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CONTENT

SECTION A: LANGUAGE

Pragmatic Analysis of Tones and Tonal Patterns in Igala Language Abdul, Mohammed Adem	1
Process Choice Analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Inauguration Speech Mohammed Maikiyari, Ph.D and Ramatu Tijani Oziti	12
Quantifiers in English and Izhia: A Minimalist Investigation Maria-Helen Ekah, Ph.D and Chibueze Egbe Aleke	26
A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Images of Banditry in <i>Daily Trust Newspaper</i> Cartoons Umar Uba Abubakar, Ph.D., Benjamin Iorbee, Ph.D and Queen Nguhemem Jebe-Tume	42
Critical Discourse Analysis of Persuasion in Donald Trump's 2024 Victory Speech Hauwa Giwa-Ali, Ph.D	60
Political Discourse Analysis of Selected Plenary Speeches of Nigeria's Senate President Godswill Akpabio Ahmad Musa Saleh and Abdul'aziz Bako, Ph.D	73
Rethinking Social Order: Racism within and After Covid-19 Pandemic Abaya, Henry Demenongo	84
Irregularities In The Grammar of the English Language: Blindspots for Pedagogical Attention in ESL Classrooms Cecilia Folasade Ojetunde, Ph.D and Osipeju, Babasola Samuel	105
An Analysis of Lexical Cohesive Devices in Governor Ahmadu Fintiri's Inauguration Speech Muazu Hassan and Hauwa Giwa-Ali, Ph.D	121
Non-observance of Grice's Maxims: A Study of Some Selected Dialogues in the Play – Harvest of Corruption Abdulkadir Adamu and Usman Maigari Malala	140
The Morphology of Personal Names in English and Ebira Languages Amina Salisu Aliyu, Ph.D, Ahmadu Mohammed Dauda, Ph.D and James Jarafu Jawur	153
Impact of Gamification on Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention among Private Secondary School English Learners In Lagos State, Nigeria Adedokun, James Adekunle and Olabode, Adeyinka Ayoola, Ph.D	169

The Expansionist Approach to the Teaching of the English Grammatical Categories: Examples with the Naming Category Khabyr Fasasi	187
Digital Media Learning and Postmodernist Classroom Innovations in Nigerian Universities Maggai Tsokwa and Fatima Inuwa	201
The Pronunciation of the New English Native Speakers in Nigeria Ngor, Cornelius Iko-awaji	210
Lexico-Semantic Analysis of ASUU-FGN Impasse In Nigerian Newspapers Awoniyi Olalekan Ogundeji and Happiness Uduk, Ph.D	222
A Critical Stylistic Analysis of a Channels Television Show, 'Politics Today' Waliyah A. Akeju and Muhyideen Kolawole Ayuba	237
An Investigation on Functionality and Usage of Language Laboratories for Teaching Oral English in Colleges of Education in Bauchi State Bakoji Mohammed Fema, PhD, Alhaji Abubakar, PhD and Fatima Mohammed	249
A Pragmatic Investigation of the Speech of Former President Muhammadu Buhari on Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 Habu Yusuf	262
Rhetoricity In Orality: An Analysis of Muhammadu Dan’Anace’s “Shagon Mafara” Garba Adamu, Ph.D and Ashiru Abdullahi	277
A Semantic Analysis of Selected Mwaghavul Proverbs Danji Sabo and Kyetu Mandyen Danlami	286
Investigating Linguistic Features of North-East Nigerian Suicide Notes Yunana Ahmed, Ph.D and Danladi, Daniel Boyi	300
A Morphological Study of Derivational Patterns In Android Smartphone Terminologies Ahmadu Mohammed Dauda, Ph.D and Abdulkarim Musa Yola	315
Lexical choices and Ideology in Nigeria’s Security and Development Discourse in the Nigeria’s Media Murjanatu Sulaiman-Shika	326
Syntax and Semantics Interface Mohammed Gambo, Ph.D	346
Colonial Legacy in Tunde Kelani's <i>Saworoide</i> : Language, Power, and Resistance Okunnuwa, Sunday J. Ph.D, Ibrahim, Wahab Adegbayi, and Sobande, Olukayode Olukemi	355

