
“WE REFUSE TO REMAIN IN CHAINS”: A FEMINIST STYLISTIC READING OF ASABE KEBIR USMAN’S *DESTINIES OF LIFE***Ayodele Adebayo Allagbé**Université André Salifou (UAS) of Zinder, Republic of Niger, ayodeleallagbe@yahoo.com,
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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how Asabe Kebir Usman deploys language in her novel entitled *Destinies of Life* (2014) to encode gender relations and ideologies; i.e. how she represents, in her literary piece, the relations between male and female characters and how these characters perceive and respond to social reality. Drawing its theoretical insights from Feminist Stylistics (henceforth, FS) (Mills, 1995/1998, Montoro, 2014) and the descriptive qualitative research design, this study specifically examines how the writer depicts the workings of patriarchal culture in relation to the Hausa womenfolk and demonstrates how she intentionally attempts to deconstruct male-dominance and its underlying androcentric ideologies with a view to discursively freeing them from the shackles of oppressive power structures. It argues that the narrative context of the novel is ontologically marked by the influence of two oppressive power structures: patriarchy and religion (Islam, to be precise) (Ouarodima, 2018, Allagbé, 2023). The findings reveal that the writer employs language to represent such patriarchal workings as arranged marriage, widowhood, motherhood, polygamy, power abuse, sexist oppression, objectification, jilting, etc. They also exude that she empowers the women (Maryam, Aisha and Nafisah) involved in the aforementioned workings. In fact, she depicts them as either intelligent or educated and cognitively or/and spiritually strong or powerful individuals. The study concludes that Usman, through her female characters, protests against the established social norms that constrain or sanction gender in her society.

Keywords: Gender relations, ideologies, male-dominance, oppressive power structures, patriarchal workings.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that gender is an essential aspect of any contemporary or postmodern society (Oyewùmí, 2005). It determines how a society is organized and where people (male and female alike) belong in social life, the social roles and attributes they take on or are assigned therein (Allagbé and Allagbé, 2015, Allagbé and Amoussou, 2018, Allagbé, Zossoungbo and Alou, 2020, Yohanna, Tasya and Rahmadsyah, 2023). It also serves as the basis of social thought and identity (Oyewùmí, 2005). In point of fact, gender determines or predetermines how people act or behave and even conditions how they perceive social reality and respond to it (Allagbé, Amoussou and M’po Kouyinampou 2021). Unlike sex which is generally considered as biological or essentialist, gender is socially constructed; i.e. it is learned (Butler, 2004, Talbot, 2020). It stands to reason from the foregoing that, right from birth, boys and girls learn how to act out or perform their gender (Koussouhon and Agbachi, 2016b). As they grow up in their speech community, children naturally acquire, just the way they acquire their mother

tongue, the values, attributes, characteristics and roles ascribed to the two sex categories: male and female.

As it appears above, individuals learn how to do or perform gender over time. While they learn to do so in society, they consciously or unconsciously discover that gender is constituted by social norms. In feminist studies and gender studies, it is commonly believed that social norms define what is livable or legal or not for gender (Butler, 2004). In this sense, feminists posit that social norms constrain or sanction gender in social life. In contemporary or postmodern African societies, for instance, the social norms constituting gender are (assumed to be) permeated or influenced, as a number of recent studies (see Ouarodima, 2018 and Allagbé, 2023, for example) have already shown, by two oppressive power structures: patriarchy and religion (Islam and Christianity mainly). Feminist scholars generally agree that patriarchy is pervasive in society (Allagbé, 2023). This suggests that, in all walks of life, it favors men at the expense of women as it gives them access to power, social control and high social status. Previous empirical linguistics-based studies on the representation of gender in African literature have revealed such workings of patriarchal culture as arranged marriage, widowhood, motherhood, polygamy, power abuse, sexist oppression, objectification, jilting, etc. (Koussouhon, Akogbéto, Koutchadé and Allagbé, 2015, Koussouhon, Akogbéto and Allagbé, 2015a & b, Udumukwu and Igbokwe, 2016, Allagbé, 2016, Allagbé and Amoussou, 2018, Ijem and Agbo, 2019, Allagbé and Amoussou, 2020a & b, Allagbé, Zossoungbo and Alou, 2020, Amoussou and Djimet, 2020, Allagbé, Amoussou and M'po Kouyinampou 2021, Allagbé, Alou and Chinade, 2021, Amoussou, Djimet and Allagbé, 2022, Allagbé, 2023, Amoussou, 2023, etc.). However, these studies have not examined the aforementioned workings of patriarchal culture in relation to the Hausa womenfolk in a novel, say, *Destinies of Life*, set in northern Nigeria. This is the research gap this paper intends to fill in.

Like feminist researchers, proponents of religious studies and women's studies are of the view that patriarchy intersects with religion with a view to ensuring that male-dominance is sustained in society. Ahmed (1992), for example, observes that Islam (like Christianity) inherited the traditions in place in the Middle East. Note that the foregoing observation is true for Africa. (The inheriting religion in Africa further intertwined with colonial rule in a bid to disarticulate the social structures in place. In this sense, history recounts that colonial rule and religion contributed, *inter alia*, to widening the gap between men and women across Africa). While Islam (like Christianity) inherited the traditions in place, in the Middle East (like in Africa), it had diligently and progressively subverted or/and adapted these traditions to suit its ideological agenda. (However, it is important to mention that some inherited traditions are very stubborn and have thus remained immutable over time, for instance, women's right to property inheritance). Needless to say, every religion, regardless of its origins, has a hidden socioreligious vision or an underlying ideology. Feminists are aware of this fact. That's why they cogently critique religion, as a social institution, for the role it has played in representing women in marginal terms. In point of fact, religious discourses on/about women and gender, feminist research has proven, are intentionally constructed to sustain the *patriarchal status quo*. Endorsing the foregoing, Edet (2021) submits that the church disregards widows, for example, because it shares (or is dialectically influenced by) the tradition or worldview of patriarchal culture.

