up of only twenty-four hours" (Darko, publication year, p. 34). God the creator is seemingly portrayed as contributing to trials of motherhood because "He" creates a day made up of only 24 hours. However, the adjective "good" is used to modify God because he also gives Kabria the strength and skill to be able to achieve much within the 24 hours at her disposal.

In the house, Kabria is not free. She is gobbled by her domestic schedules. At the office, it is even worse because her duties eat her alive. Thus Darko also uses personification to emphasize the challenges Kabria faces as a working mother. What makes Kabria successful in spite of her circumstances is her ability to act for herself as an agent of cultural change. Acting as an agent of cultural change means reviewing the cultural expectations of the woman and deconstructing those expectations which are inimical to the woman's development. It involves not only enriching the lives of her children but of everyone she encounters through the uplifting of consciousness, aimed at making them realize the benefits of giving a human touch to all situations. Kabria's life therefore echoes Iniobong I. Uko's (2006) statement:

. . . societal constructs set motherhood and procreation as the woman's major sources of fulfillment, but contemporary African women are seeking new avenues for self-fulfillment, arguing that it is now untenable, obnoxious and unacceptable that womanhood is validated only through motherhood and procreation, where procreation implies the male-child principle. (p. 86)

It is important then to explore how Kabria is able to surmount the trials of motherhood and to become not only a successful mother but also a versatile social worker and detective all in one.

Kabria does not only care for her children and husband but for her car which she affectionately calls Creamy. Handed down to her by her husband, this 1975 Volkswagen, has undergone so many "plastic" surgeries that it has grown immune to the work of mechanics and welders. Responding to the need to repaint Creamy, Kabria seeks help from Adade since she has very little money. However, after being turned down several times by Adade, Kabria devises a radical plan to squeeze the money out of her husband. Kabria's strategy reveals a bold attempt at dealing with the trials of motherhood. Through Kabria's radical action, the reader realizes that for a mother to overcome the trials of motherhood she has to be smart, courageous, and resilient. These are the attitudes that enable Kabria to elicit the money for the required paint job from Adade:

Kabria cast her mind onto the daily bottles of beers gobbled up in the name of releasing tension and paid Adade a surprise visit at his fine office the fourth day.

Tu-tu-tu-tu . . . Creamy's furious engine and exhaust heralded its tattooed arrival. And Kabria, who meant business, parked it right beside Adade's brand new Toyota Corona, provided him on loan by his employers. When Adade saw his wife and car, he prayed desperately for the earth to open up and swallow him whole. Kabria compounded his embarrassment by deliberately soliciting for more attention with her loud and gay hellos to all of Adade's co-workers; then in their full and attentive glare, hopped gingerly into the car and drove away in the same tu-tu-tu-tu fashion. Her little coup d'état paid off. (Darko, 2003, p. 39-40)

Kabria's ability to penetrate Adade's psyche to know what would cause him embarrassment is effective. Even though Adade brings in the car paint, it is blue instead of the cream Kabria requested. Kabria continues to drive her tattooed car to Adade's office for three weeks until he gives in to her stubbornness by providing her with cream car paint.

Moreover, in the passage quoted above, Kabria resorts to action rather than bandy words with Adade. Her action can be metaphorically compared to a coup-d'état through which a *de jure* authority supersedes a *de facto* one. The metaphorical reference to a coup-d'état used by Darko here suggests that mothers, when faced with trials such as these, are capable of employing creative strategies to attain their goals.

Having dealt with the trials of motherhood in her own home, Kabria ventures into Fofu's life to transform this street child into a respectable human being. Kabria's and MUTE's involvement in Fofu's life thus links the theme of mother-daughter relations with the wider theme of female-solidarity ethics and how this can be brought to bear on the solution of problems.

Oduyoye (2004) has spoken about the need for solidarity among women: "We need to take on our share in enabling others to recover their own worth as women and to empower other women to survive and struggle against injustice" (p. 119). By taking on the mother-role, Kabria and her colleagues at MUTE are involved in a process of expansion—a process which makes them broaden their original job schedules to include those of private detectives, social workers, and mothers as well. Here we have the meeting point of economic and gender development. These ladies of MUTE add onto their job responsibilities by including Fofu's rehabilitation process and the search for Baby T's murderer(s). They are also obsessed with seeking not only their own economic well-being but that of Fofu. Since this economic empowerment focuses on women, these ladies at MUTE are also contributing to gender development.

