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A Textual Analysis of Street Children's Survival Strategies in Amma Darko's *Faceless*

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
	Anchored on textual analysis and theoretical insights from (interactional) sociolinguistics, (positive) psychology and neuroscience, the current paper aims at analyzing the various strategies that the street children, named or nameless, etc. in Amma Darko's Faceless (2003) draw on to ensure their survival on the streets. The study further demonstrates how this novel, beyond its representation of the social issue of street children, depicts the outstanding resourcefulness of many African children who have to cater and fend for themselves on the streets. The findings reveal that these children have used such survival strategies as imitating or behaving in an adult-like manner, bonding, learning and using a code, hustling, accepting and adapting to one's reality and floating-out-of-one's body to cope with life on the streets.

1. Introduction

Amma Darko's third novel entitled *Faceless* (2003) has been recently studied to highlight the impact of parental neglect/irresponsible parenting on a family setting, mostly on children (Okyeso, 2013; Koussouhon, Akogbéto and Allagbé, 2015b; Allagbé, 2016), the problematics of childbearing and the issue of street children and their plausible consequences on the individual and by extension the society as a whole (Anate, 2014), the root-cause of the disruption of infant care in Ghana and its drawbacks (Oppong, 2004), the limitations of feminist trends which tend to liberate women from the traditional shackles of patriarchy at the expense of men, and most especially, at the expense of children (Tchibozo-Laine, 2019), the plight of street children as a social tragedy (Awitor, 2014), etc. While these studies have profusely emphasized the role of social change (which has brought about the disarticulation of traditional African social structures) as the driving force underlying the social issue of street children- the main theme that threads the plot of the novel- in the fictional text; none of them has actually provided some hints on how these children work out their resourcefulness and know-how to cope with life on the streets. This is the research gap that the current study sets out to fill in.

As said earlier, the present research work aims at analyzing the various strategies that the street children in Darko's *Faceless* (2003) draw on to ensure their survival on the streets. This novel set in the post-independence, post-colonial, and post-modernist era depicts a very desolating and heart-rending social situation of street children in contemporary Ghanaian society. These children, named (Baby T, Fofo, Odarley, Poison, etc.) or nameless, most of whom surprisingly still have their mother, their father or even both of them alive, are pitilessly driven out into the hungry and insatiable arms and claws of the streets. In other words, these children are generously sold out by their parents to the harsh and hellish life on the streets wherein they have to cater and fend for themselves and in some cases provide means to sustain their siblings and parents back home. The symbolically represented streets, in the novel under study, constitute a *No man's land*; i.e., a depersonalized land filled with misery, abject poverty, hunger, squalor, and all sorts of unimaginable evil. The streets are also symbolized in the fiction as a true jungle marked by a perpetual struggle for dominance, power, and survival. Underlying the streets is the principle of *the survival of the fittest*, a phrase coined and first used by the Darwinian evolutionary theorist, Herbert Spencer,

in his *Principles of Biology* (1864) (https://en.m.wikipedia.org). The streets in this literary piece are termed 'Sodom and Gomorrah.' According to Allagbé (2016:25), 'Sodom and Gomorrah' is a:

> place name (a fictionalized market name in Accra city) (which) actually alludes to the Biblical historical "Sodom and Gomorrah". The "Sodom and Gomorrah" in the Holy Bible (see Genesis 19:1-29) is a land full of iniquities, a place of moral decadence and perdition. By transposing this Biblical meaning into her literary world, Darko naturally seeks to create a strong symbolic image therein. The image she creates here is that of a place where the people (male and female alike) therein are submitted to abject and rampant poverty expressed by such aspects as lack of basic social amenities, squalid environment, human suffering, joblessness, etc.

To unravel the various strategies these children use for their survival, in Sodom and Gomorrah, the study seeks to draw on textual analysis.

2. Methodology

As stated above, this paper draws on textual analysis. Textual analysis, by definition, is a methodology that involves understanding language, symbols and/or pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences (http://methods.sagepub.com). It is also considered as a qualitative method for gathering, processing, and interpreting text data (http://monkeylearn.com). It follows from the foregoing definitions that textual analysis is a careful, critical or close reading of a text which aims at gaining a full insight into or understanding its entire content. It can also be perceived as a content analysis. Combining this method with theoretical insights from (interactional) sociolinguistics, (positive) psychology and neuroscience, this study qualitatively seeks to work out and explain *in situ* the various strategies the street children in Darko's *Faceless* (2003) draw on to cope with life on the streets.