This paper is set against the backdrop of the abovementioned theoretical assumptions about gender articulation in social life. It aims to analyze how Asabe Kebir Usman deploys language in her novel entitled *Destinies of Life* (2014) to encode gender relations and ideologies. In other words, it seeks to unravel how this female writer represents, in her literary piece, the relations between male and female characters and how these characters perceive and

respond to social reality. Drawing its theoretical insights from Feminist Stylistics (henceforth, FS) (Mills, 1995/1998, Montoro, 2014) and the descriptive qualitative research design, this study specifically examines how the writer depicts the workings of patriarchal culture in relation to the northern Nigerian Hausa womenfolk and demonstrates how she intentionally attempts to deconstruct male-dominance and its underlying androcentric ideologies with a view to discursively freeing them from the shackles of oppressive power structures.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated above, this study draws its theoretical insights from FS. FS can be simply glossed as a theoretical framework that examines the ways in which language is used to represent gender in literature (Suleman, Tabassum and Mahnoor, 2023). According to Montoro (2014, p. 346), FS is “the sub-branch of stylistics which aims to account for the way in which gender concerns are linguistically encoded in texts, and which attempts to do so by employing some of the frameworks and models pertaining in the stylistics tool-kit”. It can also be referred to as a branch of stylistics which combines theoretical insights from feminism and stylistics in order to examine the ways in which gender issues materialize linguistically in texts (Allagbé, 2023). Concurring with the foregoing, Mills (1995, p. 1) submits that FS is “an analysis which identifies itself as feminist and which uses linguistic or language analysis to examine texts [...]. Thus, feminist stylistic analysis is concerned not only to describe sexism in a text, but also to analyse the way that point of view, agency, metaphor, or transitivity are unexpectedly closely related to matters of gender, to discover whether women’s writing practices can be described, and so on.” It stands to reason from the foregoing that FS is concerned with the analysis of the way gender is represented in texts from a linguistic perspective. In other words, it purports to investigate how texts or text producers employ language to depict gender relations; i.e. the relations between men and women. In addition to this, feminist stylistic analysis is interested in how readers (male and female alike) identify gendered meanings in texts (Montoro, 2004).

Underlying FS is the view that society is organized along gender lines or that patriarchy is pervasive in society (Allagbé, 2023). The concept of gender is very crucial in FS in that it helps one gain an insight into how the relations between the two sex categories (male and female) are enacted in social life. Feminist theory suggests that the relations between men and women in a patriarchal society are marked by hegemony; i.e. one sex (the male sex, precisely) dominates, abuses, maltreats, oppresses, exploits, objectifies, jilts, etc., the other one. From a feminist perspective, patriarchal culture is believed to endorse male-dominance and female subordination. The notion of gender is also central in FS because it helps one understand how unequal gender or power relations are socially constructed. The social construction of gender brings to mind the performativity theory of gender put forth by Judith Butler (1988, 1990/1999, 2004). “According to this theory, gender is not a fixed or inherent characteristic, but rather a social construct that is created and maintained through cultural practices” (Suleman, Tabassum and Mahnoor, 2023, p. 1789). In other words, gender performativity theory posits that gender is a performative act; i.e. gender roles are social performances that individuals repeatedly and variably put on in social life. In this sense, the term “gender” denotes a social category which subsumes the variable roles men and women perform in society. In other words, it encompasses the socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviors, expectations and attributes assigned to individuals based on their perceived or assigned sex (Yohanna, Tasya and Rahmadsyah, 2023, p. 115).

Given the foregoing, feminist stylistic scholars postulate that gender is fluid and variable or that gender is socially or discursively constructed and varies across varying historical and cultural locations (Montoro, 2004). Ethnographic research on gender articulation in pre-

colonial societies in Nigeria (see Oyewùmí, 2005 and Amadiume, 2015), for instance, substantiates the foregoing claim. The research exudes that in pre-colonial Nigerian societies like Yoruba and Igbo, gender, as a social category, did not determine or predetermine the roles men and women could perform in social life. In other words, it reveals that, in the aforementioned societies, gender was not tied to biological sex (and as a result of this, women could perform then the social and political roles [say, title holding, bread-winning, leadership, to name but a few] that patriarchal culture perceives or conceives as a male preserve). Could the same be said about the Hausa society, the setting of the novel entitled *Destinies of Life* under study? The answer may perhaps be positive for the precolonial Hausa society. However, in the contemporary Hausa society, just like in any contemporary society in/across Nigeria, gender, this study cogently postulates, is what determines or predetermines role assignment, division of labor and conditions both men's and women's social thought and identity. In other words, this paper argues that the contemporary Hausa society is organized along gender lines or in terms of a *patriarchal order*; i.e. a behavioral system in which men simply have power over women (Simpson, 1993, p. 148). Acknowledging the foregoing, Usman (2018, pp. 111-112), the author of *Destinies of Life*, points out that:

In [the] traditional Hausa society, the man is an overseer of the affairs and lives of the women in his life; wives, daughter[s], sisters or even mothers. He determines the dimension of their lives and destinies whether he is morally upright or not. [...] The woman, on the other hand, is first and foremost part and parcel of the society. She is considered subordinate to [a] man and her advice is not to be taken for it is believed that a woman is untrustworthy, unintelligent and unreliable in giving advice. As a daughter, the Hausa woman is expected to obey the societal rules and expectation[s] set down for her first, by her father and brothers if she has any and later by her husband when she eventually gets married. The Hausa woman is though seen positively as a mother. As a mother, she is upheld and recognized as a life giver. The society sees her role in the upbringing of the child as inevitable and uncompromising. She is viewed as good, responsible, loving, caring and affectionate. As a wife, a woman is expected to rely on her husband for everything. Her views or choices are not taken seriously and she is only recognized and respected by the society if she obeys the wishes and commands of the husband.

As it appears above, the contemporary Hausa society ascribes gender roles to men and women based on their biological sex. Gendered men and women, in this perspective, are individuals who subscribe to the established social norms. Yet these norms, as we can infer from the quote, endorse hegemonic relations between men and women in the Hausa society. Previous empirical linguistics-based studies have exuded that Hausa feminist writers like Zaynab Alkali, Saliha Abubakar Abdullahi Zaria, Asabe Kebir Usman, etc., have critiqued, in their literary pieces, the way the Hausa society (mal-)treats the Hausa womenfolk (see Allagbé, 2023, Ayoola and Hunsu, 2014, for instance). For example, Allagbé (2023) examines how Alkali deploys language in her novel entitled *The Stillborn* to enact gender. He reports that in a bid to represent women's issues in a fair manner, this female writer does not exclusively reproduce the *patriarchal status quo*. In the same way, Ayoola and Hunsu's paper (2014) analyzes Usman's *Destinies of Life* and Zaria's *Edge of Fate* to show how these women negotiate the interstices of feminist ideology, religion, culture and Western education. The study reveals that the contemporary northern Nigerian Muslim woman finds herself in a dilemma as she attempts to overcome the forces that inhibit her self-expression and at the same

