

Exploring Nego-feminism in Ba'aram Alkali's Personal Angle

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Abstract

For a long time, there have been series of writings on women, issues relating to women and feminism in almost all spheres of knowledge. Women writers in Nigeria have attained a status almost everywhere around the world. They present female situations such as hardship, subjugation and all such types of discrimination against women. They also try to challenge and bring about possible solutions that the woman can prefer to attain her freedom and success in society through their writings. However, there is a great need for examining these writings by women to see and direct the society towards a better understanding of the possible solutions to issues concerning women. Though women's writings in Nigeria have gained prominence over the years, there is still room for researchers to examine and explore issues presented in these writings which the woman in the society can relate to when the need arises. Alkali's *Personal Angle* explores issues faced in contemporary marriages, such as feelings of unfulfillment and challenges that couples encounter in their relationships. It highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics between men and women in various roles, including politics, business, and home life. Using Nego-feminism as a theory to view and analyze texts adds a wide corpus to understanding feminism, African feminism, and its different variants. This paper also points out that nego-feminism as a theory advocates peace and harmony. It is a theory that is quite different and not radical in approach. This paper also reveals that when there is understanding and negotiation there will be no war of supremacy.

Introduction

The emerging trend in contemporary African literature, particularly fiction, involves the redefinition and re-presentation of women's identity and sensibility. The rise of female writers in Nigeria has shifted the focus and perception of women's images in literature. These writers first critique the negative portrayal of women and then work to inspire and redefine female identity. They create characters who confront societal challenges, contributing to the feminist movement, which faces mixed acceptance in

Africa, often labeling its advocates as radicals. Feminism today is an ideology with many practitioners that have situated themselves in various theoretical intersections. Feminism, however, is not only a critique or an extension of traditional ideologies, but has made a significant contribution of its own in the field of theory and praxis. Before the 1970s (in the first and second waves), feminism was concerned with the politics of women's authorship and representation (writings and images) of women's condition in literature. Theorists of the third wave feminism consider gender to be part of deconstructing existing relationships between sexes. Feminist critics carefully examine how the images of men and women in imaginative literature reflect or reject the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving total equality. Recently, it has focused on gay and lesbian literary identity as interpretative strategies. In emphasizing the relevance of feminism, Balogun (2014, p. 19) believes that:

Feminist theorists have espoused the connection between otherness and class in terms of the relationship which borders on gender inequality in which the dominant group (male) imposes the values of its own particular identity, while at the same time devaluing the identity of the 'other' (female) through the imposition of corresponding discriminatory measures.

One can say that feminism is all about what gives women their confidence; nonetheless, the confidence is still dangling as expected, because what these women desire is yet to be fulfilled. Many factors may be responsible for the delay of the success according to Alkali (2010, p. 23) "the ever-present anti-feminism...and as well as the dangerous position, was taken by the feminist themselves is the reason for the delay of the woman success". However, Feminism does not have a universal application and suitability, especially for African women. As a result, other forms of Feminism emerged, such as Womanism, and the various forms of African feminism, such as African Womanism, Stiwanism, and Motherism. Nnaemeka develops more sensible and rewarding feminism, a term she calls Nego-feminism, after all, these "new feminist models are needed especially those that are realistic, practical and, fundamental" (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 26). In her paper, "Nego-feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way" (2003), Obiomma Nnaemeka proposes Nego-feminism from two similar positions. First, it directly flows from 'negotiation'. Second 'n-ego' translates to 'non ego/ no ego'. It is, therefore, a feminism that is free from egoistic tendencies which neither male nor female holds. The center of her theory emphasizes the complementarity of sexes" (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 360). Nego-feminism charges both sexes to be willing partners in progress. In short, where the notorious western and radical feminism is extreme and sidelines some aspects of

African culture, Nego-feminism is open to the present and the future

This paper adopts Nego-feminism because it gives room for understanding and appreciation. It is also not harsh and extreme in approach. Alkali, Tolif & Jan (2017, p. 10) agrees that “Nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation complementarity, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration. Nego-feminism offers to the world how to manage the two sexes harmoniously”. This paper examines the exploitation and suppression of women, highlighting conditions that leave them psychologically vulnerable. It focuses on Fatima Ba'aram Alkali's *Personal Angle* (2008), which advocates for peace and cooperation. The study demonstrates that such texts serve as tools for resistance and enhance understanding of the interplay between culture, gender, and power dynamics in the region, contributing to the broader feminist discourse in Africa.

