

## REVERSING THE IMPERIAL GAZE, AFFIRMING POSSIBILITY: CONRAD AND FANON IN AMMA DARKO'S *BEYOND THE HORIZON*.

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### Abstract

Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of the dialogism of the word, especially double-voiced discourse, this paper examines Darko's subtle inscription of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in her novel *Beyond the Horizon* (1995). Specifically, the paper examines "horror" and the novel's title as double-voiced discourse or dialogical sites of contestation and affirmation, respectively. It argues that while the Conradian subtext can be understood in the context of Darko's reversal of Marlow's imperial gaze in *Heart of Darkness*, the Fanonian subtext revolves around Darko's politics of "beyond the horizon" which is contingent on decentering Europe as the location of hope for postcolonial people. By focusing on Darko's subtle dialogue with Conrad and Fanon, the paper shows that Darko strategically frames Mara's encounter with Europe as a journey into the "heart of darkness" and also foregrounds de-linking from the West as an emancipatory ethic and thought for postcolonial transformation.

**Keywords:** Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, dialogism, imperial gaze, postcolonial

### Introduction

Political instability, poverty, the search for the good life, and the allure of the West are at the heart of the desperate dash to the West by many people from poor countries in the Global

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South. However, many of those who brave the perilous obstacles and make it to their dream destinations realize to their shame that they cannot be masters of their fate as they had imagined. As a result, they are forced to accept their new status as tormented, disposable or petty beings who “peep about to find” themselves “dishonourable” jobs and graves.<sup>2</sup> Africa’s literary response to this crisis of migration to the West is the “new African transatlantic novel” which foregrounds migration, dislocation, human and sex trafficking, or the objectification of postcolonial subaltern bodies in the West (Onyerionwu, 2016). Amma Darko’s debut novel, *Beyond the Horizon* (1995; henceforth *BH*), is one of the defining texts in this subgenre. Focusing on the crisis of expectation that confronts African migrants in Europe, *BH* explores the tragic paradox that revolves around the West’s power to interpellate and disavow postcolonial subalterns. Although rarely commented on, *BH* is also a subtle reversal of the imperial gaze and a meditation on the location of the horizon of hope for postcolonial people. To read *BH* from this perspective, however, requires that one grasps the subtle dialogism that frames its emancipatory thought.

The paper examines Darko’s reversal of the imperial gaze through the subtle inscription of Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* (henceforth *HoD*) and Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism of the word, it analyzes the title of Darko’s novel and the word “horror” as used by Mara, the protagonist-narrator, as double-voiced discourse or dialogical sites of contestation and affirmation, respectively. It argues that while the Fanonian subtext can be understood within the context of Darko’s reversal of Marlow’s imperial gaze in *Heart of Darkness*, the Fanonian subtext revolves around Darko’s conception of the “horizon” which is contingent on reversing Marlow’s imperial gaze and demystifying Europe as the redemptive location for postcolonial people. By focussing on Darko’s subtle inscription of Conrad and Fanon, the paper shows that Darko strategically frames Mara’s encounter with Europe as a journey into the “heart of darkness” and also calls on postcolonial people to rethink the West as the place for postcolonial re-invention or self-fashioning. Above all, the paper shows that an awareness of double-voiced discourse in *BH* enriches our understanding of the full complexity of Darko’s craft and thematic concerns. The paper begins in the next section with the literature on *BH*.

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<sup>2</sup> See Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act One, Scene Two.

### Critical Reception of *Beyond the horizon*

Since its publication, *BH* has received significant scholarly attention. To Odamtten (2007, p. 4), *BH* embodies “the need for new and different stories to be told” on the Ghanaian literary scene. According to Barberân (2014: 13), *BH* interrupts “hegemonic representations of sex trafficking disseminated by the mainstream media” that traditionally ignore the decisive role of “the neoliberal economic model of exclusion and inequality” in sex trafficking. Given the novel’s focus on sex trafficking, prostitution, sexual violence, and Mara’s quest for liberation, it is not surprising that most scholars have dwelt on the interconnecting issues of patriarchal violence and dehumanization, sex trafficking, prostitution, pornography, and the commodification of the subaltern woman’s body (Abeka *et al.*, 2014; Awitor, 2013; Higgins 2006; Jonet, 2007; Kammampoal, 2017). Others have focused on alienation and reinvention, subversion, female resistance, shame and agency, and the quest for feminist solidarity and bodily integrity (Asempasah & Sam 2016; Angsotinge *et al.*, 2002; Djossou, 2020; Umezurike, 2015). A few critics have made passing reference to the novel’s dialogical orientation (Frías, 2002: 12; Asempasah & Sam 2016).