SECTION B: LITERATURE

- An Appraisal of Cult Symbols In The Selected Songs of American POP Artists
Tanimu, Abubakar (Prof) and Adekunle, Joseph 365
- Enlightenment for Empowerment: A Feminist Reading of Safiya Yero'S Najah
Manta G. Yadok and Ishaya: Bilyaminu Salman 381
- Arab-Muslim Immigrants and the Limits of Cultural Citizenship in H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*
Olamiposi Oyeleye, Ph.D., Oladiran Damilola Peju, Ph.D. and PatrickbCharles Alex, Ph.D. 395
- The Artist and Leadership Failure In Africa: A Study of Ngugi Wa Thiong'O'S Wizard of The Crow
Dr. Manasseh Terwase Iortyer, Prof. Jeff Godwin Doki and Bizuum Godwill Yadok 411
- Narratives of Conflict: A Literary Exploration of Boko Haram's Impact in Politics and Security in Nigeria's Northeast Since 2009
Markus Ishaku 421
- Literary Creativity and the Condition of the Nigerian Writer in the Age of Globalization and Capitalist Economy
Adebayo, Abidemi Olufemi, PhD and Bukola, Olubunmi Iyabo, M.A 431
- Amali's Faces of Shame as Reflection of Leadership at the Altar of Ethics and Decorum
Isah Ibrahim PhD 442
- Of Mothers as Mistresses: Jocasta Complex and Transference in Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's Season of Crimson Blossoms.
David Mikailu Ph.D. 452
- Stylistic Explorations of Love: Conceptual Metaphor In Mariama Bâ'S So Long a Letter and Zaynab Alkali'S The Virtuous Woman
Anwar Danjuma, Maryam Mukhtar Abdullahi, Muntari Babangida and Sulaiman Harisu 462
- The Influence of Nigerian Folktales on National Identity and Values
Jimoh, Olumide Yusuf, Ph.D. and Adedokun, James Adekunle 474
- Discontents and the Quest for National Rebirth in Karen King-Aribisala's Kicking Tongues
Okache C. Odey 487
- An Assessment of Performance of Bauchi State Senior Secondary School Students in Literature-In-English
Professor Asabe Sadiya Mohammed, Dr Alhaji Abubakar and Haruna Shuaibu Hardawa 496

Betwixt And Between Colonial Hegemony and Contemporaneity: Examining The Voyage of Transmutation In African Drama

Andrew Aondofa Nyikyaa 508

Investigating the Educational Advisory Roles of Tera Proverbs

Alheri Bulus 527

SECTION C: COMMUNICATION

The Media Influence on Economic Development Through Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

DANGO, Salamatu Eshi and ABDULLAHI, Hussaina Abaji 535

Social Media Discourse and Peace Negotiations in Contemporary Nigeria

Peter Ochefu Okpeh, Ph.D., Theodore Shey Nsairun and Okpeadua Sony Okpeadua, PhD 546

When Robots take over Journalism: systemic Considerations for Artificial Intelligence and Practical Realities in Nigerian Television Newsroom

Maggai Tsokwa and Tebrimam Useni Andefatso 560

Mitigating Fake News Through Media Literacy Education: The Perception and Experience of Masaka Market Traders in Karu

Ben Ita Odeba, Ayuba Ummah Ibrahim and Desmond Onyemechi Okocha, PhD. 574

An Assessment of Adherence to Journalism Code of Conduct among Journalists in Plateau State

Dorcas Agabison, Prof. Greg H. Ezeah, Maggai Tsokwa and Orya Theophilus Tertsea 597

An Assessment of the Two-Way Communication Model of Public Relations Used During the University of Jos School Fees Increase in 2023

James E. Amad, Evaristus J. Ugboma and Chidimma Precious Okechukwu 616

An Assessment of the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Business Communication in Lafia, Nasarawa state and Makurdi, Benue state, Central Nigeria

EIMOGA Audu 632

SECTION D: CREATIVE WORKS/BOOK REVIEW

Poems for Savannah Journal of Language, Literature and Communication Studies

Ismail Bala 647

The Loss-Land

Fatima Inuwa 652



Dustbins and Dreams Abdulkadir Mubarak	657
The Desperate: Desire of a Feminine Soul Faith Nkeri Aliyu	664
Gumakan Zamani: A Book Review Mohammad Abubakar M.	667



