

# **Gender and Local Development in Feminine Writing: A Play of Scopes in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid***

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## **Abstract**

*This study postulates that Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* portrays how gender issues encompass local development. Such a postulate raises issues about interrelationship between feminine emancipation and local development in feminine writing. Indeed, inserting the scope of gender in any developmental issue seems to be an approach that fits female authors' writing policy. Thus, African female writers use this trans-thematic approach of gender so as to put forth the prevailing importance of inclusive and harmonious development at the centre of social progresses. From this perspective, *The Housemaid* by Amma Darko provides us a portrayal of interdependency between the concept of gender and that of local development. The merit of this work is to show that women's quest to emancipation through writing enhances life in all its aspects including local development. From postcolonial feminist lenses, the analysis will consist in showing how Amma Darko's imaginative writing knits gender to the theme of local development. Following these two axes such as painting local issues through gender and viewing progress in gender, the paper will show that gender as a concept in feminine writing boosts human capacity and sets up a modern environment.*

**Key-words:** Gender, local development, feminine, postcolonial feminism, inclusive.

## **Résumé**

*Cette étude postule que *The Housemaid* d'Amma Darko décrit comment les questions du genre prennent en compte la problématique du développement local. Une telle thèse pose le problème du lien entre l'émancipation féminine et les questions de développement local dans l'écriture. En effet, l'enjeu du genre étendu à toutes les questions de développement semble être une approche au service de la politique scripturaire des auteures féminines. Ainsi les auteures africaines utilisent-elles cette approche trans-thématique du genre afin d'inscrire la nécessité du développement inclusif et harmonieux au cœur des progrès sociaux. À partir de cette approche, *The Housemaid* d'Amma Darko nous projette un ancrage*

*d'interdépendance entre le concept du genre et celui du développement local. Le mérite de cette réflexion est de montrer qu'à travers l'écriture, la lute des femmes impacte positivement tous les aspects de la vie y compris le développement local. À la lumière du féminisme postcolonial, l'analyse consistera à montrer comment l'initiative littéraire d'Amma Darko concilie le concept du genre d'avec la thématique du développement local. En suivant ces deux axes d'analyse à savoir la mise en texte des problèmes locaux à travers le genre et l'image du progrès à partir du genre, l'étude montrera que le genre comme concept dans l'écriture féminine booste la capacité humaine et instaure un environnement moderne.*

**Mots-clés :** Genre, développement local, féminine, féminisme postcolonial, inclusif.

## Introduction

Feminine authorship in Africa, of course, has raised a variety of issues. But, subject-location and development constitutes the very reason of feminine writing, especially when it comes to post(-)colonial<sup>1</sup> female writers. The subaltern discourse advocated by Gayatri Spivak (1988) sustains this statement since it theoretically turns off western epistemic hegemony and instigates the subaltern to grow out of his/her own elaborate paradigm. Shutting off western institutions of writing-regulation to postcolonial and feminist scrutiny of knowledge as explained by Swati and Santosh (2016, p. 2) becomes the guiding principle of the subaltern subjectivity. In the same line, the Nigerian critic and feminist scholar Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) calls upon a radical writing consisting in steeping women authorship in fundamental African differences. As a consequence, Africa's feminine artistry, without sinking into autarchy, looks for an ataraxia which can really push on African women's living issues. This essence of female authorship is also approved by the well-known Senegalese Mariama Bâ (1981, p. 7) when she posits writing as a peaceful, non violent; but a strong army for change. As for Aidoo (2003), Kolawole (1997) and Ogunyemi (1985) African women's writing somehow substantiates a perception of woman as a subject of a specific environment. As such, her emancipation is related to the state of her living context and environment as well perceived by Adrienne Rich (1988) who speaks of politics location.

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<sup>1</sup> Taking into account both after colonising period and theory.