Two conclusions can be drawn from extant literature. First, there is currently no in-depth analysis of Darko’s subtle inscription of Conrad and Fanon in *BH*. As a result, Darko’s reversal of the imperial gaze and critique of the “horizon” has remained unexplored. Second, the literature suggests that *BH* affirms Bhabha’s (2004, pp. 1-2) assertion that “the ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon nor a living behind of the past”. This is confirmed by Mara’s realization that patriarchal domination and violence in Africa morph into a complex global economy of female bodily commodification and disempowerment in Europe. The Bhabhalian interpretation, however, does not consider the dialogical resonance of the novel’s title and Mara’s usage of the word “horror” which, upon critical analysis, yields an alternative meaning. As the analysis will show, *BH* is not so much about the impossibility of a new horizon *tout court*. Rather, *BH* is a critique of the “horizon” as a potent structure of thought and feeling in postcolonial contexts wherein the West is represented as the utopian place of transformation. It is precisely in this sense that I will argue that Darko’s title is at once a call on postcolonial people to think beyond the allure of the West and to re-imagine Africa as a horizon of possibility.

The unstated problem *BH* grapples with, then, is how to think beyond the West as a model and structure of thought for postcolonial people, which is why Germany is presented as a traumatic and revelatory threshold rather than the terminus for the postcolonial subject's heroic re-invention. The threshold emerges from a fundamental encounter. By fundamental encounter, I mean an encounter that calls into question images of thought and opens the possibility of different ways of being and seeing.<sup>3</sup> In other words, a fundamental encounter is “a vigorously anti-systematic mode of understanding ... a means of disrupting the centralizing impulse of any system” (Quayson, 2000, p. 136). As Ahmed (2002, p.8) argues in a different context, encounters “*reopen the prior histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of difference*” (emphasis included). As the analysis will show, Darko uses Mara's encounter with Europe to reopen prior narratives of encounter, like Conrad's *HoD*, that fix Africa in regimes of difference. Europe, as a threshold, thus emerges in *BH* as a place of crisis and disclosure for the postcolonial subaltern. The crisis stems from the realization by Darko's protagonists Mara, Vivian, and Kaye that their perceptions of Europe are no more than comforting myths or illusions. I emphasize the notion of fundamental encounter because it is essential to understanding Darko's reversal of the imperial gaze and the decentering of the allure of the West. More importantly, it enables one to pose radically new questions that have hitherto not been sufficiently posed in the scholarship on *BH*. What image of thought does *BH* decenter? How is this demystification orchestrated? What are the implications of this demystification for postcolonial liberation and transformation? To answer these questions, it is crucial to focus on Darko's dialogic inscription of Conrad and Fanon. Before the analysis, however, it is essential to flesh out Bakhtin's concept of dialogism of the word.

### **Bakhtinian dialogism: Incorporating and contesting the Other**

Dialogism forms part of Bakhtin's broader concept of polyphony, verbal discourse, or utterance as a social phenomenon. As Holquist (1990, p. 37) argues, dialogism is vital to Bakhtin's attempt at theorizing an alternative socio-political ontology that gives primacy to meaning as an agonistic struggle. Bakhtinian dialogism emphasizes otherness and hybridity as inherent to language or utterance. Central to Bakhtin's dialogism is the word as the minimal but complex

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<sup>3</sup> On fundamental encounter, see Gilles Deleuze (1994).

point of stylistic analysis. Unlike traditional stylistics that viewed the word only within the confines of language, Bakhtin pluralizes the relation of the word to its object by emphasizing intention and directionality. For Bakhtin, every utterance or word is always already populated by other meanings:

The word in language is half someone else's. It only becomes "one's own" when the speaker populates it with his own inflection and accent, when he appropriates it and adapts it to his own semantics and expression. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294).

This idea of dialogism has deep significance for literary analysis as it theorizes the process by which newness or otherness enters the universe of the text. Bakhtin shows that newness is a product of the intention and directionality of an utterance or word. Also, Bakhtinian dialogism enables us to see the literary work as a dynamic process of "productivity and operation" or a complex dialogue of reader, text, and context (Kristeva, 1980, p. 367).

One of Bakhtin's examples of dialogism is double-voiced discourse.<sup>4</sup> Double-voiced discourse refers to the dialogic force inherent in any utterance or word; it means that all utterances or words are traces or sedimentations of prior and multiple meanings. As Bakhtin puts it, double-voiced discourse is "directed both towards the referential object of speech as in ordinary discourse and toward another's discourse, towards someone else's speech" (1994, p. 105). Or as Kristeva (1980, p. 66) puts it, "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read ... any text is a mosaic of quotations ... the absorption of and transformation of another." It is this idea of the doubleness or otherness of the word or utterance that is central to the analysis of the title of Darko's novel and "horror" as dialogical sites of contestation and affirmation. Such a reading emphasizes that *BH* does not exist in hermetic isolation; it contests, affirms, and reframes antecedent texts/voices. The next

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<sup>4</sup> See Baxter (2014, pp. 23–41), on Bakhtin's theories of double-voiced discourse.

section focuses on how Darko decenters Europe by re-locating or reversing *the imperial gaze* and “horror” in Conrad’s *HoD*.