time avoid upsetting the applecart of Islam and patriarchal ideologies. In the next section, the methodology this article draws on is outlined.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs the descriptive qualitative research design. This is to say, it selects some texts from *Destinies of Life* (2014) in which gender concerns are depicted, and describes the language used for this purpose. To describe the language of the selected texts, it uses the Hallidayan Transitivity theory. Transitivity is one of the theories feminist stylisticians borrow from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Allagbé, 2023). With this theory, they objectively account for how texts or text producers represent gender. In this sense, Canning (2014, pp. 50-51) points out that “We can use the transitivity system to account for patterns of experience in a text because reality is made up of experiential processes– doing, sensing, being, happening and becoming [...]”. According to systemic linguists, transitivity is a grammar of experiential meaning. Experiential meaning is considered as the ‘construing experience’ function which is realized as the structural configuration of process(es), participant(s) and circumstance(s) (Webster in Halliday and Webster, 2009, p. 6). As it appears, transitivity analysis involves the identification of three clausal features: processes, participants and circumstances. These three features are duly identified in the selected texts from the novel. After that, the analysis qualitatively demonstrates how they encode gender relations and gendered meanings in the texts. The study seeks to answer the epistemological questions below:

1. What transitivity features does Usman deploy in her fictional text to encode gender relations and ideologies?
2. To what extent do these features project gender relations and ideologies in the text?

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Before delving into the analysis proper, it is expedient to say a few words about Asabe Kebir Usman’s novel under study. Set in the northern part of Nigeria presumably marked by the influence of two oppressive power structures: patriarchy and religion (Islam, to be precise) (Ouarodima, 2018, Allagbé, 2023), *Destinies of Life* (2014) is a social critique of patriarchy, institutionalized sexism or male-dominance; a critique meant to liberate the northern Nigerian Hausa woman from the shackles of oppressive power structures. It specifically represents the hegemonic relations between men and women in the Hausa society. In other words, it thematically describes such age-long workings of patriarchal culture as arranged marriage, widowhood, motherhood, polygamy, power abuse, sexist oppression, objectification, jilting, etc., highlighting how they affect the northern Nigerian Hausa womenfolk physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially. While Usman reproduces the aforementioned workings (which one can call here normative/naturalized/stereotyped roles, behaviors or attitudes in a male-dominated society), she diligently subverts/deconstructs/disarticulates them by discursively empowering the female characters (Maryam, Aisha and Nafisah) involved in them. The subsequent feminist stylistic analysis discusses each of the workings in relation to the aforementioned female characters. (Note that while the analysis discusses a given working of patriarchal culture, the discussion actually touches on other workings). It also figures out how these women are discursively enabled to cope with the workings with a view to freeing them from the shackles of oppressive power structures.

Let us start with arranged marriage. This working of patriarchal culture concerns Maryam, Aisha’s mother. She is married to Awwal, Aisha’s father. In fact, their marriage is arranged by their parents, and they do not love each other. Notice that the marriage lasts six

years and the fruit thereof is Aisha. Notice also that both unwilling partners are able to endure this loveless union for six years because they do not want to disobey their parents. Family members including their late maternal grandfather who believe that their marriage can one day work encourage them to live together. Needless to say, patriarchal culture and Islam frown upon a child's disobedience of/towards his/her parents and elders. However, Maryam, against all odds, decides to break loose from the shackles of a loveless wedlock. In point of fact, she seizes the opportunity of the pressures Awwal's relatives including his mother put on her over her inability to give their son another child after Aisha to break her long silence. In this sense, this woman turns "revolutionary" (Usman, 2014, p. 12), and no longer cares about family and cultural pressures, and social criticisms. What matters for her, at this stage, is only her freedom or fulfillment. This depiction indicates a shift in perspective. Consider how the narrator depicts this female character's attitude in the text below. Consider as well how her society (her father included) responds to her attitude in the text.

1. When Maryam (S) **took the decision (Pme)** [2. **to leave (Pm)** Awwal (G)] (Cc), 3. she (S) **knew (Pme)** [4. she (A) **was going against (Pm)** the wish of many members of her family (G)] (Ph). ... 26. He (S) **had sought (Pme)** severally for Allah's intervention (Ph) 27. and **had committed (Pm)** Maryam's affairs (G) to prayers (B) 28. and if after all he (A) **had done (Pm)** 29. she (S) still **wanted (Pme)** 30. **to leave (Pm)**, 31. then it (T) **might be (Pi)** the only way out (V). 32. He (S) **ignored (Pme)** all the gossips and grumbles (Ph) 33. and **warned (Pv)** Maryam's mother [34. **not to say (Pv)** anything (Vb)] (Cc)" (Usman, 2014, pp. 12-13).

In the text above, the narrator deploys the mental processes "took the decision" in (1) "knew" in (3) and the material processes "leave" in (2) and "was going against" in (4) in relation to Maryam to encode strong female self-consciousness, courage or volition and deliberate action. This suggests that the female character represented in the text is cognitively aware of the social risk she is running by opting for the unusual decision to quit her marriage. Indeed, it is very risky for a northern Nigerian Muslim woman to walk out of her marital home. It is very risky in that the woman is not sure to ever get married again, especially when she has already got a child or children. Against all odds, a year after Maryam has walked out of her marital home, she gets married to a man called Abba she loves (Usman, 2014, p. 14). This representation deconstructs the taken-for-granted patriarchal assumption that a divorced woman is likely to be shunned or ostracized in social life. It is also very risky for a Hausa woman to leave her home as she might likely not be prepared to cope with the torture and trauma resulting from the way the society (her family included) will treat her. Of course, a divorced woman is stigmatized as a divorcee (*bazawara* in Hausa) in the narrative context of the novel. As it appears, the Hausa woman depicted in the text above surprisingly proves to be mentally and spiritually ready to take the risk and she does take it. The foregoing begs for a question: "Where does this woman draw her cognitive/mental and spiritual strength from to take such a weird decision?"

Before answering the above question, note that the text shows that while the depicted Hausa society openly criticizes Maryam's decision to divorce her husband, her family (especially her father) fails to do the same (see clauses 21-34). This unfailingly shows that she finds solace in her family, in her father precisely. In addition, the text indicates that Maryam finds solace in her religion, Islam, which foresees divorce as a solution to a failed or loveless marriage: "14. Her weapon (T) **was (Pi)** her religion, Islam (V), 15. which (S) **recognizes (Pme)** the family (Ph) as the foundation of any society (Co), 16. it (Sy) also **decrees (Pv)** [17. that if two people (A) **cannot make (Pm)** a happy marriage (G), 18. then divorce (T) **is (Pi)**

the final alternative (V), 19. but many relatives (Sy) **told (Pv)** her (Rv) [20. that a good Hausa woman (A) **should suffer (Pm)** in silence (Cm)] (Vb).” The foregoing counters the view that Islam condones female subservience or servitude. In other words, as clauses (19 and 20) clearly exude, it is tradition, not Islamic religion, that in effect endorses female oppression and objectification.