3. A Textual Analysis of Street Children's Survival Strategies in the Novel

As expressed right from the onset, the textual analysis of Darko's *Faceless* (2003) has exuded that the street children therein have used such strategies as *imitating or behaving like adults*, *bonding*, *learning and using a code*, *hustling*, *accepting and adapting to one's reality* and *floating-out-of-one's body* to ensure their survival on the streets. The main characters in the novel have actually used the above mentioned strategies in various contexts and for various purposes.

Imitating or Behaving like Adults

Imitating someone means 'reproducing the person's behavior' or 'behaving like the person.' The street children in Darko's *Faceless* (2003) imitate or behave perfectly in an adult-like manner in order to survive on the streets. The opening paragraph of the novel provides some insightful textual clues which prove this point. Describing the female protagonist, Fofo, and her behavior in relation to other street children, the heterodiegetic narrator uses the following terms:

> Fofo would have spent the Sunday night before Monday dawn with her friends across the road at the squatters' enclave of Sodom and Gomorrah watching adult films her fourteen years required her to stay away from, and drinking directly from bottles of *akpeteshie*, or at best, some slightly milder locally produced gin. Ultimately, she would have found herself waking up Monday morning beside one of her age group friends, both of them naked, hazy and disconcerted and oblivious to what time during the night they had stripped off their clothes and what exactly they had done with their nakedness (Darko, 2003, p.1).

The text above embodies three deeds that adults do which street children imitate or copy. One of them is watching erotic films (e.g. porn/blue films). Another one is drinking *akpeteshie* or locally produced gin. The last but not the least is having sex. These immature children, whose age obviously does not exceed fourteen, as indicated by the text above, are already sexually active. And the striking thing about these children's expression of their sexually active behavior is that they make love to one another under the grip of alcohol and in a promiscuous manner. Elsewhere in the novel, the narrator depicts Fofo as a premature adult: "A part of Fofo was and would always remain the fourteen year-old that she was; but the harshness of life on the streets had also made a premature adult of part of her. She was both a child and an adult and could act like both, talk like both, think like both and feel like both" (Darko, 2003, p.22).

The ability to shift from being a child to being an adult or acting alternately as both is a valued strategy that Fofo, like any other street child, needs in order to survive on the streets. It must be recalled here that being a child is a sign of 'softness/weakness' and being an adult is a sign of 'toughness/ruggedness'. The narrator actually associates the former semiotically with 'shedding tears' and the latter with 'suppressing tears' in the following passage: ''They (the tears) were

suppressed for too long: tears that could not be shed on the streets where toughness was the prescription for survival and tears were a sign of weakness; tears held back lest they reveal her (Fofo's) fourteen years'' (Darko, 2003, p. 160). The sign of 'toughness/ruggedness', as the narration further reveals, is more articulated and entrenched in male street children than in their female counterparts. For this reason, the narrator says that ''. . . it is more difficult to break the 'streetness' in boys from the streets than in girls. Abused young males, in particular, are also prone to becoming abusers themselves'' (p. 169). In fact, boys are the tough and rugged ones on the streets; they dominate, abuse, and terrorize their female counterparts. By associating toughness/ruggedness with boys, the narrator simply suggests that they are the norm (that female street children should look up to. Fofo, actually, imitates the established norm when she poses as a boy to pick Kabria's purse (pp. 45-47), and that they hold and exercise power on the streets. The street lord, in Sodom and Gomorrah, is actually a male and is called Poison; a name that is ''naturally predisposed to or teleologically conjured up to be portentous, dangerous, cruel, heartless, and inhuman'' (Allagbé, 2016, p. 24).

Bonding

Bonding is defined as the formation of a close relationship (as between a mother and a child or between a person and an animal) especially through frequent or constant association (https://www.merriam-webster.com). A **bond** between people is a strong feeling of friendship, love, or shared beliefs and experiences that unites them (https://www.collinsdictionary.com). It is obvious in the foregoing that bonding is an interactional or a socialization process that constantly brings two or more people together. With time, these people tend to develop and share in common like attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and experiences and exert some influence on one another.