### **Reversing the imperial gaze, relocating the horror of recognition**

This section discusses Darko’s subtle reversal of the imperial gaze. It argues that Darko’s inscription of Conrad’s *HoD* is framed around the horror of recognition and the reversing of Marlow’s imperial gaze. The gaze designates a mode of perception that presumes power, domination, and othering.<sup>5</sup> As Marion (2002, p. 214) argues, gazing is about being able to keep the visible thus seen under the control of the seer...To gaze at the phenomenon is therefore equivalent to not seeing it, but indeed to transforming it into an object visible according to an equivalent to an always poor or common phenomenality—visible within the limits of concept.” The gaze does not only objectify that which is observed, it also assumes the autonomy and authority of the one who gazes (Tate, 2022, p. 154). The imperial gaze refers to a mode of perception that objectifies the other and “refuses to acknowledge its own power and privilege” (Kaplan, 1997, p. 78). According to Kaplan, the imperial gaze “reflects the assumption that the white subject is central ... one that refuses mutual gazing, mutual subject-to-subject recognition. It refuses ... “looking relation” (p.78). To reverse the imperial gaze, therefore, means studying, analyzing or looking at the West through the eyes of the previously colonized. What I call the horror of recognition refers to an epiphany that challenges deeply held beliefs and ideas. In this paper, the reversal of the gaze and the horror of recognition refer to same perceptual and ideological process of countering that result from the encounter or confrontation with the real or reality.

Before analyzing the reversal of the imperial gaze and the horror of recognition, in *BH*, it is essential to begin with a synopsis of the novel. *BH* is Mara’s story of betrayal, education, and liberation. Mara, the protagonist-narrator, is literally sold by her father into marriage to Akobi in Naka, a village in Ghana. Not long after joining her husband in Accra, Akobi travels to Germany. Later, he lures Mara into Germany with the promise of transforming their fortunes.

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<sup>5</sup> Often associated with Mulvey (1975), the concept of the gaze has emerged as a useful conceptual and analytical framework in understanding the subtle operations of power, domination, and resistance in as diverse fields as film studies, photography, feminist studies, postcolonial studies, literary studies etc. See Baer (2017); Gabay (2018); hooks (1996); Kaplan (1997); Lovatt (2013); McGowan (2003; 2007); Woodward (2008).

However, Mara finds to her shock that she has been trafficked into prostitution. Contrary to the image of Europe as paradise in the socio-cultural imaginary of Naka, Mara is confronted with a Europe where subaltern women are, to borrow from Butler (2009, p. 25), “differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.” Mara is reduced to a sex slave in an “isolated house on the outskirts of Munich” (*BH*, 3). After suffering sexual abuse and financial exploitation, Mara, with the help of her friend Kaye, an ex-prostitute, finally succeeds in legalizing her stay, getting Akobi jailed, his girlfriend Comfort deported to Ghana and freeing herself from her pimp. Consequently, she redirects her income into her account under a new “overseer and lord” (*BH*, 3). Fearing that her pornographic videos, which Akobi had secretly filmed to blackmail her, might find their way to Ghana, Mara decides to remain in Germany and plunges herself into prostitution as a profession (*BH*, 139). *BH* thus traces Mara’s journey and transformation from a naïve conscript of patriarchal ideology and the allure of the West into a tormented but enlightened reader of the mechanisms of patriarchal violence, racial prejudice, dispossession, and the problematics of ethical empowerment in a Europe that blatantly glorifies the objectification and exploitation of female bodies.

At the heart *BH* is Mara’s encounter with Europe. Echoing Conrad’s *HoD*, *BH* is Mara’s journey into the “heart of darkness.” This is why what Mara learns as a result of her first encounter with Europe, a place she and the people of Naka imagined as “not [...] just Heaven but [...] Heaven itself” (*BH*, 34), is crucial to Darko’s demystification of Europe and critique of the complicity of African men in the dehumanization of the African woman’s body. Darko traces the allure of the West and its power to interpellate postcolonial subalterns to two powerful myths among postcolonial people. First, Europe as the location of readily available jobs; second, Europe as the place for the triumphant accumulation of material things. As Akobi tells Mara, “I will make so much money that I can buy us everything! Everything! Mara! Television, radio, fridge, carpet, even car!” (*BH*, 34). In Naka, travelling to Europe is considered a potent accomplishment that elevates the community and “magically” raises the traveller’s esteem in the family and society (*BH*, 54). Europe’s magical hold on the people of Naka is presented in a flashback in which the now-enlightened Mara recalls a conversation between her and Akobi before her encounter with Europe. In the flashback, Akobi explains his decision to travel to Europe as the justification for selling Mara’s jewellery, which she inherited from her

grandmother: “there is so plenty (sic) factory and construction work waiting to be done there in Europe, but with so little people to do them” (*BH*, 34).