The above theoretical direction to Africa's feminine writing establishes the necessary relationship between the concept of gender and social progress as to impact on a given place. It also raises the question of local development as to know how literary production can bring social, cultural and economic empowerment to an area. To this paramount question, the Ghanaian writer Amma Darko responds with *The Housemaid* from which space, time, characters, culture (tradition and modernity) are portrayed in accordance with gender issues. This writing policy leads to the following query: To which extent can *The Housemaid* be read as a local development approach novel? Or, how does it justify the fact that gender-writing sustains local development implementation. These questions, delineating the direction of this study, put feminine authorship on the track of African current development issues. Taking into account this feminine distinction and alongside the idea of showing the contribution of feminine writing to progress in Africa, the analysis will be conducted from postcolonial feminist lenses. That is to say the study will show how the representation of ex-colonised women's conditions in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* reveals local development issues. Following this theoretical framework knitting gender discourse to local specificities (L. Tyson, 2006, p. 105, H. Carby, 1982, p. 13, C. Mohanty, 1984, p. 351) on the path of development, the analysis will primarily focus on writing gender as raising local development issues and then viewing progress into gender implementation.

## **1- Writing Gender as Raising Local Development Issues**

Whether aesthetic or committing, the common characteristic to African women's gender poetics is the dilemma of local development. Social progress is thus an acute problem viewed in women's imaginative work from internal to external relationship. This writing policy has delineated a kind of feminism which Capo-Chichi et al. (2017, p. 113) posit as "The woman's freedom to decide her own destiny, [...] freedom from society's oppression and restriction, freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them into action." The impact of these converted actions lies upon their very receptacle which may be the rural or urban area with a culture whether traditional or modern.

Responsibility for bettering this receptacle, primarily being for those whose life is attached, leads women writers to allot their artistry for taming their own environment. This commitment accounts for their three dimensions' responsibility as a writer, a woman and a third person to whom Ogundipe-Leslie urges to associate local vision to her writing.

This search of fairness in local living is well echoed in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*, a novel which portrays a fictional Ghana within gender paradigm. As for this, the author expounds the concept of gender over some development issues with an omniscient narrative mind as one can read in this warning sentence: "In Ghana, if you come into the world as a she, acquire the habit of praying. And master it. Because you will need it [...]" (A. Darko, 1998, p. 3). Being the first sentence of the narrative, it opens the door to a text through which any issue is dissected from gender perspective. It also sheds light on a reflexive approach that centres writing on the local. This local emerges out of the opening sentence as Africa with its bias view of woman. Thus, from authorship to narrating, this piece of writing unearths what Celistin Gbaguidi (2018, p. 41) calls "African women's trivialisation" consisting of exerting pressure on women through tradition and patriarchal beliefs. The idea of prayer, associated to women's existence in Darko's fiction, pinpoints Africa as a locus of female predicament from which survival relies upon strong capacity of psychological resilience.

Drawing from the fact that Darko's writing of gender is the depiction of local issues with the portrayal of a post-colonial Africa, one can wonder about the different themes out of which the author creates the story of "*The Housemaid*" as titled and written on the cover page. Funmilola and Chijioke (2022) respond to this query when they consider this novel under some sustainable development issues such as the child neglect and human trafficking, the adolescent pregnancy, the non-educational enrolment of children and the uncontrolled birth with sexual abuse. To this regard, they rightfully put that "Darko, through her writing, creates awareness regarding social problems that hinder the achievement of SDGs<sup>2</sup> and compromise a sustainable future if not corrected" (2022, p. 315). This viewpoint obviously inserts Darko's novel into the category of literary works whose contents

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<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation of "Sustainable Development Goals"

contribute effectively and efficiently to the advancement of the society while incorporating gender into social realism.

In this line, the story of *"The Housemaid"* is a pretext for the Ghanaian writer to expound on topics such as women and rural life, women and education, women and sexuality, health and child-bearing. This thematic arrayal casts Amma Darko as a social critic aiming to ensure well-being which "is the normative principle of human life that indicates good quality of life or the betterment of life" in Sisira S. Withanachchi's definitional approach (2011, p. 50). Being a lack for women, this well-being becomes the actual issue that motions Efia's history of getting rid of the lifeless newborn in the bush. This history reveals a poor rural life in the small village of Kataso:

Kataso, a village in the eastern hills, had no flowing water, no electricity, no entertainment centre, nothing. Only the chief owned a television set – old, black and white, and 100 per cent out of order. There would have been no power to run, even it had worked. It stood in the palace for decoration. A privileged few, who could occasionally afford batteries, owned pre-set radios, the kind imported from China in the 1960s; they were set permanently to the only radio station that had been available at the time" (A. Darko, 1998, p. 29).