To survive on the streets, Fofo has to bond with street girls like Odarley while Poison has to bond with other street boys. Fofo and Odarley are represented, in the novel, as close friends. They share their joys and sorrows together on the streets. For instance, when Fofo has luckily escaped Poison's attempts to rape her (Darko, 2003, p.3-4), the first place her instincts direct her to is Odarley's abode (p. 5). She narrates what she has experienced (her fears and worries) to her friend. As they move to the dump (pp.6-9), Fofo tells Odarley, her friend, what she has experienced with the street lord. She repeatedly alludes to this as a 'big trouble'. In their conversation, one can notice many textual and contextual clues which point to camaraderie between the two characters. When Poison (also called Macho in the fiction) shows up at the dump, causing everyone to run *helter-skelter*, and picks Fofo's plastic bag, a bag containing all her money from the previous week, Fofo breaks down in tears. Odarley stands by her side in support, asking her what she intends to do now. As she decides to see her mother, Maa Tsuru, Odarley follows her there. In addition, she even accepts to take the lead for Fofo by announcing her arrival to Maa Tsuru (pp. 18-20). Like Fofo and Odarley, Poison, who initially is an extremely shy and very soft speaking boy, has to bond too with other street boys for his survival, when he runs away from home to join the streets at the age of eight. Then, as we are told by the narrator, ''Poison landed in bad company on the streets the moment he landed there'' (p.169). As mentioned earlier, all these characters (male and female alike) need to bond with others to ensure their integration as well as their survival on the streets. But, their integration cannot be facilitated without a code.

Learning and Using a Code

In sociolinguistics, the term 'code' refers to any kind of system that two or more people employ for communication (Wardhaugh, 2006). A code is also a neutral term which can be used to denote a language, a variety of language, a dialect, a speech style or a register (p. 88). On the streets, there are as many codes as there are many social groups or/and sub-groups. In fact, a given group or sub-group is typified and differentiated from others by its code. Thus, a key to a group membership and its inherent advantages (such as protection, mutual assistance, etc.) is the ability to learn and use its code. In this perspective, it can be posited that no individual can survive on the streets without belonging to a group. And being a member of a group simply implies knowing how to use its code.

Fofo and Odarley, for instance, in their conversation (Darko, 2003, pp. 5-9) seem to belong to the same group in that they use a code that both of them seemingly understand very well. This code (a Ghanaian or an Accra English) is characterized by features of spoken language. Terms like ''Shshshshshsh . . .'', ''Trouble?'' (p. 5), ''Ah!'', ''You are wearing no underpants?'', ''Hm'' (p. 6), etc., prove this fact. Fofo and Odarley also seem to code-switch or style-shift; i.e., they alternate between two codes or vary their speech styles: English and a dialect of a Ghanaian native language. Culture-specific features like ''Mami Adzorkor's kenkey balls'', ''*Ebei*'', ''Kwansima Fante's butter bread'' (p. 7), etc., clearly exude this aspect. The foregoing clearly denotes a cultural and linguistic hybridity or/and multicultural setting (Allagbé and Alou, 2020, p. 7).

The context of situation seems to determine the choice of a given code and the communicative as well as the social behavior of its users. Consider Fofo's speech patterns when she has come back from Aunty Dina's home (where she has spent some

days away from the streets) to Sodom and Gomorrah in the company of Kabria (a MUTE worker). MUTE is a non-governmental organization interested in information gathering and documentation and Sylv Po (a radio presenter at Harvest FM): (1) ''Don't turn! (2) Don't look around. (3) They are watching us!'' she warned unexpectedly. (4) Sylv Po became alarmed. ''From where?'' (5) ''Cool it!'' Kabria came in. (6) ''Don't attract attention.'' (p. 154). In (1) and (2), Fofo obviously appears to be in a higher position in that she gives orders to her listeners. This may be due to the fact that she is on a territory she knows better than they do; she knows the required *habitus* (to borrow the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's terms) (which she has acquired and internalized over time through *socialization* and *mimesis*) that one must put on in such a place. Kabria too seems to know this tacit requirement very well in that she behaves in a much similar way as Fofo. This is to say, Kabria gives orders to Sylv Po (5 and 6). Unlike Fofo and Kabria who obviously know how to behave on the streets, Sylv Po's attitude proves that he is completely at loss. In fact, his echo question (5) shows that he is a *greenhorn* here. In (3), Fofo states a fact; a fact which exudes once more her mastery of the streets. The pronoun ''They'' in (3) strongly hinges on the context of situation for its meaning. In fact, the meaning of this pronoun is text-external and then exophoric in nature.