The flashback is significant because, beyond highlighting Mara’s emerging consciousness, it dramatizes the localized myths about Europe in particular and the West in general that circulated in sections of Ghanaian society in the 1970s and late 1980s, the historical setting of the novel.<sup>6</sup> Akobi articulates one of these myths; “Ho, do you know, for instance, that in Britain the people are so rich that they throw fridges away? And in Germany, they throw away cars?” (*BH* 35). Mara’s initial unquestioning belief in Akobi’s claims lends credence to Adjei’s (2007, p. 54) assertion that Mara is too naïve for comfort. To Adjei, Mara’s extreme naivety is central to Darko’s strategy of male-bashing. However, Mara’s initial uncritical belief in Akobi can also be read as suggestive of the power of the ‘fictions’ postcolonial subalterns have about the West. Thus, Akobi is not only a ventriloquist; he is also a victim of the fantastic socio-cultural fabulations about Europe. Akobi and Mara are victims of what Gbogi (2022, p. 297) calls an “antagonistic imagination” that frames Europe as the place of order and history while Africa represents disorder, chaos, and “a place of negations” (Achebe, 1975). Darko, therefore, highlights the power of fetishism and interpellation that the image of Europe has in postcolonial contexts. It is this utopian image that Darko dismantles by upending Mara’s initial naïve image of Europe with her confrontation with the real Europe. Instead of utopia, most postcolonial subjects who travel to “Europe full of dreams” are shattered by the abject reality in Europe (*BH*, 116).

Mara’s fate as a sex slave is not atypical; it is the fate of most undocumented women, ironically, and this is Darko’s point, in “paradise” (i.e., Europe). As Mara says, “there are pretty women like myself, one in each room waiting to be used and abused by strange men” (*BH*, 1). At the cinema, Mara sees on the screen “black women, Africans” engaged in pornography without “a trace of shame” (*BH*, 61). The effect of these strange encounters is that Mara revises her image of Europe. Europe is no longer “paradise” but “a place hotter than hell” (*BH*, 139). Ironically, the challenge for migrants like Mara, Vivian, Kaye, Osey and Akobi is that they cannot communicate this catastrophic truth to their relatives back home as the reality contradicts the existing mythologies in Africa. As Marlow realizes in the Congo, one

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this perception has not changed.



consequence of the confrontation with the “heart of darkness” is the revelation of “a ‘truth’ that turns out to be incommunicable, or even a lie” (Jervis, 1999, p. 69). Osey, the agent who facilitated Mara’s illegal transit to Germany, puts the paradox in its proper socio-cultural context for Mara:

Who will believe you at home if you return and tell them that there is no work and that German people too are themselves without job? (sic). You will be accused of being a born failure, or they will say you offended the gods and ancestors, and that you are trying to justify your shame by dissuading other people from going to Europe to try their luck. (*BH*, 77).

Confronted with the impossibility of communicating the “truth” about the real Europe, Mara and the other subalterns repeat Marlow’s lie to Kurtz’s Intended. Unlike Marlow, however, the postcolonial subaltern migrant’s lie consists in shipping material things home so that relations will never suspect that these are, in fact, objects of shame. For Mara, it is this wilful collusion in the commodification of the African woman’s body and the production of collective shame that constitutes “horror”. Kaye captures the shameless complicity of Africans in exploitation of African women in Europe for Mara:

My people back home now have everything they want, Mara. They don’t know how I make the money to buy them very much. What matters to them is that I send them what they request. So I keep them satisfied that way and keep my peace here ... I just let them go on believing I’ll return one day. The hope alone keeps them cheerful, so I won’t destroy it for them... ) Sometimes I think that my family suspects I’m in the trade [prostitution] but deliberately refrain from asking me because if they knew the truth and then took no action, not wanting to forfeit the luxuries they enjoy at my expense, they will indirectly become party to my sins. (*BH*, 117-118).

The novel’s ethical imperative, then, is to reveal the disastrous effect of the allure of the West on subjects from poor countries seeking greener pastures in the West.

At this point, it is essential to focus on the more crucial and practical question: how does Darko revise Marlow's imperial gaze? Or how does *HoD* constitute a significant dialogical voice in *BH*? To answer this question, it is important to focus on the first few hours of Mara's arrival in Hamburg, Germany. In those moments, Mara is transformed into a postcolonial flâneur and reader of the socio-cultural scripts and images of Germany and by extension Europe. The encounters, as the analysis will show, constitute Darko's strategy of reversing the imperial gaze and the horror of recognition.<sup>7</sup> The importance of Conrad's *HoD* lies in the complexity with which it explores Europe's encounter with Africa. Framed around notions of civilization and barbarism, *HoD* is an intricate staging of two forms of encounter: Marlow's encounter with Kurtz, that enigmatic character who emerges finally as the debasement of European civility and Marlow's encounter with Africa. However, part of the rhetorical baggage of *HoD* is that Marlow's encounter with Kurtz is eclipsed by his encounter with Africa.<sup>8</sup> This is because Marlow's imperial gaze unrelentingly codes Africa as the demonic or incomprehensible Other and, impliedly, a threat to European sanity (Achebe, 1977).

Unsurprisingly, some African writers have overtly or subtly reversed Marlow's imperial gaze by rewriting Conrad's trope of encounter in a manner that positions the African as a reader of European social and cultural scripts. Examples of these include Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966); Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013).<sup>9</sup> These texts, in their different ways, stage fundamental encounters with the West by reversing the imperial gaze and confronting the African with the real West. *BH*, like these texts, may be read as unpacking colonial constructions of European exceptionalism, representations, and processes of Othering. Through the reversal of the gaze, the African writer opens up spaces to think outside colonial and neo-colonial regimes of power and representation. Unlike cross-cultural encounters in colonial discourse "in which Otherness is assigned a particular quality of impoverishment and evolutionary backwardness as its indelible signatures" (Quayson, 2000, p.15), postcolonial African literary representations of cross-cultural encounter position the African gaze in the West as a site of agency and critique.