This descriptive piece of narrative scrutinises "rurality" as a deficiency in terms of modern infrastructural equipments. Linked to gender, this apparent default in post-colonial Africa suggests a hardship that worsens women's life in rural area. It means "local conditions" in Kataso, as "development determinants" (Mahmood, 2000, p. 3) figure the reversal side of development which is embedded into deprivation, vulnerability and powerless. Indeed, the idea of lack of flowing water, electricity and entertainment centre underlines the prevalence of urban areas where life is better than in Kataso. Read in this direction, one can afford to say that Amma Darko brings to the limelight the issue of female condition and socio-economic facilities. More importantly, the author, erecting herself as a development agent, delves into

human condition in rural area where the lack of those basic needs leads to a boring life:

which left sex as the only affordable entertainment in Kataso. Everyone – young, old, mature and immature – indulged in it freely, making the two midwives the busiest of the village professionals.

The young men, when they could no longer stand this bland, grey life, would leave for Accra, Kumasi and Tokoradi to work as shoe-shine boys, truck pushers or hawkers of items such as popcorn, dog chains and air fresheners along the cities' busiest streets (A. Darko, 1998, p. 29-30).

This cause-effect narrative posits *The Housemaid* as a socio-economic diagnosis intending to plan development in Darko's fictional Ghana. Therefore, boredom and overuse of sex in Kataso, in addition to being seen as the main cause of unplanned maternity, question the phenomenon of rural depopulation and the notion of inclusive development. The latter, is viewed in the novel in terms of space and gendering paradigm. That is to say urban area such as Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi are privileged while rural area like Kataso is left in darkness, without any investment. The lack of investment in rural areas is tantamount to deficiency in job opportunities and lack of a well trained human capital. This dullness in rural area encourages recourse to sex; victimising young girls as Mama Ama Mbroo's fourteen-year-old daughter impregnated by Kofi Akorti (A. Darko, 1998, p. 30).

Depicted in such an awful image, rural life subsumes poverty and moral disintegration since it erodes some hitherto cherished traditional values. This reading perspective of *The Housemaid* matches with Lola Akande's that Darko's novel "deconstructs" the darker image of the city in African fiction (2020, p. 54). Indeed, Akande looks into the somehow traditionalistic view of the city in postcolonial discourse while re-actualising to a refluxing rural-urban itinerary opposed to urban-rural itinerary. This reversal itinerary raises the issues of rural

depopulation, human capital evasion and urban promiscuity. This is seen in numerous departures of young people, males and females, to the aforementioned cities.

Village depopulation can be analysed in *The Housemaid* as the core phenomenon around which women's living conditions are woven. Despite the fact that the urge of leaving village to city is subsequent to poor conditions of living in rural areas, the access to city seems not to be totally glamorous for females. Amma Darko substantiates this statement by carving characters such as Akua and her mates including Efia, the actual housemaid. First of all, Akua's determination to quit her unbearable village suggests the dooming "endemic nature of sexual laxity" according to L. Akande (2020, p. 55). It also corroborates a rural-urban migration motioned by a psycho-sexual violence, a moral disruption and an economic anomie prevailing in Kataso. From this perspective, Akua and many other characters' departure in *The Housemaid* reveals the rural exodus as a migration crisis which, according to Edith Amrevurayire (2016), exerts a negative pressure on rural economic advancement.