The next working of patriarchal culture we are going to look at is motherhood. And this working has to do with Maryam and her daughter, Aisha. Aisha, unlike her mother, Maryam, is depicted, in the fictional text, as someone who falls in love with a man called Mukhtar. Both lovers are ready to get married. But, unfortunately, Mukhtar has an accident along Zaria/Jos road and passes away, just a few hours before their wedding ceremony begins. Before Mukhtar dies, he has already brought the *lefe*, bridal gifts to Aisha’s parents, as the Hausa custom requires (Usman, 2014, p. 27). This denotes compliance to social norms. Of course, Mukhtar’s death plunges Aisha in hysteria and depression or grief. Consider how the narrator depicts how this female character responds to Mukhtar’s death and the grief it engenders in the following text. Consider also how her parents mutually attempt to soothe her sorrow.

1. Baba (Awwal) (T) **was (Pi)** a pillar of strength (V). 2. So **were (Pi)** Mama (Maryam) and Abba (T). ... 32. Baba (Cr) **got (Pi)** tired of trying to cheer her up. 33. When he (A) **failed (Pm)** 34. he (Sy) **consulted (Pv)** Mama (Rv). 35. She (A) also **did (Pm)** 36. all (G) she (A) **could (Pm)** (At) 37. but **had to give up (Pm)** also. 38. No one (S) **knew (Pme)** [39. how **to get through to (Pme)** Aisha (Ph)] (Ph). 40. In their extreme anxiety **to cure (Pm)** her, 41. her parents (A) **forced (Pm)** her (G) [42. **to visit (Pm)** countless spiritualists (G)] (Cc), 43. but no amount of incantations or prayers blown into *Zamzam* water (A) **could cure (Pm)** her (G). 44. It (T) **was (Pi)** 45. as if she (A) **had lost (Pm)** all the sense of loving (G). 46. Life (T) **meant (Pi)** nothing (V) to her (Cl) anymore (Cm). 47. Mukhtar (T) **was (Pi)** her life (V) 48. and with him (Ca) **had gone (Pm)** the essence of living (G). 49. Mama and Baba (S) **refused (Pme)** 50. **to give up (Pm)**; 51. they (A) **stood by (Pm)** her (G), 52. **not relenting (Pm)** in their effort (Cm) (Usman, 2014, pp. 32-33).

As it appears, the text above represents a parent-daughter relationship in a context of grief; grief caused by the loss of a loved one. While the narration describes Baba as “a pillar of strength” in (1) for his bereaved daughter, Aisha, it does not portray Mama less. In point of fact, both parents are portrayed as people who play both individual and collective roles to help their daughter overcome her grief. Consider, for instance, the textual snippet: “32. Baba (Cr) **got (Pi)** tired of trying to cheer her up. 33. When he (A) **failed (Pm)** 34. he (Sy) **consulted (Pv)** Mama (Rv). 35. She (A) also **did (Pm)** 36. all (G) she (A) **could (Pm)** (At) 37. but **had to give up (Pm)** also.” The narrator’s use of the relational process “got” in (32) and the material process “failed” in (33) in relation to Baba and the material processes “did” in (35), “could” in (36) and “had to give up” in (37) in relation to Mama clearly evinces individual parental attempts at helping Aisha get rid of her grief. Again, the narrator deploys the verbal process “consulted” in (34) which has Baba as a Sayer and Mama as a Receiver. This process unfailingly projects Mama as someone who is trustworthy, intelligent and reliable. This depiction counters the popular belief that a woman is untrustworthy, unintelligent and unreliable in giving advice (Usman, 2018, pp. 111-112). In the same token, the textual snippet “49. Mama and Baba (S) **refused (Pme)** 50. **to give up (Pm)**; 51. they (A) **stood by (Pm)** her (G), 52. **not relenting (Pm)** in their effort (Cm)” exudes collective parental actions. The narrator’s use of the material processes “to give up” in (50), “stood by” in (51) and “not relenting” in (52) in relation to Baba and Mama confirms the preceding claim. It follows from

the preceding analysis to establish that Mama is equally empowered as her ex-husband, Baba, through the mother(ing) roles she performs in the text.

While all the attempts from parents and family members to cheer Aisha up fail, we are further told that she is able to cope with her melancholic situation thanks to her commitment to work; studies:

1. At school (Cl), she (Cr) **became (Pi)** withdrawn 2. and **had (Pp)** only one obsession; study (Pd), 3. and this (G) she (A) **did (Pm)**, [4. **giving (Pm)** herself (B) no room (G) for any social activity (Cc)] (Cc). 5. As the months (A) **rolled by (Pm)**, 6. she (S) finally **accepted (Pme)** Mukhtar's death (Ph) but at the price of her happiness (Cm). 7. With acceptance (Ca), Aisha (A) **faced (Pm)** her work (G) with a renewed vigour (Cm), 8. her unhappiness (G) [**was**] **suppressed (Pm)** with work (A/Ca). 9. When she (A) **graduated (Pm)**, 10. she (A) **did (Pm)** so (G) in flying colours, to the expectation of many (Cm) (Usman, 2014, p. 33).

The above gender representation reveals a shift in perspective; i.e. it portrays a new Aisha who is ready to accept Mukhtar's death and start life afresh. It also indicates the female character's ardent quest for knowledge. But her quest for knowledge is made at the expense of her joy. This is to say, in her attempt to get rid of the memory of Mukhtar, Aisha concentrates all her strength on her studies, suppressing her sorrow with work, and the outcome, as noticed, is highly outstanding. This suggests that Hausa women cannot achieve anything (including their freedom) in social life without a minimum sacrifice. It also suggests that they need to transcend the torture and trauma inflicted on them by life in general and patriarchy, in particular. Above it all, it suggests that they need to take action in order to change the course of history and their lives. Note that Aisha graduates from university with flying colors at the age of twenty-three. At this age, she shows no interest in getting married. All parental efforts to force her to change her mind fail lamentably. The narrator portrays this better:

1. Aisha (S) **refused (Pme)** [2. **to get involved in (Pm)** any relationship (G) with the opposite sex (Ca)] (Ph). 3. Despite Baba's support (Mn) 4. and pity for her (Mn), 5. her actions (A) **were beginning (Pm)** 6. **to be (Pi)** a thing of worry (V) for him (Cc). 7. As soon as the issue of marriage (A) **came up (Pm)**, 8. Aisha (A) **would flare up (Pm)** 9. and always **have (Pp)** a reason (Pd) [10. **to change (Pm)** the topic (G)] (Cc). 11. The thought of marriage (T) **was (Pi)** a no-go topic (V) for Aisha (Co). 12. Baba (A) **tried to break into (Pm)** Aisha's shell (G) 13. but **failed (Pm)**. 14. He (S) **had wanted (Pme)** her (Ph) [15. **to get involved in (Pm)** one or two relationships (G) 16. so that she (Cr) **may get (Pi)** married (At)] (Cc); 17. but anytime (Cl) Baba (A) **brought up (Pm)** the topic (G), 18. Aisha (A) politely (Cm) **dropped (Pm)** it (G). 19. Mama (Ph) **was also disturbed (Pme)** about her attitude (S/Ct) 20. but with time (Cm) Abba (S) **persuaded (Pme)** her (Ph) [21. **to let (Pm)** Aisha (G) be] (Cc) (Usman, 2014, pp. 34-35).

As it appears, the narrator ascribes the mental process "refused", the material processes "to get involved in" in (1), "would flare up" in (8) and "to change" in (10), "to get involved" in (15) and "dropped" in (18), and the relational processes "have" in (9), "was" in (11), "may get" in (16) to Aisha. These processes naturally project the female character as cognitively impermeable to anything that has to do with marriage or with the opposite sex. This apprehension is further reinforced by the processes ascribed to her parents. Consider the material processes "tried to break into", "failed" in (13) and "brought up" in (17) and the mental process "had wanted" in (14) assigned to Baba, and the mental process "was also disturbed" and the material process "to let...be" in (21) assigned to Mama. These processes clearly evince

parental actions and intentions to see Aisha change her mind and get married one day. Notice that the representation of Aisha as someone who refuses to marry at the age of twenty-three even when her parents insist encodes both defiance and freedom. Needless to say, in an Islamic patriarchal society like northern Nigeria, a child is socially expected to respect his/her parents. Here, the contrary is observed. But there is a logical reason for this female character's unexpected attitude. She has not completely healed from the loss of her first love, Mukhtar. And her parents seem to understand this perfectly.

Of course, Aisha takes advantage of this situation to her benefit. One can presume from the way she behaves that she has a hidden intention: she wants to marry when she wants and to whom she wants, and not under parental or social pressures. For instance, when a young lecturer at the University of Sokoto called Umar she meets at the National Youth Corps orientation camp shows interest in her and decides to let her in on it, she refuses to give him the chance to meet her. To cut a long story short, when Umar and his friend Zubair, find their way to her father's house in Jos where they meet Baba, he opens up to the old man, telling him his intention for his daughter. Baba explains to Umar the reason for Aisha's unenthusiastic behavior and asks him to be patient as well as cautious with her. With Baba's intervention and influence, Aisha accepts to see Umar who proposes to her some weeks later, and they finally get married (Usman, 2014, pp. 37-38). This brings us to our next working of patriarchal culture: power abuse.

After Aisha and Umar wed, they move to Sokoto. Recall that both spouses work and earn a salary. While Aisha teaches Sociology at the College of Arts and Humanities (Usman, 2014, p. 36), Umar is a lecturer at the University of Sokoto. The foregoing deconstructs the taken-for-granted patriarchal assumption that only a man is or can be a breadwinner in a patriarchal society. In the subsequent text, the woman is portrayed as a true helper for the man:

1. As the months (A) **flew by (Pm)**, 2. Aisha (Cr/Ph) **was (Pi) determined (At/Pme)** [3. **to be (Pi)** a very good wife (V) for Umar (Cc)] (Cc). 4. [That his salary (A) **could not sustain (Pm)** them (G)] (T) **was (Pi)** no concern of hers (V). 5. She (A) **tried (Pm)** as much as possible (Cm) [6. **to supplement (Pm)** with her salary (Ca)] (Cc). 7. She (G/Cr) **was (Pi)** now fully **employed (Pm/At)** with the State College of Arts and Humanities (Ca) 8. where she (A) **had done (Pm)** her youth service (G). 9. Sometimes (Cm) they (A) **stayed (Pm)** for long weeks (Cx) without meat (Cm), 10. but this (S) **did not bother (Pme)** Aisha (Ph) 11. because she (S) **believed (Pme)** [12. that things (A) **would improve (Pm)** one day (Cl)] (Ph). 13. When during the fifth month of their marriage (Cl) Umar's car (A) **broke down (Pm)**, 14. Aisha (A) **came (Pm)** to his rescue (Cl). 15. She (A) **sold (Pm)** her most valued gold bangles (G) [16. **to put (Pm)** the car (G) back on the road (Cl)] (Cc). 17. When Nigerian University Lecturers (A) **embarked on (Pm)** a strike action (G) 18. which (Vb) the government (Sy) **termed (Pv)** illegal (At), 19. she (T) **became (Pi)** the breadwinner (V) 20. because Umar (T) **was (Pi)** without his monthly salary (Cm); 21. the government of the day (Sy) **had declared (Pv)** "no work no pay" (Vb) (Usman, 2014, p. 47)

In the text above, the narrator describes the female character positively. In point of fact, she deploys the Values "a very good wife for Umar" in (1), "no concern of hers" in (5) and "the breadwinner" in (20), and the Attributes "determined" in (2) and "now fully employed" in (7) to encode positive qualities. She also ascribes the material processes "tried" in (5), "to supplement" in (6), "had done" in (8), "came" in (14), "sold" in (15) and "to put...back" in (16), the mental processes "did not bother" in (10) and "believed" in (11), and the relational processes "was" in (2), "to be" in (3), "was" in (7) and "became" in (19) to Aisha. These

processes indubitably project her as someone who performs good deeds and embodies good intentions and qualities. Unlike Aisha who is depicted positively, the narrator evaluates the male character somewhat negatively. For instance, she represents him as someone whose salary cannot sustain a family (4), as someone whose family spends weeks without meat (9), as someone whose car breaks down and is unable to fix it without a woman's assistance (13-16) and finally as someone who loses his status of the breadwinner of the family because the prolonged strike of Nigerian University Lecturers causes him to be without his monthly salary (17-20). This depiction exudes the writer's departure from and subscription to mainstream ideologies of gender positioning and representation (Allagbé, Amoussou and M'po Kouyinampou 2021).