<sup>7</sup> The trope of encounter was a powerful discursive strategy in colonial discourse and functioned as a pseudo-realistic apparatus for the representation and production of knowledge, cultures, and exotic geographies. Such knowledge and representations constituted the basis for the differential labelling and treatment of others as peripheral to European civility (Mbembe, 2001, pp 1-23; Mignolo, 2003; Pratt, 1992, pp. 1-11; Said, 1979, pp. 19-24).

<sup>8</sup> See Rino Zhuwarara, "Heart of Darkness Revisited: The African Response" (2004).

<sup>9</sup> See Krishnan 1996.

In this way, the West's construction of what Adichie calls "a single story" is destabilized and alternative viewpoints are disseminated.<sup>10</sup> This is the context in which Darko's novel becomes profoundly pertinent as a dialogical contestation of Conrad's *HoD*.

The first example of Darko's reversal of the imperial gaze is Mara's usage of the word "horror" to describe her encounter with Germany. A few hours after her arrival in East and West Germany, Mara is confronted with situations and scenes that call into question her previous image of Europe. She describes these experiences as "horrors" (*BH*, 61, 67). For lack of space, the analysis focuses on the first and second encounters. While waiting to catch a train to Hamburg, Osey decided to give Mara a welcome treat by taking her to the cinema to see "film full of action" (*BH*, 61). To her surprise, the action film turned out to be a pornographic film. As a result, Mara is thrown into a state of semantic upheaval as "action film" means something different in Ghana. She is, therefore, forced to find the appropriate vocabulary to negotiate her new experience.

This action that I saw horrified me and left me sitting in my seat heated up with my mouth wide open. The people on the screen, there were ... that is to say, they were several men and women all together, about fifteen or so; among them black women, Africans; they were doing it there ... there on the screen! They were actually doing the thing plain plain (sic) there on the screen before everybody. And there was no trace of shame or whatever on their faces. Not one bit! (*BH*, 61).

This encounter with a socio-cultural space of "raw obscenity" and shamelessness represents Mara's initiation into "a completely new society where the values were different from those at home" (*BH*, 62). Interestingly, the "action film" was Osey's way of initiating Mara from "primitiveness" into "living in civilization" (*BH*, 62). For Mara, however, the entire event "was a shock for me, my first shock, and *my first horror*" (*BH* 61; emphasis mine). It is precisely at this point, this choice of the word "horror," that I will argue that Conrad's *HoD* is subtly invoked in *BH*.

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<sup>10</sup> On the dangers of a single story, see Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The danger of a single story." TED Talk. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>. Retrieved 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2022

To grasp the dialogic meaning of “horror,” it is important to read it as a double-voiced discourse. In other words, “horror” is populated by two utterances and two semantic and axiological belief systems. As Bakhtin (1981: 305) argues, “even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect,” thereby generating two contradictory meanings. Following Bakhtin, therefore, I argue that lurking behind Mara’s story is another story, the author’s story. Double-voiced discourse serves two speakers at the same time and expresses two different intentions simultaneously: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 314). As indicated in the previous section, Darko’s decentering of Europe is an authorial function rather than the protagonist-narrator of the story. “Horror” therefore encapsulates two discourses or voices. In Mara’s usage of “horror,” the competent reader is called upon to hear the voice of the author, Darko, who is subtly referencing the literary archive, especially Marlow’s discovery of “horror” in Africa. This authorial voice thus frames Mara’s encounter with Germany/Europe as a journey into “the heart of darkness.” By summoning *HoD*, Darko also hints at the reversal of the imperial gaze and the relocation of the horror of recognition to Europe, as will be demonstrated below.

The Bakhtinian reading of “horror” proposed here complicates the general reading of Mara in the existing literature on *BH*. Mara’s encounter with Europe rewrites Marlow’s encounter with Kurtz’s mysterious African woman in the Congo. Marlow’s representation of the African woman suggests a contrast between her and Kurtz’s “Intended”, who is portrayed as a naïve European woman who must be protected from the hollow imperial rhetoric of civility and enlightenment. Marlow’s encounter with Kurtz’s nameless African mistress crystalizes Marlow’s feminization of Africa as not just passive and mute but as a mysterious and menacing succubus. Her passivity and speechlessness recalls Hegel’s infamous description of Africa as “the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit,” lacking the potential to actively participate in World History (Hegel; cited in Stahl, 2014, p. 5). To appreciate the force of this argument, one needs to pause and reflect on what it would mean if the “daughters” of Kurtz’s mysterious and speechless African mistress fictionally reciprocated Marlow’s adventure of discovery by journeying to Europe. To entertain this possibility is to foreground the questions “who sees”?

and “can the subaltern speak?” This is the dialogical essence of Mara’s usage of “horror” from the author’s ideological point of view.