Amma Darko also makes very salient points about the role of men in combating the abuse of women by men. MUTE would have failed in its bid to trace the murderer(s) of Baby T, had Sylv Po, the radio show host of Harvest FM, not gotten involved. Darko's portrait of Sylv Po reveals an acknowledgement that it takes collaboration between men and women to adequately address gender issues, and alleviate the problems that women encounter as they maneuver through patriarchal minefields.

The involvement of Sylv Po in the Fofu case typifies the potency that can be unleashed when positive-minded men partner with positive-minded women. Sylv Po's collaboration with MUTE and the street child Fofu reveals the formation of a vibrant group that cuts across different kinds of dividing lines. Sylv Po's voluntary collaboration with

MUTE to solve Fofu's problem is in line with the position of many African womanists who uphold the view that building a wall around oneself to shut off the male gender is not beneficial and acknowledges the role of positive-minded men in gender development (Kolawole, 1997, p. 123). Indeed, male collaboration is an asset in the hands of women seeking partnerships in women's developmental issues.

It would be a mistake to assume however, that male collaboration comes easy. In *Faceless*, it takes the creative mind of Dina, the CEO of MUTE to connect with Sylv Po. Having heard about Kabria's encounter with Fofu, Dina found an outlet for further action. The effective use of dialogue in the narration reveals this resourcefulness:

Dina's creative mind was already in motion. "There could be something to be unraveled in there, you know." She muttered thoughtfully. "A girl at the market who tried to rob someone while dressed as a boy, who wants to meet government, and who claims a dead suspected prostitute found at the market place was her sister? And you say Harvest FM did a programme this morning on AIDS and street children?"

"Yes."

"Shouldn't we talk to them?"

"On what?" Aggie asked.

"I am not yet exactly sure on what. But I can feel something in there. And if we should do our bit and get more on the girl, we could convince them to do a programme on her. It could be good for us too."

Kabria was all but enthused. "Could this be leading to something like me keeping my promise and going back there tomorrow?"

"Let me talk to Harvest FM first," Dina proffered and went into her office to make the call. (pp. 74-75)

Although Dina is the boss at MUTE, she practices collaboration as we see her soliciting the views of her subordinates even though she already knows what to do. This is one of the numerous instances in the novel which challenges the received view that women are their own enemies. Dina's behavior shows that it is not in all cases that we find women rivaling with one another. Darko convincingly portrays the relations between the female boss and her subordinates, who are all women. Once Darko introduces Dina into Sylv Po's activities, the novelist's portrayal of Dina is outstanding. The reader feels Dina's energy, intelligence, foresight, and especially her anxiety when she is sent a parcel of human excrement by Poison to warn her to desist from pursuing Baby T's murderer(s). With determination, she ignores the warning and goes on with her search and her plans of rehabilitating Fofu.

Sylv Po's involvement with MUTE is made possible through Dina's networking abilities and through Sylv Po's interview with Miss Kamame, Dina's resource person on the "Good Morning Ghana Show," the reader is carefully tutored on not only the exact cause of streetism but also the need for all to collaborate to ensure a permanent solution to the problem of streetism. In an introductory essay to *Faceless*, the renowned Ghanaian writer and poet, Kofi Anyidoho, maintains that unless government attaches greater importance to the problem of streetism, street children will not only abound but that their plight will forever condemn government's failures. In Anyidoho's preface to Darko's *Faceless*, he contends that irrespective of the numerous "talks" about streetism, the problem of streetism continues to escalate:

The phenomenon of street children has become one of the most widely discussed social tragedies of our time. We are witnesses to a deluge of talk about the plight of these children, from newspaper articles, to radio talk-shows, television documentaries and elegant academic discussions. There are countless NGOs supposedly working for the interest of street children. Many well-funded, well-attended workshops and conferences have been convened on the subject. Even Government claims to be doing its very best to tackle the problem. And yet, in spite of all these well-publicized efforts, the problem not only persists but also seems to be getting even more intractable. (Darko, 2003, pp. 19-20)

However, with the help of the ladies of MUTE (Dina, Kabria, Aggie, and Vickie), at least Fofu can avoid a repetition of her mother's life experiences. The ladies at MUTE and their collaboration with Sylv Po, help to draw a positive road map for the street child, Fofu, through which she can become independent. Even though for street children like Fofu, opportunities for decent survival seem limited, MUTE's role in her life reveals that with a combination of foresight and resources, non-relatives can come in to help solve the problem. This novel reveals then that even though a mother's irresponsible behavior can cause a daughter great damage and resentment, other women, acting as responsible mothers, can take over and help change the situation.

The four ladies of MUTE though not related to Fofu by blood, consider it an obligation to ensure Fofu's well-being. These four ladies are portrayed as assertive women who are bent on exposing all ideologies and structures that war against a "determined" girl's ambition to fight oppression. The women work together to set Fofu on the road towards her rehabilitation and integration into "normal" society. However, among these four ladies, Kabria and Dina are exceptional. Apart from introducing Fofu to MUTE, Kabria takes the difficult decision to absent herself from home so as to ensure the "well-being" of Fofu even though she is unsure of the outcome of this rather unusual act. Kolawole (1997, p. 158) expresses it clearly: "The modern African woman's dilemma often emanates from modern work ethics that take her away from home for long hours" (p. 158). Darko (2003) illustrates this "dilemma":

On their way home after picking the children, Kabria said, "Obea, I am going to do something that I haven't done before. I have to leave home tonight for Antie Dina's place."

"Why?" they all shrieked.

"We have some work to do about Fofu." (p. 124)

The fact that Kabria chose to interfere with her normal routine of being at home to receive her husband and rather be at Dina's place to ensure Fofu talks, is a tribute to Kabria's humanitarian nature. By discussing her plan with her children, Kabria is also indirectly training them to learn how to reach out to those in need.

Dina's decision to allow Fofu to stay in her home teaches that mothering should not be the exclusive preserve of biological mothers. Dina has no children, yet she plays mother to Fofu: "The few days under Dina's secure roof and in MUTE's absolute care put Fofu through a tremendous transformation. She became relaxed. Her face rested. She emitted an aura of softness." (Darko, 2003, p. 127). Dina's relationship with Fofu also shows that women can achieve a lot of recognition through motherhood. Kolawole's (1997) observation is relevant here:

The characters depicted in modern African settings have turned the wheel of change around to suit their new dispensation. These writers are not just writing feminine works; an overt feminist ideological statement is visible. The thrust is the search for self-respect, dignity, self-assertion and new moral values in a new quest for redefinition and self-esteem. (p. 160)

Dina's plan for Fofu is a laudable one indeed. Her interest goes beyond just providing Fofu with a place to stay, she is also interested in empowering Fofu financially by ensuring she gets a trade. In a reply to Aggie's question as to what is to be done for Fofu, Dina says:

Eventually, we will have to talk with reputable organizations like 'Children-In-Need' or 'Street-Girls-Aid.' But before we release her, we must be certain she will be safe. We can do our bit by adopting and sponsoring her training and all, but we must tie up all loose ends first. We are already too deep in it and cannot turn our back to the so many unanswered questions. (Darko, 2003, p. 123-124)

Important to our discussion also is Dina's belief in the benefits of collaboration. Her willingness to include the rest of the staff in solving Fofu's problems illustrates her communal consciousness. Her use of the first person plural "we" establishes her desire for partnerships and this desire is taken to another level when she brings on board Harvest F.M.'s Sylv Po to publicize Fofu's case on the airwaves. This collaborative measure leads to the identification of Baby T's murder(s), and importantly, listeners are educated on the repercussions of streetism.

*Faceless* calls on African women and men to come together in a progressive move to solve the myriad problems confronting mothers, street children, and the nation as a whole.

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