On the other hand, Amma Darko views this rural-urban migration in terms of human capital inefficiency in general and more specifically, women's inadequate capacity to fit urbanity. Thus, she depicts women migrants in the city as second-class citizen floating on the periphery:

Life as porter in Kumasi was not what a normal person would call living. It was survival. [...] Like her mates, Akua had no regular home. They all live in unfinished buildings; when final completion work started, they moved out. Thank to bribes of cash and sex, workers at the building sites regularly tipped them on the next place available for occupation. Because they were living there illegally and the building owners occasionally stopped by, nothing that might betray their presence. Water store in reservoirs for construction work sufficed for their washing and bathing purposes. Drinking water was bought and stored in plastic bottles,

and nearby bushes were their easing ground  
(A. Darko, 1988, p. 32).

This passage underlines the very issue of human capital. Indeed, the city-life of Akua and her mates is a showcase of misery going from economic impotency to sexual exploitation without forgetting the security jeopardy. Doing menial jobs, living in unfinished buildings, serving as sexpot to builders, using the bushes for toilet disclose the veil on the hardship that poor human capitals go through in urban areas. This hardship derives from their incompetency as far as literacy and modern education are concerned. Their situation deconstructs their belief in green pastures and constrains them into the peripheries of the city. This aspect of city life is a current issue in Darko's writing since it is highlighted in *Beyond the Horizon* ((1995) and *Faceless* (2003) with the image of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Reclusion of women lot in poorest spaces of the city tackles the issues of inclusive development in urban area and justifies Albertine Dipen and Sako Musterd's (2009) statement that urbanity is related to different categories of household. It means that urbanity is the conjugation of multiple factors among which one can note the purchase power. As for Akua and her mates, they live below the urban standard in Kumasi because they cannot afford to live in a good house with modern facilities. In this line, Louis Wirth's (1938, p. 3) points that "recruited population from the countryside" as the origin of persisting "earlier form of existence" can be discussed. Indeed, these persisting rural modes of life in the city, as depicted in *The Housemaid*, substantiate the lack of alternative that urbanism imposes upon poor class people. That is why this urbanity aspect may be read as the mapping of poverty within the city.

Drawing from the above paragraph, illiteracy is seen as the main cause of women's dark conditions as depicted in the novel. This category of female characters including Efia, the housemaid, are illiterates and poorly casted to fit the postcolonial feminist discourse (P. KOFFI, 2021). It subsumes Amma Darko's social commitment from her feminine/feminist consciousness while positing education as the basic step "[...] for the progress and development of a society" as rightfully put by Rapheal Tayol (2019, p. 4). On the contrary, lack of education prevents people

from reaching easily socio-economic goals in the city. This problem of female education makes flow the feminine image of poverty in post-colonial Africa.

In addition to that educational problem, there are those of promiscuity and single parenthood as the dark side of the city which hinders urban development in *The Housemaid*. This is well viewed in Mami Korkor and her children's city life. The reader comes across them in the incipit of the story. Mother of three children, the woman tries to cope with her family problems by the means of informal business of fish-hawking. Despite her struggle to meet the daily needs of her family, some essential rights, such as education and health, remained uncovered. That is why her boys have to scavenge while her daughter has to stay at home and play mother to all (A. Darko, 1998, p. 10-111). Such a social satire justifies Amma Darko's postcolonial feminist perception of modern life in post-colonial Africa whereby women's lot goes through tremendous plight pushing a small girl as Bibio to address to her mother in such a frustrating manner: "why, after making Nereley with him, when you realised how irresponsible he was, did you go ahead to make Akai, me and Nii Boi as?" (A. Darko, 1998, p. 11). Bibio's rhetorical question sustains the view that single parenthood is a benchmark of poverty in post-colonial Ghana in *The Housemaid*. The same point is raised in Darko's *Faceless* where Maa Tsuru is painted as the epitome of the worst figure of single mother. Thus, like Bibio, Fofo revolts against her mother's submissive attitude to a husband she qualifies as "a man neither here nor there. Not here for the wife, not there for the sons, yet, not gone completely from their lives either" (A. Darko, 2003, p. 26).