The clearest illustration of Darko’s reversal of the imperial gaze can be seen in Mara’s encounter with the poster white woman. On arrival in Hamburg, Osey hails a taxi to take him and Mara to Akobi’s home. However, as they drive through the city, Mara is suddenly

confronted by a large poster of a ravishingly beautiful white woman, a perfect blond, in a slip, sitting on a stool with legs wide apart, eyes cunningly slanted, tongue calculatingly out and the tip upturned between snow-white teeth, just touching the upper scarlet lip seductively. Further down, the right forefinger just grazed her genitals. (*BH*, 68).

This encounter, which foregrounds the objectification and commodification of women and the postcolonial subject’s gaze in Europe, is crucial to understanding the dialogism at work in *BH* and how it reverses the imperial gaze. Mara’s encounter with the white woman on the poster rewrites Marlow’s encounter with the mysterious African woman in the Congo. In *BH*, Marlow’s spectacle of a “gorgeous apparition of a woman” is rewritten as “a ravishingly beautiful white woman.” To place Mara’s gaze as captured in the above extract in its proper dialogical context, it is vital to recall Marlow’s description of his encounter with Kurtz’s nameless African mistress:

And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments... She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent ... And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. (*HoD*, 126).

Both extracts illustrate the objectivizing function of the gaze. As Marion argues, “the gaze keeps objects in an objected state for the *I*...the gaze sees, but more originally, it possesses and

conserves” (214). The differences between the two extracts are also obvious. While Conrad’s woman is African, Darko’s poster woman is European. Also, while Conrad’s mute African mistress is presented as the embodiment of “African wilderness or primitive splendour” (Jervis, 1999, p. 68), Darko’s mute European woman is the ultimate sign of objectification of women and the embodiment of Europe’s investment in shame or what Mara calls “raw obscenity”. Like Conrad’s African woman, who is presented as a dangerous temptress, Darko’s European woman is presented, from Mara’s gaze, as a temptress in whom the will to transgress is packaged in the seductive poster that normalizes shame and the disgusting. Mara’s “ravishingly beautiful white woman” is presented as the embodiment of European capitalist decadence or profanation. This can be seen in Mara’s reaction: “I turned my eyes away, so disgusted, so scared and so unsure” (*BH*, 68). Darko displaces Marlow’s horror of recognition from Africa to Europe. In both extracts, the female body is the object of the gaze and Otherness.

What is it that constitutes “horror” for Mara in this cross-cultural encounter? Horror, for Mara, refers to the blasphemous proximity between the eroticization and objectification of the female body and Saint Paul’s Cathedral. The scandal for Mara is that Saint Paul’s Cathedral is located in “an area filled with wild posters of naked, crimson-lipped women” (*BH*, 69). It is evident then that “horror” or “the heart of darkness” in Europe, from Mara’s gaze, represents practices that not only undermine the postcolonial subject’s naïve image of Europe as “paradise” but also are antithetical to the socio-cultural values back home in Africa. This is contrary to the impression one gets from Conrad’s novella, wherein Africa is presented as an ontologically mysterious and threatening continent, and therefore “the ultimate horror is to go native” (Jervis, 1999, p.66).

Ironically, there is a sense in which Mara’s encounter with the white woman on the poster is framed as an invitation or interpellation to go native. To go “native” in Europe, as Darko’s subtle rewriting of *HoD* within the context of iniquitous forms of global mobility and her decentering of Europe suggests, is to be co-opted into the biopolitical machinery of corporeal objectification and, therefore, the impossibility of returning home. Unlike some postcolonial texts that reject “the sovereignty of the nation-state [by] embracing hybridity” (Ashcroft, 2020, p. 45), *BH* explores a form of death that revolves around the capitulation of the postcolonial subaltern woman to prostitution as an apparatus of dehumanization and shame. As

Penttinen (2007, p.7) argues, most migrant women are victims of a “shadow globalization that operates as forms of subjectivating power, producing and requiring certain kinds of subjectivities” through activities such as human trafficking, sex trafficking, and prostitution. From this perspective, Mara’s refusal, at the end of the novel, to return home is a tragedy and constitutes a critique of the postcolonial image of Europe as the horizon.

It is clear that attending to “horror” as a double-voiced discourse enables a re-reading of *BH* as a subtle dialogue with *HoD*. This sheds a new perspective on Mara’s representation of Europe as a place of sexual exploitation and violence, homosexuality, lurid pornographic advertisements, and stage shows. Rather than reading *BH* solely in terms of Mara’s tribulations, a dialogical reading with specific reference to Conrad’s novella reveals a complex narrative architecture that foregrounds Darko’s reversal of the imperial gaze and postcolonial representations of the West. By representing Europe as a place of shame, horror, raw obscenity, and commodification of female bodies from the global peripheries, Darko subtly subverts Europe as the horizon of hope for people from the Global South. Through Mara’s dehumanization and the disillusionment of characters like Vivian and Kaye in Europe, Darko shows that the West is not necessarily the promissory note imagined by postcolonial subjects. It is from this vantage point that *BH* emerges as a radical narrative of thinking otherwise, an intervention in the postcolonial subject’s valorization of Europe and the discourse of Afro-pessimism. As Odamtten (2007) has noted, the decade preceding the publication of *BH* was characterized by political instability and economic collapse in Ghana and several other African countries. In the 1980s, the IMF and the World Bank introduced crippling structural adjustment programmes to save African countries from economic collapse. For many Ghanaians and Africans at the time, Europe, especially Germany, became the salvific location.<sup>11</sup> Darko’s characters’ initial fascination with Europe is thus informed by the economic reality and failure of the postcolonial nation-state, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s. It is within this context that Europe emerged as the ‘horizon’ of possibility. For writers like Darko who have travelled to Germany and witnessed the disappointment and precarious condition of Europe’s