Enlightenment for Empowerment: A Feminist Reading of Safiya Yero'S *Najah*

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Abstract

One of the key advocacies of feminism is the education of women, an educated woman is a conscious and emancipated woman; education, for feminists is a tool for enlightenment. This position has been affirmed by feminist writers like Buchi Emecheta, Zainab Alkali, Mariam Ba and many others. This paper looks at "Enlightenment" as a transformative strategy that impacts the lives of both rural and urban women who are not formally educated. Enlightenment according to Immanuel Kant is a form of emergence from self-imposed immaturity which allows one to be courageous and resolute in decision making. This form of enlightenment is reflected in the characters of Naja and Zarah who championed the course of uneducated women in the rural areas and educated women who are faced with domestic violence in urban areas. The paper adopts Stiwanism, a strand of feminist theory that exposes the ideologies that subjugate women and advocates for transformative strategies that create gender equality and unity of purpose. Through qualitative research methodology, the paper engaged in close reading of the primary text. The paper concludes women who question religious and societal taboos are mostly termed rebellious for having the courage to do so, and the novel is not only a personal expression but also a means to challenge and re-define societal norms, contributing to broader feminist discourses.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Education, Stiwanism, Feminism, Social Equity, Women.

Introduction

In traditional African societies, women education was seen as waste of time and resources since they are not expected to participate in decision making or leadership roles. African society preferences of

education are mostly given to the men compared to women due to cultural norms, traditions and religious injunctions that forbid the woman to speak or intermingle with men. Thanks to feminist movements around the world and a growing



number of writers and activists, this view is gradually but surely being challenged. In Africa, Nigeria and more specifically, northern Nigeria, there has been a subtle and yet potent charge, mostly led by female writers to change the narratives. The need to educate the girl-child and womenfolk is gaining momentum. The complexities of modern societies have made it impossible to ignore the importance of women education. Despite stiff religious and cultural factors militating against this, many female fiction writers in the region have written works to seek not only to educate women but also empower them to be independent and expressive, largely inspired by early writers like Emecheta, Ba, Nwapa and others. The importance of women education cannot be overemphasized. As Esther Duflo posited, "...enhancing women's participation in education is essential to the society's development and it contributes to economic growth and eradication of poverty." (46)

Women Writers and Empowerment

African female writers have been advocating for the emancipation of women in Africa since the 1960s. Writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Ba, Ama ata Aidoo and many others are considered pioneers in this regard. Nwapa's *Efuru* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* are towering inspirations for women writing in Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria, writers like Abubakar Gimba, Zainab Alkali, Razinat Mohammed, Safiya Yero and others have championed the course

for women's liberation through education in their works, using art as a torch to shine the light on the plight of women in society. Safiya Yero's *Naja* is one of such works. In it, she focuses more on the concept of enlightenment as a key to women's liberation. In Razinat Mohammed's collection of short stories, *Love Like a Women's*, explored by Fatima Abubakar and Mustapha Abubakar in an article "Education as Panacea for Female Subjugation and Alienation in Northern Nigeria" Points out opposing views to the role of education as key to women's liberation from oppression. They assert that while education is seen by Zainab Alkali as a tool that gives the Northern Woman her voice and the feeling of self-worth, Razinat Mohammed shows that education does not shield the educated northern Nigerian women from subjugation, alienation and oppression not only from the male folk but their fellow women as well because of the age long cultural, economic and social system designed and constructed by the society.

Feminist writers, especially female writers have drawn the ire of some critics who dismissed them as "...wayward, irresponsible and disgruntled women who are seeking undue attention in a phallocratic society" (56). But from what we have seen in the works of Nigerian female writers referenced as feminists, the goal of most of them is not necessarily to compete with men but to ensure the woman enjoys a humane condition where she is allowed to coexist with basic rights that



recognises her potentials and enables her to pursue the good things of life like even if under the tutelage of a man. As Fwangyil puts it “these writers have proved in their works that women are not vengeance seekers due to the various forms of subjugation they face in the society; rather, they are complementary partners with the men towards the development of the society”. (56). The goal of feminist writers is create a fair and equitable society where both women and men, boys and girls can live up their potentials and flourish. In the novel under review we see this goal clearly stated, Yero is not interested in wrestling power from men, she is not interested in dominating or even sharing power with men. Her goal is to ensure that the woman is able to assert her humanity by liberating her thoughts through education. For her, education of the woman folk is tantamount to self-realisation. A woman who knows her rights will also fight for it; social justice therefore is predicated on the education of the woman. This sentiment is echoed by Chimamanda Adiche in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, where she draws parallels from educated and less educated women. Educated women are seen to have escaped from male oppression and given freedom while the uneducated women suffer from male operation with little or chances of escape. Education is a potent weapon in the women’s struggle against the patriarchy induced social, gender inequality.