This depiction of fatherhood exhumes the identity of the absentee husband/father image which, according to Juliana Ofori (2013, p. 182), "remains a major hindrance to successful motherhood in Darko's novels". In other words, absentee father is among the post-colonial incoherencies against which the postcolonial feminist voice is raised. As for the issues of local development, absentee father phenomenon is depicted by Amma Darko in terms of household disempowerment with insignificant purchase power and hard access to city facilities. Indeed, this phenomenon is scrutinised into the meaning of lifestyles supposed to be the "expressions of taste and preference" or "the

consumers' freedom of choice and transiency" (Albertine Van Dipen and Sako Musterd, 2009, p. 332). From this interpretation, absentee father is seen as an oppressive structure that prevents mothers and children from affording good city life embedded in quality and preference. Living on very few means, Mami Korkor struggles to meet her family's basic needs centred on foodstuffs. Children's education becomes therefore subsidiary, causing gender discrimination when Mami Korkor decides that, except her sons who are enrolled in school, her daughter should stay at home with household as occupation. This discrimination triggers women's incapacity as poor human capital in local development.

The issue of demography and birth control is also included into Darko's local development matrix. It is treated as an issue stemming from a mix of moral decadence and patriarchal expressiveness as Mbaye Dieng Diasse (2003) shows it in his insightful study on Darko's novels. This happens in rural as well as urban attires as depicted in *The Housemaid*. One can remember that sex is prised by everyone in Kataso and also in Kumasi according to Darko's narrative. While Kofi Akorti spends his time impregnating women of all ages, Akua and her mates including Efiya are serving as sexpot to young men and adult men in Kumasi (Darko, 1998, p. 29-33). Having a prevailing occurrence on all ages, birthing becomes the easiest task to perform, but with hugest consequences as the reader can realise with Effia's dead baby and Mami Korkor's multiple children to cater for. The latter, even if there is no clear disclose on the conditions from which she has given birth to four children, her single mother status questions her incapacity of birth control.

Looking into this feminine quandary as analysed above, local development issues intertwined with women's contemporary conditions echoed in literary production. This writing approach, underlying Amma Darko's social commitment, suggests the conviction that any attempt to solve any gender issue contributes to the implementation of local development as it is shown in the sequence below.

## **2. Portraying Local Development in Gender Paradigm**

The scope of gender poetics relies upon the desire of inclusive development. Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) Social

Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWANISM) rightfully substantiates this postcolonial feminist policy. Indeed, it is an approach that takes into account Buchi Emechata's small 'f' feminism agenda, Ama Ata Aidoo's (2003) African feminist mindset and, more importantly, it matches with Chimamanda N'Gozi's happy feminism theory. In a nutshell, African gender poetics subsumes the whole development discourse that extols and features social progress.

This poetics is really reflected in Amma Darko's novels as Koumagnon Alfred Djossou Agboadannon mentions in his insightful work entitled *African Women's Empowerment: a Study of Amma Darko's Selected Novels*:

Amma Darko's female characters burst through the veil of tradition to establish their voice and identity. Amma Darko writes about the consequence of poverty on Ghanaian families, dislocation. Amma Darko focuses on social malaise in Ghana after independence. Amma Darko [...] depicts gender issues, male capitalistic greed and patriarchy that hold at deeply felt individual levels. In another marked distinction, Amma Darko seeks a way out of this prolonged nightmare by rendering women visible and by creating a feminine voice and space either by using elderly characters or young voices. She urges women to revive their voice to sustain their lives (2018, p. 57)

Focused on female empowerment, Amma Darko's writing shapes an African feminism which fits in the search of dynamism in social progress. It means that through the issue of gender the Ghanaian writer portrays local development in postcolonial Ghana while positing women among the main actors. This quest is well echoed in *The Housemaid* from which Amma Darko addresses core issues termed as "breakthrough areas<sup>3</sup>" constituting an

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<sup>3</sup> In a study entitled "Empowering African Women: an agenda for Action. African Gender Equality Index 2015" by African Bank Group, 2015, "Land, credit, infrastructure connections, education and skills, health and fertility, personal safety, equality before the law, voice and representation are seen as 'core interests' called "breakthrough areas" around which equality actions are designed.

agenda for action around productivity, human capital development, citizenship and leadership.