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<sup>11</sup> Many Ghanaians migrated to Germany, especially Hamburg and Frankfurt. Musically, this led to the emergence of a genre of highlife called “Burger-Highlife” whose architects were based mainly in Hamburg. See Carl 2014.

postcolonial subalterns, the crucial issue is whether an alternative horizon of expectation exists. The next section analyses Darko's response.

### **Affirming possibility, re-articulating Fanon for postcolonial transformation**

The preceding section examined "horror" as a double-voiced discourse or dialogical site of contestation in *BH*. Specifically, it focused on Darko's subtle rewriting of the imperial gaze. The analysis revealed that Mara's and the authorial discourse work together to decenter Europe as the "horizon" for postcolonial subjects. This raises the following critical questions: If the West is not the "paradise" that Mara and other postcolonial subalterns imagined but a place "hotter than hell," what alternative horizon is available for postcolonial people? If the desire for the West is founded on fantasies and localized mythologies, and the reality itself is disorienting and traumatic because the West is the place where the subaltern woman's body is "used and misused," where "the rot goes too deep" and therefore the subaltern can't return home...if the West is the place where the postcolonial subaltern woman "has nothing dignified and decent" to offer those at home other than "material things" (*BH* 118, 131, 140), is the postcolonial subaltern's predicament then one of hopelessness? What kind of emancipatory thought or action is essential for envisioning Africa as a horizon of hope? This section of the paper argues that a reading of the title of Darko's novel as a double-voiced discourse or dialogical site of affirmation provides the clearest insight into Darko's exploration of the above questions. Unlike "horror," which functions as a dialogical site of contestation and reversal of Marlow's imperial gaze, this section shows that *BH* is a subtle affirmation of Fanon's emancipatory ethic of de-linking.

The Fanonian subtext is located in the title of Darko's novel. At the literal level, the novel's title is a transliteration of the Akan word *Abrokyire*. As Odamtten (2007) argues, the title describes a specific socio-cultural imaginary of heroism and re-invention encapsulated in the Akan concept of *abrokyire*. Central to the idea of *Abrokyire* is the journey motif, wherein the traveler to the west is conceived as an adventurer who returns home as the bringer of material boon. As Armah shows in *Fragments* (1974), however, *Abrokyire* is informed primarily by a "cargo mentality". The archetypal figure of the *Abrokyire* ethos is the "been-to," who is socio-culturally celebrated in Ghana as a hero. Armah's *Fragments* explores this



notion of *Abrokyire* as a structure of thought that is antithetical to postcolonial nation formation and national consciousness. Brempong is presented by Armah as the ultimate example of the ‘been-to’ and the *Abrokyire* discourse of materialism. As Brempong tells Baako, Armah’s antihero who returns from the West with nothing, “it is no use going back [home] with nothing” (Armah, 1974, p. 76). So, although Mara cannot return home, she fulfils the socio-cultural obligation by sending material things home. While it is true that *BH* is framed by this indigenous discourse of transnational mobility, transformation, and re-invention at the subjective level, it is equally true, as the analysis in the preceding section has demonstrated, that Darko’s focus is also national and continental. It is this continental perspective that makes *BH* an intervention in the discourse of Afro-pessimism that dominated the 1980s. In other words, Darko’s title articulates a radical emancipatory thought and ethic for genuine postcolonial transformation.

To unravel the dialogical import of the novel’s title, one must turn to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. In the “Conclusion” to that book, Fanon (1963) bemoans the “nauseating mimicry” or “imitation” of Europe by the newly independent nation-states of the Third World (Fanon, 1963, pp. 251, 252). By “mimicry,” Fanon was referring to the situation where the Third World countries simply looked up to and imitated Europe as the model for socio-political transformation. Unlike Bhabha (1984) who views mimicry as a subversive tool, Fanon saw mimicry as a betrayal of decolonization. For Fanon, genuine decolonization implies a new set of relations and the invention of concepts rather than the consolidation of colonial practices of domination. In other words, if decolonization is to attain its eventual status as the “liquidation of all untruths implanted in the [native] by oppression [...], as the existence of men and women who are truly liberated [...] who are truly masters of all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society,” then the postcolonial nation-states must abandon Europe as a model (Fanon, p. 250). This is imperative because has Europe has also turned out to be “a negation of man” (Fanon, p. 252). It is within this Fanonian discourse of reconstituting postcolonial action that Darko’s title must be situated. Like Fanon, the title of Darko’s novel and Mara’s beleaguered fate in Europe suggest that the path to genuine postcolonial transformation or modernity does not lead to Europe or the West; it resides in a radical re-orientation of thought and action. This implies not only the decolonization of