In the same token, Poison's speech reveals features typifying his group's code. Consider his idiolect when he is attempting to rape Fofo: (1) ''You want to live?'' Fofo moaned and nodded under the gravity of his hands. (2) ''Then no noise!'' (Darko, 2003, p. 3). The first utterance (1) is actually a full statement phonologically high-pitched into a question. But the second one (2) is a mere fragment or an elliptical imperative, the full form of which would be ''Don't make a noise!'' or ''You should not make a noise!''. All these features pertain to a spoken mode. Consider again his speech when he is being queried by Kabria and Sylv Po (both are playing the role of detectives here) about Baby T's death: (3) ''I did beat the girl up, but I did not kill her!'' he repeated. (4) ''Why would I kill a girl who was making lots of money for me? Maami Broni would bear me out. (6) You can talk to her if you like. (7) I did beat her up but I left her crying, not dead. (8) She wouldn't be crying if she was dead, would she?'' (p. 173). All these sentences are full or elongated sentences with an elaborate syntactic structure. This is an attribute of written language. In addition, all the sentences contain more than one clause. This indicates a spoken mode once again. The reason for this shift in Poison's speech is perhaps because he is aware of the social status of his addressees; perhaps he knows that his interlocutors are educated. So, for this reason, he has to adapt his language to suit their social or/and educational background/level. What the various linguistic features identified in these speakers' speech makes clear here is their speech styles (Coupland, 2007) or conversational styles (Tannen, 2005) and speaker positions (Blommaert, 2005). Perhaps, this strategy is needed in business too.

Hustling

Hustling, as we understand it, refers to working hard to earn money or earning money through illegal or unscrupulous means. All the street children (male and female alike) in Darko's fiction are hustlers (daytime and nighttime). Fofo, for instance, in the opening paragraph of the novel is depicted as a washer of carrots at the vegetables wholesale market (Darko 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, she is represented by Odarley as a pickpocket/pilferer (p. 5) whose real symbolic scene we later discover on (pp. 45-47) wherein she poses as a boy to pick/pilfer Kabria's purse. That's actually where they have met for the first time. As the narration overtly reveals, Fofo is doing all this to raise money to feed herself and survive on the streets. However, Fofo's encounter with Kabria, a very kind and generous woman, moves her feet from the streets and sets them on a new road to rehabilitation. Most of Fofo's age mates, on the streets, are shoeshine boys, iced water sellers, pilferers/pickpockets/thieves and prostitutes.

When Poison lands on the streets at the age of eight, he starts out as a thief/pilferer too. He steals in car tape-decks. He progresses in this job very well, so much so that within a couple of days he begins to feel that he masters and controls the streets. The narrator puts this better: ''Within days, he had mastered in car tape-deck thefts. The more he stole, and got away with, the more confident he became. And the more confident he grew, the more he felt in control of the streets'' (Darko, 2003, p. 169). Later, he becomes bored with this in car tape-deck theft and turns to an errand boy and supervisor for an inner city prostitute (an anonymous character). Over time, he gains the required experience to run his own pimping business, and ''Then he embarked on an aggressive recruitment of girls to own'' (p. 170). He works with Maami Broni. In fact, Fofo's elder sister, Baby T, is handed out to Maami Broni by her mother, Maa Tsuru, and her stepfather, Nii Kpakpo, to work for her as a housemaid. Maa Tsuru and Nii Kpakpo ravenously feed on Baby T's incomes. But none of them dares to find out if the little girl is fine or not where she is placed. All that they care for is what she brings in; i.e., money. This denotes irresponsible parenting/parental irresponsibility. The fact here is that Baby T is not used as a housemaid but rather as a prostitute under Poison's control. Unfortunately, she loses her life in prostitution. When Fofo's mother informs Fofo about Baby T's death, this is how she reacts, tipping her mother completely off the balance:

> Fofo's eyes widened. ''Baby T?'' Maa Tsuru began to shake. Fofo just sat there and stared at her. She felt
> no immediate pain. Even the anger and mixed feelings lay low. In her mind's eye was a recollection of

the last time she laid her eyes on her sister: Baby T's reddish and swollen eyes from too much crying, with her belongings tied up in an old headscarf and held in loosely in her right hand as she followed Maami Broni out of the compound (Darko, 2003, p. 23).

Accepting and Adapting to One's Reality

Another strategy the street children, in the novel under study, employ to survive on the streets is accepting and adapting to their reality. This strategy seems to stem from positive psychology. **Positive psychology** is ''the study of the ''good life,'' or the positive aspects of the human experience that make life worth living. As an art, it focuses on both the individual and societal well-being'' (https://en.m.wikipedia.org). It is clear in the foregoing that there are always some positive aspects to any human experience (whether good or bad). In fact, these positive aspects are what positive psychologists often lay emphasis on to help individuals live a happy life. They also emphasize on the fact that positive psychology can effect a social change. In this sense, Christie Napa Scollon and Laura A. King (in Robert Biswas-Diener, 2011, p. 1) argue that ''the human capacity to imagine and envision a better or ideal life is linked to the emergence of social progress.''