Education which is mainly the acquiring of knowledge through

structured learning is mostly career driven and is different from Enlightenment which Immanuel Kant, one of the foremost thinkers of the Enlightenment movement posited. Broadly speaking, Enlightenment means the realization or the acquisition of new wisdom or understanding. It is an education or awareness that brings change. Immanuel Kant defines Enlightenment as “humanity’s emergence from self-imposed immaturity”. Kant further describes enlightenment as the inability to use ones understanding without external guidance. He emphasized that this immaturity stems not from a lack of understanding, but from a lack of courage and resolution to think independently. He critiques the societal constraints that inhibit free thought, asserting that true enlightenment requires freedom to use reason publicly, particularly in matters of religion and governance. Kant’s famous motto for enlightenment is known as “sapere aude” which means “dare to know” (1784). In the novel, Naja the protagonist, journeys from self-imposed immaturity to personal journey of inner peace, clarity and empowerment. Although she was half or partly educated, she could not finish her studies which would have enabled her emancipate herself from poverty but the enlightenment she got through education, sets her and other women apart. This study therefore will address ways in which enlightenment works to liberate women both educated and uneducated to transform their lives for the better productivity.



Theoretical

Conceptualisation/Methodology

This study adopts stiwanism as a strand of African feminism propounded by Omolara Ogundipe Leslie as an alternative concept to feminism. Feminism which is being regarded as a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and also as a platform to demand equality, rights and justice. Anne Dobbie posits that feminism work to expose ideologies such as religion, philosophy, economics, education, culture and literature that enforce same gender and sexual norms or all in a bid to change it so that everybody's worth would be realized and be appreciated according to what he can do (109)

Ruth Sheila observes that feminist do not agree among themselves in one all-inclusive or universally acceptable definition of the term because the meaning of feminism varies, depending on one's political leanings or observations, understanding, interpretation and goals or world view of the word "woman" (4) it is in this regard that one will look at feminism as understood in Africa. To start with, Feminism began and flowered in Europe and America and now has its roots in Africa. African feminism strives to achieve gender equality and not to subjugate men, also aligns to the ideology of liberal feminism in Europe. Liberal feminism has its roots in 19th century first wave feminism that focused particularly on women's suffrage and access to education. Mary Wollstonecraft

(1759-1799), makes her case for women in her essay "A Vindication of the Right of Women" that women need to be educated just as well as men so that they can grow to be moral and autonomous human beings. (12-13). Mary Kolawale puts that it is pertinent to note that many African women prefer a different terminology from feminism because of the need to gain the support and acceptance of the African women for their ideology and social movement for the emancipation of the African women (26). In recent years the number of African women engaged in feminism has increased and African females are engaged in creative writing, literary criticism and theory. The leading African female critics and theorists include Molaria Ogundipe,leslie, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Katherine frank, Akachi Ezeigbo and Mary.E. Kolawole. These scholars have one way or another proffer alternative concept to the theory of feminism, and these new concepts are all in an attempt to indigenize the theory of women which is rooted in the peculiar experiences of the African women (26). Literary critic like Chinkwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and theorist has proposed the use of the term "womanism" to replace feminism.

In feminism discourse Ogunyemi cited in Mary Kolawale (36), posits that "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideal of black, while going a balanced presentation of black woman day". Catherine Acholonu (1995) like her counterpart Ogunyemi postulated the concept of "Motherism", and as an



alternative concept to feminism and it hinges on the centrality of motherhood in the African female experience. For the purpose of this paper, both concepts fail to suit as a tool for the analysis of this work because of their centrality of womanhood or motherhood. In addition, Molara Leslie would say that Africans do not suffer from "colorism" a phrase adopted by Alice Walker, to mean African women residing in Africa and do not go through racism because they reside in Africa.