Marital Negotiations in *Personal Angle*

Alkali's novel *Personal Angle* examines the challenges facing the contemporary Nigerian woman. Through two of her characters, Zaria and Basheika, the writer portrays the plight of the woman Ba'aram introduces us to Zaria and Basheika. Zaria, a woman in her early thirties, the wife of a business tycoon Alhaji Balarabe (junior), the first son of the late Balarabe who is overseeing his father's business. Zaria is not only married to Alhaji Balarabe, but to his entire extended family; ruled by him, controlled by his siblings, most especially his elder sister, Salima. Zaria is a wife, but only in name. She longs for attention and affection that every married woman craves for, but, that dream seems to be far away.

Basheika, on the other hand, is an opposite of Zaria, though related by marriage. Her husband, Yusuf Talib, is an elder brother to Zaria. Yusuf Talib is a struggling gubernatorial aspirant, battling between his intensified efforts for his political pursuits and keeping his family together. Through Basheika, the writer portrays the sacrifice that comes with self-pursuit. Yusuf gives all his efforts, energy and attention to his political ambition, while his family is slowly fading. His wife is depressed because she feels so alone. The husband she once knew is gradually changing and being replaced by a total stranger “an unpleasant depression washed upon her. The feeling of intense pleasure, which she derived from the dream about Yusuf, was suddenly replaced by a feeling of sadness.” (p. 27). Basheika is depressed as a result of sadness and loneliness while Yusuf was not aware of it. He loves Basheika, but he is not aware of what his ambition is doing to his loved ones. Basheika explains her marital life with Yusuf when she voices it to herself “the life of a political activism which her husband adopted just two years after their marriage

had gradually defined ten years of her married life.” (p. 26). In her marriage of ten years, she can only recall two beautiful years out of it. The remaining eight years were for his political ambition. Basheika describes Yusuf as an “overly protective man who treated any child or woman with great care. She was grateful to him.” (p. 27). Craving for power overshadows Yusuf’s good side, or we can say he is ignorant. Basheika is a beautiful young woman in her early thirties at her prime. The writer describes her as:

... neither plump nor painfully thin. She maintained a slender figure, average height and a tight stomach in spite of her three births. Everything about her looks was on an average scale. She did not possess too much or too little of anything. With hair reaching the neckline when braided and an average bust, she could pass for an attractive woman to men who were drawn to the unobtrusive beauty of a woman. Her skin had the colour of fresh brown dates, a refined brown. She looked always, whatever the situation, like she had recently had a bath. And her face said it all, an unassuming woman with observant eyes and lips that gave a character of composure to her oval face. (p. 27-28)

Through Basheika and her family, the writer portrays the effect politics has on the family. On one occasion, “Basheika went outside the house to where the children were playing. On seeing their mother, they stopped their jests and looked mischievously at each other” (p. 46). Though not as fortunate as her children during her childhood, she realizes she had the most beautiful childhood she can have. But here, her children are engrossed in different activities that makes one wonder how would they remember their childhood days in the future. Would they remember it and dream about it with enthusiasm or with dismay?

According to the view of the writer, politics comes with huge sacrifice. As the moment goes, Yusuf’s family is gradually destabilizing, as he is digging down into politics unknown to him, his family is falling. Basheika in search of her self-worth found herself in the company of Layla; a woman whom Yusuf and others think she lacks self-respect. When Basheika narrates her encounter with Layla to Yusuf saying; “I do not think there is anything evil about her. She is warm and generous.” (p. 169). His response was a bit harsh where he says; “and you could tell by just talking to her? Do you know what she does in town, and the people she deals with, and even the nature of her dealings? You do not know about what some women do in town, so do not argue with me.” (p. 169-170). Layla is a woman that feels she does not need a man or marriage to be happy in life, but this might be as a result of her encounter with men just as the writer narrates through Basheika. She says:

Layla must have been extremely beautiful in her youth. She was not a tall

woman though one would not hesitate to call her short. Perhaps she was taller before age-accumulated fat pulled her body closer to the ground. Some tell-tale wrinkles by the side of her eyes confirmed her age of forty-five to anyone who looked closely at her. But that was her official age, Samari had said. Layla was fifty. He also said Layla nursed a sad history of marriage, for she had never really married. Her first attempt at marriage ended in divorce even before consummation. He knew that much but did not know why. (p. 163)

Yusuf is aware of what the outcome of her association with Layla would be. Therefore, he disagrees with their friendship "I am telling you I do not want you involving yourself with that woman." (p. 170). After the election result was announced, Yusuf loses to his opponent, but he concedes to defeat even though many were against it. For a moment, Yusuf fell into a depressed state. A moment he needs his wife the most, but that is the time Basheika finds herself more indulged and addicted in Layla's company. She is busy trying to actualize herself while her husband is depressed and her children losing their morals. They are mere spectators of the parent's attitude and thus it affects not only their childhood, but their personality;

And as the days went by, Lami became worried that her parents were still not talking to each other. They did not pass each other in the hallway as her father took the front door out of the house and her mother, the back door always. Her mother no longer sent her on errands to her father for household upkeep and her father no longer gave her money to give to her mother. He now entrusted the elderly cook with the money for foodstuff purchases. Lami was even more worried about Ado, who now spent his days brooding, not talking to anyone. She wanted to do something and makes things right, but her father was constantly absent and she was too fearful of her mother. Either way, she did not know how. (p. 219)

The writer, however, points out the wrong that some parents refuse to acknowledge that whatever they are doing, their children are aware and it affects them greatly and might even destroy them in future. Basheika's mother is a woman of great virtue, she is not educated yet, she is the one holding firmly the very foundation of her house. Basheika's mother and Hajiya Kawkab are two different individuals. Hajiya Kawkab fails in her duty as a mother in teaching her daughter the right values. She is an independent and highly influential woman, that was not intimidated by men. She is a widow, a politician and president of the women's association. She is a very self-

determined woman that knows what she wants and goes for it. The writer introduces us to the other side of women with power through Hajiya Kawkab and the dark side of it in their family, which can be seen through the character of Hajiya Kawkab's only child Saudat, whom is described as one of the most beautiful girl of her time, "Hajiya Kawkab's daughter was indeed a paragon of beauty. Hardly anyone who walked by her resisted giving her another look, and her gorgeous appearance competed with the appearance of the prestigious women trooping into the hall." (p.51). Saudat was compelled by her mother to be part of the political gathering of women who are thrice her age or more. Hajiya Kawkab raises her twenty-three-year-old daughter to be independent beyond her age, to aim for the top, never the bottom.

... the big question still hung in the air; how big was Jamil's salary? It was a question that need not be answered. However big, his salary was not big enough to take care of the daughter of the late Alhaji Sagiru. And all that talk about business, who was he fooling? She was only twenty-three but she knows about the lies men told before marriage. She had heard all about it. And didn't her mother tell her that a woman must know her worth to decide what she was going to get out of life? (p. 23)

The background Hajiya Kawkab gave her daughter is quite inappropriate, she is rude, ambitious and she belittles people. According to her own mentality, most men are not good enough for her, those she may choose to attend to sole depends on how deep their pockets are and how well renown are their family. Saudat sees herself as superior to others, she recalls her mother's advice; "never compromise your worth." (p. 23). One should always teach their children that we are nothing in the face of the earth, we are all God's creation, and no human is superior to the other. One should never undermine another person just because they are influential or born with a silver spoon. But Hajiya Kawkab thinks that whatever she wants, must be hers and so that is the life she wants her daughter to live; avoiding the shades of grey, but living a flamboyant life, just as when the writer points out; "back home from the tailors with new attires, visiting the tailor to make new clothes and going to the supermarket to purchase make-up items were routine activities for her, an obligation by her mother's standards." (p. 108). Saudat knows her mother expects nothing less, her mother's pride is seeing her only child flaunting her beauty to the world. She is used to her mother's life; she enjoys being admired and getting compliments especially from men of higher calibre.