concepts like “horizon” or the West but also the conscious development of political, economic, and social paradigms that derive from the historical experiences of colonial domination and expropriation. The necessity for this re-orientation emanates from the consciousness that genuine decolonization is the inauguration of “a new history of Man” or “the calling into question the colonial situation” (Fanon, p. 28). This new history is radically different from imperial history and governmentality (Fanon, p. 252). It is this Fanonian discourse that the title of Darko’s novel subtly affirms. Specifically, the novel’s title, *Beyond the Horizon*, dialogically summons Fanon’s emphatic claim that, “If we wish to live up to our peoples’ expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe” (p. 254). Put differently, if Europe in particular and the West, in general, have traditionally functioned as the utopian model and horizon for postcolonial people, genuine decolonization is a radical call to look “beyond” Europe and see Africa as the place of hope and transformation. The novel’s title, from this Fanonian context, can be read as an imperative or authoritative call on postcolonial people to look elsewhere or beyond the West as the horizon. That elsewhere is Africa.

This dialogical reading of the novel’s title sheds new insight on Darko’s ethical and political vision. From the authorial perspective, Mara’s experiences and fate in Germany confirm Fanon’s insight that the West is not necessarily the *locus amoenus* (“pleasant place”). Like “horror,” the novel’s title is populated by two voices, two perspectives, and two axiological systems. The first is the Akan *Abrokyire*, which the novel exposes as founded on illusions and materialism; the second is the Fanonian liberatory ethic of de-linking from imperial history and circuits of exploitation and domination. It is important to stress that the Fanonian ethic of de-linking rearticulated by Darko is not antithetical to the spirit of global interconnectedness. Both Fanon and Darko are keenly conscious of the merits of global interconnectedness and flows as long as this does not constitute new forms of imperial subjection. Based on this awareness, Fanon maintains that international consciousness lives and thrives on national consciousness (Fanon, p. 199).

By summoning Fanon in her title, Darko suggests that epistemic de-linking from the West is the strategic path to postcolonial transformation, modernity, or flourishing. Further, Darko’s call on postcolonial states to look beyond the “horizon” (the West) can be understood in terms of de Sousa Santos’ (2018, p. 295) “epistemological interruption” or Mignolo’s (2007,

p. 453) “de-colonial epistemic shift” that “denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity” located in Europe. Darko suggests that the desperate dash to the West by postcolonial subalterns can be curtailed by decentering of the myth of the West as the horizon of hope, promoting the political and socio-economic transformation of Africa, and the de-linking of Africa’s from the West. The Fanonian reading proposed here shows that Frías’ has been too quick in describing Mara’s decision to go into prostitution as an act of “vengeance, defiance, and self-assertion” (2002, p.12). The Fanonian reading reveals that Mara’s choice of prostitution is a tragic capitulation to global forces of capitalist exploitation. By deciding to make prostitution her profession, Mara has tragically gone “native” and has ironically been interpellated by the white woman on the poster; she has become part of the new wretched of the earth at the margins of the West. If there is any heroism or redeeming quality that can be associated with Mara, it is that, like Kurtz, she “did try to confront the fundamentals of self and meaning” (Jervis, p. 69). As Jervis notes regarding Kurtz, “a confrontation with the ‘heart of darkness’ is necessary, unavoidable, for only thus could the truth of the self [and the West] be revealed, if this ‘truth’ turns out to be incommunicable, or even a lie” (p. 69).

## **Conclusion**

*Beyond the Horizon* is a subtle meditation on the horizon of hope for postcolonial people. At the core of this meditation is a dialogical engagement with Conrad’s *HoD* and Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. The paper has demonstrated that “horror” and the novel’s title constitute double-voiced discourses or dialogical sites of contestation and affirmation that demystify the West as the place for postcolonial subaltern re-invention. By paying attention to the Conradian and Fanonian intertexts, the paper has shown that Darko subtly frames Mara’s encounter with Europe as a journey into the “heart of darkness,” reverses Marlow’s imperial gaze, and re-affirms Fanon’s ethic of de-linking from the West as a strategic act of abandoning a culture of dependency. It is from this perspective that *BH* may be described as a radical narrative of thinking otherwise. Today, the dehumanizing and tragic conditions of sub-Saharan Africans on the North African coast and in the Italian city of Lampedusa call for concrete improvements in the social, economic and political realities in Africa in order to stem the tide of flight to the West. Africa needs the support of the West and, lately, China, to be able to tap into its potential

for greatness. However, Africa must not substitute this support for dependency. More importantly, the possibility of reversing the imperial gaze or looking beyond the West requires a radical deconstruction of imposed myths and what de Sousa Santos calls “the cognitive Empire” that position the West as the utopian place of hope and transformation for postcolonial subalterns and Africa as place of flight. *BH* amply demonstrates a key insight: novels think, and one of the ways they think is through the dialogism of the word or double-voiced discourse.

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