This study adopts shiwanism theory as advocated by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie instead of feminism to by-pass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa. "stiwa" is an acronym for social transformation including women in Africa. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that "stiwa" allows for the discussion of the need of African women today in the tradition of the spices and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women (549) she also furthers that "stiwa" is not about warring with men, or the reversal of role, but it stresses the transformation of the African society as the responsibility of both men and women.

Mary Kolawole puts that these African women speaking with multiple voices recognizes the uniqueness of the African female experiences, she goes to say "they are dealing with African women's question in different ways but there is room for each in the collective compound (6). Hence, "stiwa" attends to the need of the

northern Nigerian women through promoting social Transformative strategies through enlightenment geared towards change and empowerment.

Transformative Strategies For Women Through Enlightenment in *Najah*

Northern Nigerian female writers have most times addressed the issues of religion and culture as institutions that subjugate women and have advocated for education as a means of empowering women. In the case of *Naja* the protagonist of the novel, she was not fully educated with a certificate that would earn her a job, but was properly enlightened to make decisions in her life and that of other women she encountered resulting to positive changes. Education and enlightenment are like a coin of two sides. At times, enlightenment seems to come through education and in some instances, enlightenment comes before education but in the case of *Najah*, enlightenment about education came through an NYSC that was posted to her village who her convinces to go to school and get an education.

The story revolves around *Naja* a teenage girl whose education was caught short, because she was married off to Mallam Illu as a debt settlement for his cows that were missing in her father's custody. The novel is set in Wase during the incessant conflict between herders - farmers, during one of these conflicts, it was said that the *rugga* was invaded by the Tarok and this led to



the loss of many cows by Mallam Jarmai, Najah's father, and for no fault of his. But because the cows were missing in Mallam Jarmai's custody, invariably he would have to pay. The fact that the protagonist was forced into marriage against her will shows ways in which women's bodies and lives are seen as commodities even in the context of conflict. It is also interesting to see how the violence against women is intertwined with economic issues, like the loss of the cattle.

The protagonist Najah after being married off to Mallum Illu requested from her husband to give her an opportunity to teach women in Islamiya classes. Transformation in the novel resolves around different facets of life explored as follows;

Enlightenment on Cultural and Religious Practices

In northern Nigeria, cases of Islamic practices like *purdah* which doesn't allow the woman go out, may account for the few enrollments of women in schools. Practices like *purdah* prevent the women from going to school while the male children are allowed to go to school. In Naja's case, with the little enlightenment she received on education from the N.Y.S.C boy in her community, she was able to convince her mother who in turn convinced her father to send Naja to school. Though she was restrained after a short time, she was able to learn how to read and write and with this skill acquired, she was able to read and understand the Quran to her advantage. The Hausa-Fulani culture

is deeply rooted in Islamic religious practices like marriage which is grounded in Islamic principles and teachings. Islam as a religion permits a man to marry more than one wife and the women are taught to accept this even when forced into the marriage like her own case. Najah though barely educated was able to empower a lot of female characters in the text by raising awareness on certain issues concerning marriage. According to Naja, "It is only when we accept that things are not right that we can make efforts to change them and do the right things" (34). This assertion by Najah comes out from the release of her "self-tutelage" and the inner desire for a transformative experience. Every woman in that community was taught the version of the Islam religion that enjoins them to obey their husband. "For you to attain Jannah (Paradise), you must be obedient and submissive to your husband, eh! You know every woman's Jannah lies beneath the feet of husband" (6)

Naja in her own response to this teaching understands that the religion does not support injustice especially in the aspect of polygamy. She cited the Quran; "The Quran says that men should marry two or three wives: But the Quran equally states that if they fear that they will not be just between their wives then they should remain with only one wife" (36).

From the above extract, we see Naja enlightening her audiences on Islamic teaching on marriage that have only taught them obedience and total



submission which is morally right, but in some cases is being used as a tool for manipulation by some men thereby taking away the voices of the women. The same religion also enjoins men too to be just. Her questions remain, who is really following the teaching of the religion? Because it seems some men have manipulated the teachings to their own favour. With Naja's emphasis for the need of men to become just, so many men in the novel, became enemies with her and they had to report her to her husband for causing trouble and her reply was she simple, I had only "read the Quran and teach it" (52).