Saudat reaches a point in life when she knows that she is beautiful and she is using the realization as a weapon; no wonder she says:

For who could resist the incomparable beauty God that had given her and

the sheer magic that moved with her personality? And that substance of quality that attached itself to the rich, which she saw in very few women, for the women she knew were either rich but uneducated, or they were good, religious and poor. She was lucky she had a lot to keep man bound to her. (p. 112)

The only thing Saudat can do to please her mother is to look beautiful and elegant, that is the virtue Hajiya Kawkab wants to see in her child, nothing less. At the end, the beauty and riches did not get her what she desired (Yusuf Talib) she later had to compromise and marry Jamil that she once looked down upon.

However, a close look at Malama Tasalla, Basheika's mother we realize the true picture of a mother she gives words of wisdom to her daughter when things were not going quite well in her matrimonial home, she says;

'Basheika', ... you know your husband much more than we do, but your father and I can testify that he has held you in the highest regard that a man can hold a woman. I do not believe in all these rumours that he has lost his mind, but people are talking, the affairs of your home are in the mouths of people and not in a good way. Now, if you are a woman who knows her weight, you will go and kneel before your husband and ask him to stop being angry, whatever it is that caused his anger... Yusuf is a good man and I can testify for him any day. You are the one who brought us together with him. It was not because we are your parents that he married you, but it was because of you that we became parents to him, too. If after all this time in what God has given you, which is the power to hold this man and the family that you made from him, then I feel sorry for you and I wish you can see yourself the way that I am seeing you. (p. 241-242)

Malama Tasalla put the right words in her daughter's mouth, even though Basheika sees the beautiful home she wished for herself in her mother, still there are some unknown forces dragging her away from doing the right thing. She sees her mother as old fashion that doesn't know what the world entails now, she states;

She wondered why things became incomprehensible as one grew older, but then when she looked at her parents, they always seemed to be on the serene, problem-free level. They had a complex arrangement. While her mother was in control of the affairs and had her feet firmly on the earth of her home, she was still very submissive and obedient to her husband. How did they maintain such balance? She knew Yusuf was a good man, but if she made the error of submitting completely to him, he would exercise no restraint in trampling over her. (p. 241)

Basheika still hold some irresponsible mentality Layla installed in her, the mentality that if she is submissive to her husband, he will trample over her. She refuses to see the clearer picture of her mother's life; that she is 'submissive' and yet happy in her years of marriage. She forgets her husband's state of vulnerability while in the company of Layla. Layla constantly admonishes and influences her thus; "Layla fixed a hard look on her." we are both women and we should not continue pretending to each other. The world is changing now and you much change along with it. You cannot continue to live in the past like your parents. There is a very wide gap between you and them. These are modern times; people are educated now..." (p. 277)

Basheika almost succumbs to her advice and a devilish thought cross her mind for a brief moment just as the writer explains:

A sudden vague feeling passed through Basheika as a liberating thought unfolded in her mind. She saw that being uptight and guarded succeeded only in guarding her dullness. It placed a stamp on her role as the dutiful housewife and constructed a fence around her boredom. Her life was a pathway between her home and her supermarket, a life that had formerly been just a pathway between her kitchen and bedroom. And the man in her life regarded that as fulfilling while he took off to any destination in pursuit of his own dream. What about her? What about her own her own need to feel whole as an individual, to be recognized as someone too? (p. 272)

The writer, at this juncture, points out the ills that come with the pursuit of self-actualisation which most of the time if measures are not taken, they can lose their self in the process and also what they hold dear. Gradually in the process of self-actualisation, Basheika loses the respect of her children because she stopped being the mother that she used to be. They have seen the way she disrespects their father by ignoring her duty as a wife, so also as a mother. With her attitude towards them, they started disrespecting her and being rude. An instance can be seen when Basheika asks her daughter, Lami, the whereabouts of her father she replied; 'I do not know mammy' her reply "was almost rude" (p. 226). Basheika leaves her own responsibility to her eleven-year-old daughter Lami. She is now the one taking care of her younger ones and performing the duty of a mother to them. Basheika is careless of her responsibility while busy daydreaming, she gets lost in her own surroundings and her eleven-year-old daughter is the one responsible to wake up around 2 am to lock the house due to the absence of a father and 'I don't care' attitude of the mother. Same also with her second child Ado, after returning late at night she met her children in the parlour and asked them the where about of their brother Sani, "to Basheika's shock, Ado did not only refuse to respond to her inquiry, he also gave