Ten years later after their wedding, the preceding picture changes as Umar through Baba's help and influence gets a well-paid job at the Department of Economic Planning of the Federal Ministry of Finance, Abuja, and rises with time from Assistant Director of Economic Planning to Deputy Director and then to Director (Usman, 2014, p. 49). (Note that at this time, the couple has got four children (two boys and two girls): Zainab, Sadiq, Aisha (Junior) and Ibrahim. Note also that at the birth of her first child, Aisha puts an end to her teaching job and concentrates her time on housekeeping. This indicates subscription to mainstream ideologies of gender positioning and representation). With Umar's rise comes power; money power. However, he fails to use this power wisely as he begins to betray, cheat on, exploit and jilt the opposite sex. For example, he has an extramarital affair with his secretary, Farida, and this makes him become less affectionate to his wife. When Aisha finally discovers this reality and confronts him, he unashamedly denies it. Consider how he does this in the text below. Consider also how his wife reacts to this.

1. **Look (Pb)**, Aisha, 2. I (S) **know (Pme)** [3. Farida (Cr) **is (Pi)** gorgeous, smart (At) 4. and **has (Pp)** a good sense of humour (Pd) 5. but there **is (Pe)** nothing between us (X)] (Ph). 6. So it (Cr) **is (Pi)** surprising (At) 7. that you (Cr) **are getting (Pi)** unusually upset (At) over nothing (Co)". 8. Aisha (Cr) **got (Pi)** very angry (At), 9. angrier (At) than she (S) **had intended (Pme)** 10. **to be (Pi)**. 11. "Why **shouldn't I (Cr) be (Pi)** upset (At)? 12. My husband (A) **is playing around with (Pm)** a girl (G) 13. and she (Pr) even **has (Pp)** the guts (Pd) 14. **to tell (Pv)** anyone (Rv) 15. who (S) **cares (Pme)** [16. **to listen (Pb)** 17. [that she (A) **is going to marry (Pm)** my husband (G)] (Cc), 18. but my husband (Ag) **makes (Pc)** me (Cr) **feel (Pi)** better (At) 19. by **telling (Pv)** me (Rv) [20. that (a) she (Cr) **is (Pi)** gorgeous (At) 21. (b) she (Cr) **is (Pi)** sweet (At) 22. and oh, I (S) almost **forget (Pme)** [23. (c) she (Pr) **has (Pp)** a wonderful sense of humour (Pd)"] (Ph)] (Vb) (Usman, 2014, p. 50).

As it is obvious, Umar in his attempt to convince his wife, Aisha, that he does not have a sexual escapade with his secretary, Farida, inadvertently ascribes the double Attribute "gorgeous, smart" in (3) and the Possessed "a good sense of humour" in (4) to her. These terms which unmistakably characterize Farida positively indicate that he has an unavowed penchant for her. Aisha is not a dupe. She actually gets the underlying meaning as she gets angry and even goes ahead to sarcastically ironize and dramatize what her husband has said in a bid to mock him (11-23). After this incident, Umar becomes surprisingly loving to his wife, and to prove his good intention to her (which is an effect of her influence on him), he jilts Farida and asks for her transfer with immediate effect to another ministry (Usman, 2014, p. 50).

Four years later, the same man who seems to have repented sets his eyes on another young woman, Nafisah, his distant cousin's daughter, who has come to stay with them (his family) because she is studying Law at the University of Abuja (Usman, 2014, p. 51). Initially,

he considers Nafisah as his daughter, but as time goes by, he begins to see her as a woman. Nafisah too initially considers Umar as a father but with time she begins to notice the looks he gives her and the comments he makes about her when they are alone. They later begin to see each other in secret (in a guest house) without Aisha knowing it. Nafisah's outlook subsequently begins to change as Umar lavishly spends money on her. This love relationship actually lasts two years, and no one suspects them. In her final year at the University, Nafisah persuades Aisha to allow her to move to the school hostel, and she accepts. With this new trend, Nafisah follows Umar on official trips, and with time, she becomes "a sophisticated lady" (ibid., p. 53). When Nafisah's parents (especially her mother) hear about her love relationship with Umar, they are happy about it. As the narrator puts it, they believe "They (A) **had caught (Pm)** a big fish (G) in their net (Cl)" (ibid.). One day when Aisha and the kids are on a visit to Baba's house (Baba is ill and has just been discharged from the hospital) in Jos, Umar brings Nafisah to his matrimonial home for a sexual escapade. Before the sexual hostility begins, both lovers exchange a bit, and their exchange opens a window into their perception and attitude. Consider the exchange as well as the narratorial comments below.

1. "Nafisah" (Vb) he (Sy) **said (Pv)** hoarsely (Cm), 2. she (Be) **looked at (Pb)** him (Ph) strangely (Cm) 3. and **did not say (Pv)** anything (Vb). 4. "Do you (S) **realize (Pme)** 5. [what (G) we (A) **are doing (Pm)**] (Cr) **is (Pi)** wrong and unfair (At) to Aisha (Cc)?" 6. "Yes" (Vb) she (Sy) **replied (Pv)**. 7. "But we (Cr) **are soon getting (Pi)** married (At), 8. so what (Cr) **is (Pi)** bad (At) about visiting my future matrimonial home (Ct)?" 9. Her heart (A) **beat (Pm)**. 10. She (T) **would be (Pi)** his wife (V). 11. "Nafisah" (Vb) he (Sy) **said (Pv)** again (Cm). 12. "Yes?" (Mn) 13. "**Do you (S) love (Pme)** me (Ph)? ... 26. "You (Ag) **have made (Pc)** me (Cr) happy (At) Nafisah. 27. My old age and retirement (Cr) **will be (Pi)** fantastic (At). 28. **Come (Pm)**, 29. I (Pr) **have (Pp)** a present (Pd) 30. I (A) **have been saving (Pm)** for this occasion (Cc)". 31. She (A) **followed (Pm)** him (G) silently (Cm) to his bedroom (Cl) (Usman, 2014, p. 60).