Naja in one of her classes had enlightened the women on the issue of rivalry in their homes stressing the importance of peace, equity and fairness between co-wives. She admonishes the women to see themselves as sisters rather than rivals. She reveals that men enjoyed it when they were not at peace with each other as it gives them the feeling of superiority and importance. Citing the Quranic verse that states that "If men fear that they would not be just, they should remain with one wife (76) with this realization, the women saw the need to demand for equal treatment from their husbands. This is vividly reflected in the characters of Talatuwa and her co-wife Uwandiya, Talatuwa had gone ahead to invite Uwandiya to join her in her husband Turaaka one night when he had bought roasted meat but deliberately exempted Uwandiya from the Feast. Hence, Uwandiya's action is as a result of the enlightenment she

received from Naja to live peacefully with her co wife through her Islamiyyah classes, Naja created an agency for women to voice out their challenges, marital issues and parental problems focusing on Islamic point of view at the fore front, she advised them on the right decision to take using hadiths and verses from the Quran as their defense.

Enlightenment on Health Issues

The rate of child marriage being practice in northern Nigeria is one of the leading causes of visco vaginal fistula commonly called VVF a very common yet unknown health problem in the society in the novel. VVF is a health condition very common among young girls who are married off early or are under aged. The fact that these women are not taken to the hospital for proper medical care during child labour only serve to increase the rate of occurrence for this condition. Though it is very common among young girls in Northern Nigeria the people still remain ignorant about the true cause of visco vaginal fistula VVF. These girls have faced stigmatization and condemnation as a result of this ignorance. Take for instance the experience of Hauwa in the text; she was forced into marriage at the age of twelve. She suffered this health condition after her first child birth; as a result, she was accused of committing adultery.

"The young woman had been intimate with her ex-boyfriend a few months after her wedding, when her



husband was way on a journey. Nobody knew about it until God, the all-seeing, decided to punish and expose her right here on earth, by first of all taking away the baby then afflicting this problem upon her. [86]"

In ignorance these women have come to the conclusion that since urine was unclean the constant leakage should be as a result of impurity. They believed that 'the constant leakage symbolizes that something impure has gone there, and must be cleansed.[86]

These women who innocently fall victim of this condition in addition to the hardship they are experiencing, are forced to face public condemnation and insult from the same people who have indirectly or directly put them in that condition. Hauwa was giving the liberty of divorce hence abandoning her to suffer alone. Kaamila, Najah's younger sister was unfortunate to meet the same fate. She had found her-self in the same condition after a prolonged labour and just like Hauwa she was accused of infidelity. Her mother had begged her to confess her sins so that Allah may have mercy on her. The mother asserts as "young, married, inexperienced girls, sometimes you may over step your boundaries, knowingly and unknowingly. So, tell me, kaamila my child, did you have any intimacy with any man other than your husband after marriage? [85]

The fact that kamilas mother could accuse her of being unfaithful at such time shows the level of the society's

ignorance. Najah's father had gone further to blame it on the medical personnel that Najah had involved to save her sisters life during her prolonged labour. Naja in her quest to find a solution to her sister's problem, visited Hauwa, discussed with her and found out that Hauwa did not engage in any extra marital affair like everyone believed nor did she undergo any form of cleansing to cure her like Najah's mother had said. Najah clarified that the medical personnel that attended to Hauwa said that because she laboured too long, the baby died because he was tired, and she Hauwa would have died too, if not for the timely surgery. [111]

This proved that Hauwa was neither unfaithful nor was she being punished. Naja at that point realized that the assumption that her sister's bladder was mistakenly punctured during her surgery was wrong. She had gone back to the medical doctors who were in charge of her sister's surgery for more answers. "You see, your sister is suffering from obstetric fistula, which is as a result of the prolonged labour she had, which pressed the unborn child tightly against her pelvis, cutting off blood flow to the vesico vaginal wall, killing the affected tissues, leaving a hole. [117]

The doctor took out time in giving Najah a medical explanation for her sister's condition. She carefully gave her a breakdown of what the true cause of the problem was. This is an enlightening moment not just for Najah but the readers who have been ignorant of such health condition. The



author through the voice of this doctor has taken her time to break down the cause of this condition and also present a possible solution. The doctor added that "If only you will stop this house delivery, you will save yourselves lots of health-related issues and the rate of infant and maternal mortality would be drastically reduced.[116]

The author has directly and indirectly proffered a solution to not only save the lives of young girls from health issues like V.V.F, but also to reduce the rate of infant and maternal mortality. Najah advised that women should seek professional medical help when faced with such complications. Since the reason why most of these men refuse their wives to seek medical help is because the hospital is being run by male doctors, the voice of the Liman suggests that the men embark on a "jihad" which will solve the problem both for the men and the women.