In gauging human participation to wealth production, productivity becomes one of the conceptual frameworks through which Amma Darko tries to map local development. In this vein, women's labour is portrayed as a gear to social progress. The figuration of women in different activities sectors shows how gender equality strengthens social advancement. Women in entrepreneurship such as Madam Sekyiwa and her daughter Tika and professional women such as Teacher fill in the previous void that delays the fulfilment of development. Indeed, painted as a wealthy businesswoman, Sekyiwa guides her daughter Tika into business after the latter failed her exam: 'I want to set you in business.' 'A shop?' Tika asked. 'No. But I'll get you a warehouse. You will bring in goods from neighbouring countries. Shop owners will buy wholesale from you' (Darko, 1998, p. 21). This conversation propels women's capacity to occupy the entrepreneur position in a society where such a professional skill is scarcely matched with women. In other words, Sekyiwa and her daughter are casted as examples of female figures in businesses. That is to say the depiction of Sekyiwa and Tika questions capitalism as male terrain, subverts its stability and then celebrate women's success and positioning in capitalism.

Likewise, Teacher is presented as a skilful professional whose profile is viewed in terms of skilfulness, capability and diligence while performing her task. As a result, she occupies a social position that helps her afford a comfortable modern life in Accra as the narrator tells us: "Among the Katoans with formal jobs and the comfort at home [...] was a lady called Teacher by virtue of her profession." (A. Darko, 1988, p. 34) Tika's profile highlights women's access to successful positions highly valued in post-colonial states where citizenship fulfilment and elitism are mostly related to social success. Giving such a respectful position to a woman is tantamount to recognising women contribution to nation building. This contribution leads to an inclusive development which can efficiently fight back hindrances such as stereotypes and traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, the character of Tika is relevant to local development to the extent that she is the prototype of change from menial job position to a top level position. Teacher's

empowerment is narrated as an exemplary one since she is from the same traditional background and undergoes the same social difficulties as the other female characters who fail to transit successfully from rurality to urbanity. (A. Darko, 1998, p. 35). Teacher not only symbolises a successful transition from rural life to urban life, but also impacts positively her village in terms of human capital, aiding her young sisters in getting competences and being trained for some metiers. But compared to Teacher, Madam Sekyiwa and her daughter, though they are used to justify female entrepreneurship, daunt the development of human capital.

Amma Darko copes with this darkness by casting two categories of women, the first with illiterate women and the second with literate ones. Madam Sekyiwa, Akua and others such as Efi are painted as mere housemaid, petty jobs performers. On the contrary, Teacher is viewed as an accomplished citizen entitled to brandish the women's knowledge capability. Having succeeded transiting from the margin to the centre, Teacher is seen in the narrative as the perfect representative of her village in Accra:

Because of her position, Teacher was often given the task of getting young girls from Kataso positions as housemaids with families in Accra. Usually, a guarantee was given that, after the girl has served for four years, her training as a dressmaker or hairdresser would be sponsored. As a result, Teacher was very well known among the Accra Katasoans. (A. Darko, 1998, p. 35)

The above passage posits Teacher as an economic strategist who plans local development with female empowering policies for illiterate young women. A second look into Teacher's empowering plan leads us to state that Teacher is the embodiment of a social aid plan which brings solution to illiterate young women's vulnerability in urbanity. This figurative character of Teacher, always on duty to save her lot from jeopardy, is hallmark in Amma Darko's writing. For example, Mama Kiosk, the mentor of Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Diana, the boss of Mute in

*Faceless* (2003) and *Not Without Flowers* (2007). Respectively teaching entrepreneurship to Mara or employing women to build an alternative library for women and supporting street girls such as Fofo and Oderlay, both Mama Kiosk and Diana forecast the possibility of a local sisterhood laid upon common interests. These interests are women's participation and activeness in social and economic development as Teacher and Sekyiwa do.