In the text above, the narrator represents Umar as someone who is consciously disturbed by the act he and Nafisah are about to perform. His polar question "4. "Do you (S) **realize (Pme)** 5. [what (G) we (A) **are doing (Pm)**] (Cr) **is (Pi)** wrong and unfair (At) to Aisha (Cc)?" towards Nafisah clearly indicates this. On the contrary, the narrator describes Nafisah as someone who is not bothered at all. In fact, her response to Umar's query "6. "Yes" (Vb) she (Sy) **replied (Pv)**. 7. "But we (Cr) **are soon getting (Pi)** married (At), 8. so what (Cr) **is (Pi)** bad (At) about visiting my future matrimonial home (Ct)?" exudes this. Again, Umar's question as to whether Nafisah loves him is not answered directly; i.e. with yes or no. In point of fact, in Nafisah's indirect answer, one can figure out that she is conscious of what she is doing. In other words, she is not that kind of girl a man can use and dump at will. One can also notice that she is fully in control of her life. This portrayal is suggestive of (radical) feminist ideologies.

As Umar and Nafisah move into the bedroom, Aisha unexpectedly returns from Jos. She surprises the two lovers in her matrimonial bedroom and feels deeply betrayed, shocked and humiliated. But, against all odds, she does not immediately make a stink about it. When Umar notices her presence in the house, he asks her to let him explain to her what has happened the next day. She accepts despite herself. Consider how Umar explains what has happened to Aisha and her reaction in the text below. Consider too the narrator's comments.

1. "Aisha, I (Sy) **am at a loss for words (Pv)**. 2. I (S) **do not know (Pme)** [3. where **to begin (Pm)**"] (Ph). 4. "**Begin (Pm)** from the beginning (Cl)". 4. Aisha (Sy) **said (Pv)** coldly (Cm). 5. "Aisha things (A) **have been happening (Pv)**

between Nafisah and myself (Cl) of late (Cl)...” 6. Aisha (A) **cut (Pm)** him (G) short here (Cl). 7. “I (S) **can see (Pme)** that (Ph)”. 8. “Aisha, **don’t make (Pc)** this (Cr) difficult (At) for me (Cc)”. 9. She (S) **refused (Pme)** [10. **to look at (Pb)** him (Ph), 11. and then he (Sy) **continued (Pv)**] (Cc). 12. “As a Muslim (Co), I (A) **can marry (Pm)** up to four wives (G), 13. if I (A) **can afford (Pm)** it. 14. I (S) **feel (Pme)** [15. I (A) **can (Pm)**] (Ph), 16. so I (S) **want (Pme)** 17. **to marry (Pm)** Nafisah (G)”. ... 41. **Tell (Pv)** Nafisah (Rv) [42. **to pack out (Pm)** of my house (Cl) now (Cl)] (Cc). 43. I (Sy) **mean (Pv)** now (Cl)”. 44. Aisha (Sy) **said (Pv)** hysterically (Cm). 45. “Why (Vb), if I (Sy) **may ask (Pv)**?” 46. “I (S) **don’t think (Pme)** [47. I (S) **need to explain (Pv)**] (Ph). 48. I (S) **accepted (Pme)** her (Ph) into my house (Cl) 49. because I (S) **trusted (Pme)** her (Ph), 50. now (Cl) I (A) **have changed (Pm)** my mind (G). 51. I (S) **do not want (Pme)** her (Ph) in my house (Cl) again (Cm)”. 52. Aisha (Sy) **replied (Pv)** angrily (Cm). 53. “It (A) **cannot change (Pm)** anything (G) Aisha. 54. Moreover, I (Pr) **own (Pp)** this house (Pd). 55. I (Sy) **dictate (Pv)** [56. who (A) **stays (Pm)** 57. and who (A) **goes (Pm)**] (Vb)”. ...63. “[So, what (Vb) you (Sy) **are telling (Pv)** me (Rv) in short (Cm)] (T), **is (Pi)** [that Nafisah (A) **will stay (Pm)**] (V). 64. But I (Pr) **won’t have (Pp)** it (Pd) Umar. 65. If she (A) **stays (Pm)**, 66. I (A) **will definitely leave (Pm)**. 67. **Do** you (S) **hear (Pme)** that (Ph)?” 68. She (Sy) **said (Pv)** shouting (Cm). 69. “I (Cr) **mean (Pi)** it (At), 70. if Nafisah (A) **does not leave (Pm)** now (Cl), 71. I (A) **will leave (Pm)**”. 72. “So you (S) **want (Pme)** 73. **to leave (Pm)** 74. because I (S) **want (Pme)** 75. **to get (Pi)** married (At)?” 76. **Asked (Pv)** Umar (Sy) in a sneering voice (Cm). 77. “I (A) **am not leaving (Pm)** 78. because you (Cr) **are getting (Pi)** married (At). 79. You (A) **are going about (Pm)** the issue (G) [80. in a way that (A) **gets on my nerves (Pm)**] (Cm). 81. Why Nafisah? (Mn) 82. Why not someone else? (Mn)” 83. Umar (A) **shrugged (Pm)** his shoulder (G). 84. “I (S) **do not know (Pme)**. ...” (Usman, 2014, pp. 66-68).

The text above clearly shows that Umar draws on Islam to justify his amoral act: “12. “As a Muslim (Co), I (A) **can marry (Pm)** up to four wives (G), 13. if I (A) **can afford (Pm)** it. 14. I (S) **feel (Pme)** [15. I (A) **can (Pm)**] (Ph), 16. so I (S) **want (Pme)** 17. **to marry (Pm)** Nafisah (G)”. Since Islam decrees that a man can marry up to four wives, if he can afford it, this man takes it for granted that a woman (his wife for that matter) has no emotion and dignity or self-worth. By choosing Nafisah as a second wife, this man dishonors his wife twice. Firstly, he dishonors her because the woman considers Nafisah as her own daughter, and does not imagine having her as her rival. In fact, anyone else except Nafisah can be Umar’s second wife! Her wh-questions “81. Why Nafisah? (Mn) 82. Why not someone else? (Mn)” not only encodes the foregoing meaning but also a deep sense of betrayal and humiliation. Secondly, the matrimonial bedroom is socially considered as a sacred place and no one else except the couple is expected to have access to it. Umar, against all odds, breaches this social expectation, which he tries to sustain with his religion. In the text above, Aisha threatens to leave her marital home if Umar allows Nafisah to stay. He actually accepts to send Nafisah away but he goes on to organize his marriage with her without considering Aisha’s feelings and consent.

Aisha later leaves her marital home for her father’s house as things become more and more unbearable. For instance, Umar becomes violent and subsequently beats Zainab who attempts to openly defend her mother, Aisha. Again, he deprives Aisha of money. To escape this marital turmoil, she once again finds solace in her father’s house. Indeed, the old man helps her find a job. Hence, she takes back control of her life. Meanwhile, Nafisah controls Umar’s

life, squandering his resources. As time goes by, Umar discovers that she is not a good marriage material at all. In fact, as the narration indicates, she is rude, spoilt to a fault, disrespectful, extravagant and far demanding. In a squabble following Nafisah's fruitless demand for money, she insults and provokes Umar, and when he hits her, she surprisingly strikes him back. Notice how the narrator describes this in the text below. Pay attention to the processes she ascribes to both characters.