her a very rude eye... his impudent tone and insolent eyes compelled her to reach out and plant a slap across the nine-year-old face.” (p.279). she instantly regrets her action, but she cannot turn the hand of time. This is the same Ado, who Lami was worried about, the boy “now spent his days brooding, not talking to anyone. She wanted to do something and make things right, but her father was constantly absent and she was too fearful of her mother. Either way, she did not know how.” (p.219). basheika only sees the child disrespecting her without really seeing the clear picture of the almost depressing state of her child. The writer is right, marriage comes with a huge sacrifice and responsibility one cannot have both without compromise. Oriaku (2015) also believes that; “marriage, both in real life and fiction, is perhaps the most circumscribing factor in a woman’s life.” (p.77)

The close relationship that Basheika once had with her children is gone, Lami that adores her mother before now resent her. Most atimes it is Lami that helps her father with things Basheika should have been doing. “Lami took a tray of food into her father’s bedroom. She now performed the function of serving her father his daily meals.” (p. 217). Due to the attitude of their mother, the children prefer to be closer to their father, he is aware that he was not always around most of the time. The crime Basheika accused her husband of doing during his political career, now she is doing worse than him. She forgets the person she was before. She once accuses Yusuf of abandoning his family and adopting politics. The writer gives an instance when Basheika asks Yusuf to take Sani to the hospital but he says; “I have to write a speech for the movement empowerment get-together which I am attending this afternoon” (p. 45). But looking at the current situation, Basheika abandons her family and all her duties. Her father also advises her on the way she is going about with her life in the name of self-actualisation, which makes the people talk about her marital issues. He advises her saying:

Your husband is your garment and you are a garment for him. You must put your heads together and consult with each other in your affairs; that is the meaning of marriage. You both are still very young in the world. If God wills, you have a lot of time and He will bless you with even greater things. So, help your husband because it is you to whom the Almighty has given power to do that. If there is anything, any problem at all, be patient with what you are doing and give attention to your family. That is the most important thing to you. Whatever good deed you perform now, whatever you do to help your family, you are laying a bed for yourself to rest upon later in life. Help your family and the Almighty will help you more. (p. 244)

Through the words of Basheika’s father, the writer advocates negotiation, understanding, collaboration and compromise. Here, husbands and wives are

encouraged to act in ways that some men and women had not previously been able to. Alkali (2013, p. 235) however states that;

“The truth, then, is, Nego-feminism has the potency of succeeding to a large extent and with multiplier effect. It has profound implications for marriage; sex, children, work, and more... the spirit of Nego-feminism may just be what is needed to manage homes for greater national and international display.” Alkali, Talif & Jan (2013, p.11) believes that nego-feminism sorrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation, complementarily, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation and arbitration.”

Basheika’s father is right; a woman is a garment and likewise the husband to her, but Yusuf is in a confused state that only love and affection of a loved one can bring him out. Same goes to Basheika, she found herself deep in the web of Layla. Her voice admonition thus:

Life is not like that, Basheika. Like I always tell you, there is nothing for a woman but what she goes out to get for herself. I am sure it was not your husband who advised you to establish this business. Look at me; see how wealthy I have become. I did not seek the permission of a man to do what I did and no wonder I am now this rich. Have you not seen the falsity in the belief that a woman cannot put her head together with a man and say they will do the same thing? No, she can do even better. (p. 270)

So Basheika felt that to have an exciting life, a woman needs to go out and get it for herself. What she fails to remember is that she is not in the shoes of those women that lack, her husband never fails her as a man. A reality that made her mother questioned her once; “does your husband not provide food for you anymore? Has he stopped clothing you? Has he removed the roof under which he had given you shelter?” (p. 240). Basheika finds herself not responding to her mother’s questions because she knows the truth, Yusuf never fails his duties as the man of the house and her mother goes on saying:

I do not believe he has stooped any of these. If he has, then it is up to you to tell us. And if he is performing all his duties, yet he is angry with everyone and running around a village, then you have to look at your-self and see that you have a big problem. You can sit here before me and boldly tell me Yusuf is angry, what have you done about it? (p. 240)

Her mother is right. What has she done about Yusuf ‘s state of sadness? It is her duty as his wife to console him and with time they would have been out of the situation they are now in. But the ‘new’ Basheika is a woman of self-justification, she says; “Yusuf is not a little child. He is a grown man and knows what he is doing. Why

should I be blamed for things that he is doing? Who will take responsibility of what I am doing then?' (p. 241). That's her excuse, Basheika fails to understand nobody can heal alone; we all need a kind touch of that special person to be whole again.

The writer uses the character of Layla to portray women that are hardened because of societal realities. They become toughened as a result of a bitter experience. Basheika must have noticed it when she asks her, "if you know so much about men, how come you never married one?" (p. 270). This is an excellent question, but very disturbing to Layla by the look she gave Basheika she says;

Since you asked, I am sorry you have to hear me say this, but all married men the world over spend more time with their hidden mistresses and they spend more money on them. We who are standing outside its circle can see clearly how ugly marriage is, believe me. You will appreciate all I am saying some day. You will see things clearer with time. (p. 270)

With Layla's reply, one can conclude that her reply was that of sheer bitterness. She was hardened, but there must be a very terrible experience in life that can make one loose self-morality into the dark winds of the world like Layla did.

Finally, Yusuf realizes that looking at his wife and allowing her to go on with her behaviour will not solve their issues, because he sees her getting deeper into the life of mischief that may end up sabotaging their happy family. He calls her and admonishes her, at first Basheika sees that she has nothing to regret but, Yusuf cuts her off saying:

What kind of attitude are you displaying to me? You say you not a woman on the street, is this the attitude of a respected woman? What responsible married woman would live for months under the same roof with her husband and not even utter a word of greeting to him? What mother would live in the same house with her children and not even bother to see if they feed properly three times a day? Tell me, do you even know that Ado has missed a term in the school calendar because he has not been going to school... Look at yourself, Basheika. What have you been denied in this life? There are women out there, who have real, serious problems. They don't have even half of the things you have been blessed with. Is this the absence of serious problems in your life that makes you behave in such manner? (p. 305)

A sense of regret creeps in her mind which makes her understand that she has to make the biggest decision of her life and come to term with herself. A week later, the bittered, self-centered Basheika is replaced with a warm hearted one, whereby she came to understanding with herself because:

Yusuf's admonition to her last week had opened a cage of suppressed feelings in her and it affirmed to her, her important status in the life of her husband. To have him summon and talk to her with firmness melted the animosity that she harboured against him. At once she felt a surge of emotion and realized once again, as she did in several intervals in their marriage, how much she lived this man. She loved him for his honour, his principles and the good in him, the very essence that made him Yusuf Talib, his prescience and fortitude. She loved him even for his selfishness... (p. 320)

Basheika appreciates the manner in which Yusuf summons and talks to her with understanding and love and thus it softens the hatred she has in her mind against him. She realizes and regrets cutting ties with those she loved which almost cost her, her marriage. She now understands that her husband and family are the most important part of her life. She therefore says to him:

I have severed my ties with the people you disapprove of, hence closing down my super market, but I still have the desire to own a supermarket, to start anew, on my own, with my own contacts, in my own independent space, without the supervisory powers of any business person. I want you to take an interest in whatever I am doing and to give me your support always. (p 320)

This is the first time Basheika told Yusuf with care how she wanted him to support her in all her endeavours. Here the writer is trying to point out the importance of communication between spouses because it is the best and right way, they can understand each other. Basheika's courage to talk to Yusuf telling him how she needed his support is in line with negotiating terms with him and Yusuf replies whole-heartedly saying; "I have heard you Basheika... May Allah bless you." (p. 321). For every relationship to reach a stage of happiness there must be compromise, understanding and collaboration and that when Basheika finally found; her own 'happiness' because:

That night as she lay to sleep in the strong arms of her husband, Basheika's heart rejoiced in the new understanding that she found with him. A new courtship began between them and once again she felt like a new bride, smothered by her eager groom. And in the days that ensued, she re-adjusted to her combined roles of wife, mother and home maker. She spent more time with the children whom she found to her surprise, felt very intimidated in her presence. Meanwhile, through the services of Talib Chambers, she engaged the services of a registered company to secure a vacant building in a relatively safe area and appropriate area of the city, which she could effectively use for her supermarket business. (p 321)

Basheika is now contented with her family. She does not mind starting all over again with her children, trying so much now to understand them. As she thrived in the spirit of a new beginning, Basheika now realizes some vital truth about life thus:

She realized that nothing in life was truly a surprise. Everything was part of a coordinated chain of events and if one was conscious enough, every single act or occurrence was self-explanatory. And that was the eternal secrets of successful women, those women who taught other women what it meant to be a woman; that every success lay in the balancing of values and good coordination so that events occurred with mathematical accuracy. And that was the supreme significance of freewill, for God had with His will all pervasive power given man the freedom to use his freewill to follow any direction in life and had armed him with the criterion to distinguish good from evil, so that he should indeed use that freewill to opt for the former. Since man had the freedom of mind and the knowledge of acts and probable consequences, it meant, therefore, that choice was his prerogative and he could decide exactly what he wanted and begins to work towards that objective. (p' 321-322)

Secondly, Basheika also realizes that;

The challenges she encountered as a woman were not necessary the challenges her mother encountered. She was living in times that were fast changing, times when women were becoming increasingly exposed to wider experiences and to the work field, which has hitherto been exclusively the field of men. With the integration of women in the work field came the independence of women's spirit and the gradual displacement of man as the sole owner of the work field, resulting in competition between sexes. It was an ongoing competition and its effect on anyone caught unprepared might eventually be stressful. (p. 322)

The writer through an authorial intrusion discusses effects apparent in women's struggle for liberation and equality. She states that;

The struggle of the contemporary woman in these changing times were manifested in a major way by the universal women's rights movement, which had an ideology of woman being a victim of man's gross misconduct and abuse of power. It was an ideology that had taken root and gradually embedded itself in the woman's psyche, so much so that coupled with the hurtful marital experiences of some women, the majority of women living today generally 'thought of and lived through marriage in the defensive. There was a conceived fear of opposition in the woman's mind, a deep-rooted belief that her man would eventually hurt her. In consequences of

that belief, she took up some arms against him to protect herself without even being attacked. And what created an atmosphere of never-ending suspicion between the sexes. In her world, trust was an illusion. Fidelity for a man was too good to be true, and while she cried out for liberation with every act, which was a reaction to the script in her head, she gave man an incredible power which he did not ordinarily possess- the power to keep her perpetually in fear of being maltreated. (p. 322-323)

With this, it is now an option for the woman to choose a path to follow, but Ba'aram Alkali did not allow Basheika (her character) to follow the 'script'. Basheika testify this when she says;

She would not condemn herself to being a victim of an intense fear of man's perceived atrocities. She acknowledged that some women became hardened in life because of their experiences with men. Similarly, some men became less loving because of their experiences with women. She did not have the experiences of those women and her experiences had generally been happy. She therefore resolved to maximize her happiness. (p. 323)

This is the decision Basheika made, a conscious decision to invoke into her marriage every possible good, to maximize marital benefit and create an atmosphere that would be enjoyable, comfortable and conducive for the growth of her children.

Alkali's character, Basheika wants to realize her self-esteem. The way she tries to achieve her own self-esteem is daring considering her culture. She ends up losing because she becomes alienated and estranged from the society and she cannot change the society to conform to her new choice of life. She later has to mellow down and negotiate her life back and return to her husband. Thus, with negotiation, there can be mutual understanding between the sexes. Nego-feminist tackles both masculine and feminine egos. It emphasizes negotiation, acknowledging that everyone, both male and female, needs place and space, undoubtedly capable of creating challenges, while at the same time generating a compromise.

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