In addition to productivity, the character of Teacher can be studied as the portrayal of a skilful human capital in the implementation of gender equality. That is why one should remember the early social status of this character. She is brought to Accra for house-holding at Tika's as narrated in the following passage: "Initially she had intended Teacher to come and live with her as a maid, but her kind-hearted husband saw the little girl's potential and told his wife that he wanted to enrol her in school." (A. Darko, 1998, p. 34). Out of this decision Teacher's fate is veered from a mere maid to an intellectual woman serving the state in one of its very important compartments such as teaching and training. It is worth mentioning that Teacher's transformation is due to a male contribution. This male contribution highlights one of the postcolonial feminism tenets which propels gender solidarity through the complementary approach of sexes. In other words, Tika's father's willingness to send his maid to school regardless the latter's advanced age tells us more about this interrelated relationship between men and women. N'Gozi Adichie's (2015) idea of happy feminist is thus materialised in Amma Darko's writing since she makes men contribute to women empowerment. The image of Teacher from illiteracy to literacy out of these tremendous efforts shows how gender equality implementation can bring positive impact on human capital.

In the same vein, Amma Darko uses gender paradigm to mirror citizenship. According to Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan (2004, p. 11) citizenship is a conceptual frame from which women's movement to emancipation comes into existence. This statement can be justified by the first wave feminism whose claims were deeply rooted in women's legal existence within modern states marked by the advent of suffragettes. This conceptual frame grows more and more with the extending of citizenship notion beyond the search of voting rights to touching

other existential issues that underlie humanity. As for postcolonial feminist such as Amma Darko, citizenship is among the key concepts whose attainment can back up the implementation of gender equality in her fictional Ghana as depicted in *The Housemaid*.

Scrutinising some important themes such as ignorance with the image of Efia's grandmother and mother, human exploitation with that of Akua and her mates in urban area, and the depiction of uncontrolled birth in Kataso, the Ghanaian author posits citizenship as the core element of social development and therefore relevant to local development. Indeed, painting a good African grandmother with the firm belief that her granddaughter will inherit the bulk of Tika's wealth by the fact of getting pregnant is an act of castigating naivety and at the same time an act of showing the negative impact of ignorance. The old woman's plan for Efia is then designed in the novel during her meeting with both Efia and her Mother:

Listen! The woman you are going to live with is is a rich but wasted woman. A very wasted. An unproductive womb is bad enough. But no womb at all? And that what she is. A walking woman with no womb inside her...The gods and ancestors of village of ours designed everything. So hear me! Be subservient, humble and very dependable...Then get yourself pregnant. You both hear me right. Efia, you will live with her, win her affection, become indispensable to her. So that when you innocently become pregnant...refuse to name the father. [...] Old and wrinkle as I am, when I bombard her with volumes of tears I shall shed, she will need an iron heart to turn down my fervent plea to forgive my granddaughter (A. Darko, 1998, p. 46-47).

The above passage in addition to showing an ignorant old woman, it questions the adaptability of the figure of grandmother in a context where citizenship recommends knowledge and awareness of one's own rights and duties. Implicitly, this

grandmother figure shows a total blindness about modern life. It also sheds light upon the requiring need to be updated to social reality in modern life. Tika's response of repelling her pregnant maid illustrates the fact that she is not only a literate woman but also a woman who knows her rights and duties. Of course, humanistic questions can be raised to Tika's attitude, but one thing which is central to her living with Efia is the contract, may be formal or not, related to job: House-holding. The negotiation of this contract has never been extended to caring about a pregnant woman with her prospect child.

Opposed to Efia's parents' attitude as underlined in the quotation, Tika is casted in this line to tackle the issue of birth control. This is an issue of paramount importance in Drako's writing. The Ghanaian author depicts a society in which reproduction has been for long considered as a god-given task to be performed without any other care. She mentions this utmost well embedded cultural belief in her third novel *Faceless* (2003) as it sounds in the following sentence: "Girls are pressurized to prove their womanhood whether they can adequately care for a child or not. You give birth. God will take care of the child" (A. Darko, 2003, p. 109). As discussed by the gender specialist named Ms. Kamame portrayed in the aforementioned novel by Darko, reproduction becomes a paradigmatic frame through which citizenship is gauged in relation to gender. Viewed in this line, citizenship can be analysed on the premises of female capability of scheduling a birth control programme for individual and then familial blooming.