This jihad the Liman suggests is to let our daughters attend western school so that they can become nurses, doctors and health attendants, then we can allow our women go to hospitals...he has been able to convince us to send our own daughters to school, so that they will eventually take over from the men in the hospitals, then we can all go there to receive medical attention.

Even from a religious perspective, they men understood how important and beneficial enlightening the women would be to the society. This had provided options for women to

change their situations, to change them from their state of ignorance to potential students that would someday become doctors and nurses. These men hopefully will understand that educating their women was the best solution for their fears. The fear that another man in the name of being a doctor would be looking at the private parts of their wives, this to them was a 'haram'. (87) Since this is what they want to avoid, why not train their daughters to take over from these men so that their women can have access to proper medical care.

Enlightenment and Self Assertion

Self-assertion is the confidence that you have in speaking firmly about one's opinion and demanding the rights that they believe they should have. Assertiveness can help you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view. Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn your respect. Naja throughout this novel have only fought for what she deemed right and also stood firmly on her opinions. Najah's self-assertion was born from awareness that women are not treated fairly and her determination to make things better. She believed that that the men were going against the teaching of the prophet, for the prophet had made it clear that if any man fear that he will not treat his wives justly then he should remain with one wife.

Yet they are neither just, nor did they remain with one wife. [76]



In Najah's opinion, it is the men who have sinned against Allah. She finally believed that they would go to hell fire if their wives did not stop them. This served as awareness to the women to stand up against their husbands whenever they try to treat them wrongly. Their fear was replaced with their duties not to allow their husbands go to hell. Naja believed every woman out there should have the right to voice out their opinions or speak without fear of the men in her life. This was the attribute that captured her interest in Zahra.

She was awed; a woman giving orders to a man, Najah was impressed. She wanted to be respected like aunty Zahra. [137]

Naja knew at that instant that she wanted to be respected like aunty Zahra. She was determined to become rich because she felt that if she was, then she can speak the way she liked and perhaps *daada* (Najah's mother) would be able to speak freely too. As a young child, Najah's impression of gender equality is finances which empowers the women to express themselves freely without fear.

Thus, Najah's major aim of establishing her Islamiyyah class was to sow the seed of courage in the lives of the women so that they can express themselves freely and effectively to enable them build healthy and productive relationships.

"She had sown the seed of courage in the women who were

initially so scared of their husbands and would not even have a discussion with them about issues that concerns them, let alone take a decision ..." [70]

Najah's Islamiyyah class serves not only as a stepping stone, but an agency for women's empowerment in the text. She had encouraged the women to face their husbands and talk things out instead of dying in silence she gave them the courage to stand up to their husbands especially when they refused to listen to them. Aladio, one of Najah's students was able to face her husband with confidence that surprised him he said, "The Aladio he knew 'had never said a sentence of her own to him, and had never held his gaze either.' [74] Aladio had faced all kinds of inhuman treatment from her husband, he beats her occasionally and starves her alongside her children yet she kept her head bowed in obedience but on that faithful day she found the courage to speak for herself.

Silence and voicelessness have often been explored by most women writings as a tool that reinforces patriarchal societies. According to Leslie-Ogundipe;

"Women are shackled by their own negative self-image by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy. Her own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear, dependency complexes and attitude to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed" (39)



Women most times preferred to keep silent about their problems mostly because they are afraid or lack courage to speak out. After the death of Mariya, Zarah had discovered that despite their closeness she wasn't aware that her friend had been constantly abused by her husband. She could not understand why she never told anyone about it.

Perhaps if they had talked about it, they would have found a way to make their husbands understand they were not punching bags, but more like green house that needed to be tended, [184]

Zahra felt that perhaps there was a way to make these men to understand them if only these women who experienced such things would talk about it. Zarah was hopeful that the bill which was going to be passed into law by the law makers regarding men who hit their wives would make these men think twice before raising their hands on their women. Though Najah didn't think this was a bad idea, she was worried it was going to take time if it was going to be possible. Something had to be done in addition to the bill. Women must learn to speak out, to share their troubles... [184] this in its self is a form of empowerment in self -realization and assertion. This is the inclusive discussion that Leslie Ogundipe advocates in her concept of stiwanism.