1. She (S) **felt (Pme)** hatred (Ph) for Umar (Cc). 2. Fighting (Cr) **was (Pi)** better than loneliness (At). 3. She (A) **got up (Pm)** [with a fury she (S) never **knew (Pme)** [she (Pr) **possessed (Pp)**] (Ph)] (Cm) 4. and **went (Pm)** in search of Umar (Cl). 5. She (A) **met (Pm)** him (G) at the dining table (G) 6. **taking (Pm)** his breakfast (G). 7. He (Cr) **looked (Pi)** cool and calm (At), 8. this (S) **angered (Pme)** her (Ph) the more (Cm). 9. She (A) **took (Pm)** the hot water flask (G) 10. and **attempted pouring (Pm)** the liquid (G) on him (Cl). 11. Retribution (Cr) **was (Pi)** swift (At); 12. with a single blow (Cm) he (A) **knocked (Pm)** her (G) on the head (Cl), 13. she (A) **bumped (Pm)** her head (G) on the edge of the table (Cl). 14. For a moment (Cx) she (Cr) **was (Pi)** too dazed and horrified (At) [15. **to move (Pm)**] (Cc), 16. but when she (A) **picked (Pm)** herself (G) up 17. and **saw (Pme)** Umar (Ph) 18. **adjusting (Pm)** his shirt (G), 19. **not bothered (Pme)** [20. as to whether he (A) **had hurt (Pm)** her (G) or not] (Ph), 21. she (A) **picked up (Pm)** a side stool (G) 22. and **threw (Pm)** it (G) at him (B) with force (Cm). 23. Umar (A) **crumpled (Pm)** 24. and **fell (Pm)** on the nearest settee (Cl) (Usman, 2014, p. 95).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed how Asabe Kebir Usman deploys language in her novel entitled *Destinies of Life* (2014) to encode gender relations and ideologies. In other words, it has unraveled how this female writer represents, in her literary piece, the relations between male and female characters and how these characters perceive and respond to social reality. The study has drawn its theoretical insights from FS and the descriptive qualitative research design to specifically examine how the writer depicts the workings of patriarchal culture in relation to the northern Nigerian Hausa womenfolk and demonstrate how she intentionally attempts to deconstruct male-dominance and its underlying androcentric ideologies with a view to discursively freeing them from the shackles of oppressive power structures. It has surreptitiously argued that the narrative context of the novel is ontologically marked by the influence of two oppressive power structures: patriarchy and religion (Islam, to be precise) (Ouarodima, 2018, Allagbé, 2023). The analysis has yielded some important findings. For instance, the findings exude that Usman deploys in her fictional text such transitivity features as material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational and existential processes, in varying proportions, to encode gender relations and ideologies. However, the dominant process-type identified in the selected texts is material process, suggesting thus that the novel is mainly concerned with actions. The participants involved in the material and other processes are male and female characters.

The findings also reveal that the narrator deploys language in her novel to represent such age-long patriarchal workings as arranged marriage, widowhood, motherhood, polygamy, power abuse, sexist oppression, objectification, jilting, etc. In effect, the discussion of the aforementioned workings of patriarchal culture globally shows that the characters (male and female) in the novel are represented both in normative and subverted gender roles, indicating thus Usman's departure from and subscription to mainstream ideologies of gender positioning

and representation (Allagbé, Amoussou and M'po Kouyinampou 2021). For instance, Maryam is first depicted as a woman (or a mother of one child: Aisha) who, against all odds, decides to walk out of her marriage; an arranged marriage. While this female character's behavior seems unexpected in the narrative context of the novel, that she finds solace in her family, in her father for that matter, is what is the least expected. Again, this woman is described as someone who finds solace in her religion, Islam. This depiction deconstructs the view that Islam condones female subservience or servitude. This same woman is further portrayed as someone who gets married to another man she loves. While this representation encodes female freedom, it discursively deconstructs the taken-for-granted patriarchal assumption that a divorced woman is likely to be shunned or ostracized in social life. In addition, Maryam is represented alongside her ex-husband as a person who consoles and soothes her bereaved daughter, Aisha. As it appears, this representation exudes that the woman is empowered through the mother(ing) roles she performs.

Like her mother, Aisha is described as someone who finds solace in her parents (especially in her father) all through. For example, when she loses Mukhtar, her father like her mother stands by her sides. Moreover, when her husband, Umar, decides to take Nafisah as a second wife against her will, and she moves out of her marital home, she is comforted by her father who harbors her and her kids, and even finds her a new job that will surely help her earn money to take care of herself and her children. This representation encodes female liberation and financial autonomy. Aisha is also represented as someone who is able to transcend life adventures (including the workings of patriarchal culture and the deaths of Mukhtar, her first love, Ibrahim, her son, Awwal, her father and Umar, her husband) through her commitment to work and her unflinching faith in Allah. Again, she is represented both as an educated woman who teaches and earns a salary, like Umar, and as a good housewife and mother. In fact, as the depiction unveils, she is at a point in time the breadwinner of her family. This depiction deconstructs the taken-for-granted patriarchal assumption that only a man is or can be a breadwinner in a patriarchal society. Elsewhere, she is portrayed as someone who abandons her job just to cater for her husband and home when she gives birth to her first child, Zainab. This indicates subscription to mainstream ideologies of gender positioning and representation.

Nafisah too is portrayed as someone who finds solace in her family (especially in her mother) who supports her love relationship with Umar. She is also described as a young, beautiful, ambitious and materialistic educated woman. For instance, she accepts to date and marry Umar because she knows that with him she can live her dream life. In other words, she does not marry him because she loves him. She is further represented as a person who is rude, spoilt to a fault, disrespectful, extravagant and far demanding. In addition, she is depicted as a girl that a man cannot use and dump at will, as someone who is in control of her life and as someone who is self-defensive. For example, when she asks her husband, Umar, for money (hundred thousand naira) and he refuses, a squabble arises, and when Umar hits her, she strikes him back. This portrayal is suggestive of (radical) feminist ideologies. As we all know, radical feminism is a brand of feminism that calls for a re-ordering of society in which male hegemony is eliminated. In this perspective, this study concludes that Usman, through her female characters, protests against the established social norms that constrain or sanction gender in her society.

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