Inscribing birth control in the whole issue of citizenship, Amma Darko touches the main issue of local development and women's participation. In so doing, she puts forth the necessity for women to assume their full citizenship without living motherhood as a cultural burden and social oppression. Local development is therefore portrayed in *The Housemaid* as women's ability to cope with uncontrolled birth as Tika and Teacher exemplify contrary to Mami Korkor and young villager women in Kataso. The fact of controlling the functioning of the family, in terms of size and mothering capacity, becomes for Amma Darko a means for sustaining women's social dignity (C. Udogu, 2018). This dignity covers the domain of the private sphere as well as the public one. To the combination of public and private sphere,

the reader of Amma Darko can afford to say that the Ghanaian author extends citizenship to female leadership.

This statement finds a fertile ground in a “caring” or “solicitude” (see Nel Nodding, 1984 and Carol Guilligan, 1982) approach of gender that matches female leadership to women’s traits of being closest to their kinship. This perspective suggests that female leadership can sustain the process of local development to the extent that a woman’s leadership necessarily impacts the whole community. *The Housemaid* is a showcase of that feminine profile of leadership. It is well perceptible in the character of Teacher who connects young girls from her village to Accra and helps them gain a housemaid position and training opportunity (A. Darko, 1998, p. 35). That is why Funmilola Kemi and Chijioke Uwah’s point that Teacher exemplifies the dark side of human trafficking is debatable since the initiative of this woman can be inserted in the broad line of female empowerment. The main goal of Teacher is not ‘selling’ young girls to city household, but to help her ‘sisters’ from a boring and degenerating village of Kataso to reach a modern citizenship and be economically independent. In this respect, Teacher is a prototype of female leader who suits the ethics of caring by being the main transitional bridge through which Amma Darko foresees a possible empowerment of young illiterates from rural areas to cities.

Some other characters such Tika and Akua can be seen as female leaders in their respective profile. While Tika’s ability to leadership is gauged in her successful entrance into entrepreneurship, which is male dominated world, Akua’s derives from a “receptive ability and a sense of communal village responsibility” (R. Tayaol, 2019, p. 156) taken for the pregnant Efiya. In this regards, local development is viewed as solution-oriented capacity to address current and oncoming issues for better life. Akua and her mates serve this cause when they receive Efiya in respect of their double closeness related to where they all come from and their gender. Even Akua’s determination to leave Kataso can be quoted among the criteria which propel her as strong and dutiful leader. Despite the fact of using sex as bribes for transportation, Akua’s desire and willingness to leave her village reveal her undertaking initiative to put an end to suffering. One can also brandish her living condition in Accra as a

failure, but it is worth mentioning that at least Akua is in search of solution to a better life. All these taken into account illustrate a female leader anchored in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* where gender policies implementation unveils the materialisation of local development.

## Conclusion

This study has revealed how two complex concepts, gender and local development, are imbricated in feminine writing in post-colonial Africa. From a postcolonial feminist reading of the Ghanaian female writer Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*, gender writing, portraying female subject in-between several scales of pressure, echoes, at the same time, some relevant local development issues and challenges such as deficiency of modern infrastructures or lack of basic socio-economic facilities in rural areas, poor human capital, village depopulation, women's illiteracy, reclusion of women into poorest spaces, promiscuity and single parenthood as hindrances to convenient urban life. Reversely, this reading discloses the fact that Darko's narrative shows that gender implementation and local development fulfilment go hand in hand. That is the case of successful capitalist women, top level and skilful professional women, impactful female leaders aiding other sisters to deserve full citizenship. Such a study of Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* helps understand that female empowerment in Africa must be a mutual combat in which any social actor ought to be involved since the implementation of gender fulfils local development. From this social interest, one can contend that African feminine writing in general and specifically *The Housemaid* by Amma Darko is respectful to the Millennium Goals for Sustainable Development and the 2063 African Union Agenda which propel gender implementation at the core of development process.

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