The positive aspects in the street children's experience which foster their happiness and societal well-being, on the streets , are *their bonding with one another*, *their belonging to a group/gang* and *their having a job* (legal or not). It is true that the weight of 'streetness' is variably supported depending on such sociological factors as gender, age, and social background. Perhaps, we should argue that these factors interact with and influence the brain and other cognitive abilities. When we consider Fofo and Odarley, for instance, there is a sharp contrast between them with regard to the ways they approach their reality. This has a lasting effect on their societal well-being. Fofo has not been sacked from home but she is obviously less happy than her friend, Odarley, who has been sacked like a fowl from home by her mother (Darko, 2003, p. 25). In the novel, it is said that Fofo hates her situation with passion (p. 160) and strongly holds her mother responsible for this misadventure. Because of this, Fofo has developed a confrontational and revolting attitude towards her mother (pp. 20-26).

Odarley, on the contrary, appears to have utterly accepted and adapted herself to her reality. In other words, she seems to have envisioned an ideal life for herself on the streets. Nowhere in the novel has one come across Odarley complaining about her situation or even making any attempt to get rid of it. In the same way, if we attempt to compare Poison to Fofo and Odarley, we would notice that Poison is the happiest. Poison's happiness, as a matter fact, is favored by his male gender and social background. It must be recalled at this level that the narrator semiotically associates 'toughness/ruggedness' with boys. As for the social background or precisely the family history of Poison, we notice that he has repeatedly undergone physical violence in the hands of his stepfather (Darko, 2003, p. 169), and as a result, he is readily prone to recycling violence too. Poison's domestic violent experience, added to the harshness of the streets, has shaped him into a very callous, cold-blooded and cruel person. In fact, he is a true archetype of a perfect individual/fit in/for the life on the streets.

Floating-out-of-One's Body

Floating-out-of-one's body or an out-of-body-experience (OBE or sometimes OOBE) is an experience in which a person experiences the world from a location outside his/her body (https://en.m.wikipedia.org). This strategy is used by Fofo, the female protagonist, in the novel. She recounts this experience to her mother, Maa Tsuru, Kabria and Sylv Po in the following text:

> ''You know something?'' Fofo addressed Kabria, ''Sometimes I imagine myself to be outside of myself. I will float out of myself and watch with pity the miserable life led by this young girl called Fofo. Later, when I reunite with myself, the weight of it all hits me once again. Then I'll shake with misery. And when I happen to be alone, cry.'' No one spoke. Fofo went on. ''Odarley was always saying that I fantasise too much. Sometimes she wasn't sure which of the stories I told her were real or imagined. When I float out of myself, I watch this poor girl who is I, and I feel great pity for both mother and me. Isn't that funny?'' (Darko, 2003, p. 160)

As the text above exudes, Fofo uses the OBE strategy to momentarily escape from the suffering of the physical world; i.e., the bodily, moral, and spiritual suffering on the streets. In fact, as her idiolect reveals, when she is out of her body, she sees her 'self'. This paranormal experience provides her with the priced opportunity to reflect on her 'self', her miserable life and feel a great pity for her mother, Maa Tsuru, and herself. With this bi-locational body experience, she is enabled to perceive and understand beyond the surface or/and individual levels the root-cause of her sad situation or misadventure. With this strategy still, there is no doubt whatsoever that Fofo is empowered to attenuate the yolk of 'streetness' on her life. This is how she is able to cope with life on the streets.

4. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the various strategies the street children in Darko's *Faceless* (2003) use to ensure their survival and cope with life on the streets. To reach this goal, the study has drawn on textual analysis. Combining this method with theoretical insights from (interactional) sociolinguistics, (positive) psychology and neuroscience, it has qualitatively sought to work out and explain *in situ* the various strategies the street children in Darko's fiction have drawn on to cope with the harsh reality of life on the streets.

The textual analysis of the novel has revealed that the street children, named (Baby T, Fofo, Odarley, Poison, etc.) or nameless, have used such strategies as *imitating or behaving like adults*, *bonding*, *learning and using a code*, *hustling*, *accepting and adapting to one's reality* and *floating-out-of-one's body* to ensure their survival on the streets. As the analysis has further exuded, all these strategies but one have been selected by all the street children on purpose alternately in various or differing contexts. The only distinct survival strategy '*floating-out-of-one's body'* has been used by Fofo, the female protagonist, on purpose. She has, accordingly, used this strategy to momentarily escape from the bodily, moral, and spiritual suffering on the streets. While this study has attempted to analyze the various strategies street children in Darko's *Faceless* (2003) draw on to survive on the streets, it has not examined in detail how these children use language to negotiate social (group) identity and social relations, future research could look into this aspect. Future research could also explore how street children perceive life or use language to represent social reality.

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