Zarah wanted women to take action instead of waiting for help from the government which might not come at the end. She wanted the women to know that they themselves could do

something about their situation. This had inspired the founding of 'they speak out foundation which was established in memory of Mariya. Aunty Zahra had invested her money and registered the non-governmental organization in order to help women fight domestic abuse.

Enlightenment and Financial Empowerment

Women were not really given much financial opportunities in patriarchal societies. They are limited to household chores, taking care of children and their husband (Ifechelobi 18) This is evident in the case of Aladio one of Najah's student who narrated how her husband left her without food yet stops her from continuing her petty trade. She had to sell all her personal belongings in order to feed herself and her children. When her son eventually fell sick, she couldn't treat him until a woman in Najah Islamiyya contributed for the treatment. Aladio's suffering ended after few classes with Naja. Aladio eventually got the courage to invade her husband's store.

...she had opened the bags of maize he had left and asked her not to touch. She had sold half a bag to buy firewood and all other cooking paraphernalia, the other half, she divided it into two and had made *kaamu* for her son's pap with half, while the other half she had processed into corn flour for *tuwo*. [74]

Aladio was determined to do something about her situation even if



it cost her marriage. She had refused to sit and watch while she and her children die of hunger. She took a step to change her situation not minding the consequences. This experience is not peculiar to only the illiterate women. Even those educated ones like aunty Zahra face almost the same thing. Sani aunty Zarah's husband did not deem it right for a woman to have a job let alone earned some income. He feels the woman should be seen and her voice not heard thus empowering a woman financially is not important.

He had changed the subject then, and urged her to stop worrying about office jobs and come and do her primary job in his bed, that was a most valuable job, he teased. [155]

Zahra even with her education could not get a job. Sani had told her plainly that the problem was not that she couldn't get a job but that 'he would rather give it to a man.' [154] this shows that as a woman she was either objectified or commodified. Zahra had also figured out what Sani was up, every time she was being used. Sani had used her in his political campaign to gain the support of women.

When Najah started her *Islamiyyah* classes, she was able to capture the interest of many within a short period of time. Words about Naja's *Islamiyyah* were fast traveling among the women. Everybody spoke about how different she was, how learned and friendly the young *Mallama* was. Many spoke of.

'...how she encouraged women to take trade no matter how meager. [69]

Naja encouraged the women to take up trade no matter how small it is. In that way they will be able to make money that can at-least buy meal for themselves and their children without asking their husbands. They will be able to take care of themselves in the absence of their husbands. Naja was able to convince these women and soon must of her students picked up a trade, some went into making homemade snacks which their children hawk for them. Soon they all had testimonies of how their living experience changed for better. Naja was not the only one who had the ambition of changing the financial experience of these women for good; Zahra shared this ambition with her.

I want to start a support group for women, where other working class and business women will donate money to help fellow sisters in difficult health conditions, or those facing domestic abuse. [134]

Zahra on the other hand saw the need for an empowerment programme which will bring women of different classes together. This will provide ground for women to support each other in times of difficulties. She also added stereotyping to the blue print of her women empowerment NGO 'women must be taught to love one another, to share ideas and problems in order to study and understand men's behavior across cultures and religions, she wrote. [176] "this NGO is meant for women of different social



class and together we will create a strong support system for women. Women will be able to look out for one another in times of need.

In conclusion, enlightenment is expected to come with some changes after one must have come in intact with it because it requires one to reason. Reasoning in this scenario is not applicable to educated women alone but also uneducated women because they both go through peculiar challenges of marriage and child bearing. In an effort to achieve productive changes, these women will have to be courageous and resolute in making decisions that will benefit them and others positively. Najah championed the course of the uneducated women and rural women, while Zarah represents the voices of the educated and urban women who go through domestic abuse. Both characters reflect contemporary women voices of rebellion and identity often addressing societal taboos around religion, sexuality and authority. Sefiya Yero's novel *Najah* not only serve as a personal expression but also as a means to challenge and redefine societal norms contributing to a broader feminist discourses.

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