

# IN SEARCH OF THE TRUE VICTIMIZER: A READING OF LOLA SHONEYIN'S *THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES*

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## **Résumé :**

*Les écrivains écrivent souvent des romans, des pièces de théâtre ou des poèmes sans décider ouvertement qui est à blâmer dans l'histoire. En d'autres termes, ils donnent la parole aux différents lecteurs pour aborder les questions sous différents angles. Lola fait partie de ces écrivains qui exposent les maux de la société sans porter ouvertement un jugement de valeur rapide sur les responsables de la société qu'elle a décrite de manière esthétique. La problématique de ce sujet de recherche vient du postulat qu'après mon cours de roman africain et particulièrement après avoir analysé et commenté *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, j'ai posé la question à mes étudiants de savoir qui est à blâmer dans l'histoire. Non seulement les réponses sont aussi nombreuses que diverses, mais surtout il n'a pas été possible de découvrir la racine des problèmes que la présente étude tente d'identifier à l'aide d'analyse critique. En appliquant la théorie de la réponse du lecteur, la présente étude fait ressortir le véritable agresseur. Alors que certains blâment les épouses de Baba Segi pour leur conspiration du silence, certains blâment Bolanle par l'intermédiaire duquel la vérité a été révélée, certains blâment Baba Segi lui-même pour son désir d'enfants ; le véritable bourreau est sans doute la société dotée de règles et de réglementations patriarcales. Le désir d'enfants de Baba Segi, la conspiration du silence de ses trois épouses et l'arrivée de la quatrième épouse, par l'intermédiaire de laquelle ce qui est resté longtemps secret a finalement été découvert, ne sont que de simples victimes des normes patriarcales. Il est donc très important d'attaquer le mal à sa racine.*

**Mots clés:** *Afrique, patriarcat, genre, oppression, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.*

## Abstract:

*Writers often write novels, plays or poems without openly taking decision in who is to blame in the story. In other words, they are giving floor to different readers to approach the issues from different perspectives. Lola is such a writer who exposes the societal ills without openly making a quick value judgment on who is to blame in the society. The problem of this research topic stems from the premise that after my class on African novel and particularly after analyzing and commenting *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, I questioned my students on who is to blame in the story. Not only their answers are as many as diverse, but, also, they were not able to identify the root of the problems which the current study is trying to find out through a critical analysis. By applying a reader response theory, the current study brings to surface the true victimizer. While some blame Baba Segi's wives for their conspiracy of silence, some blame Bolanle through whom the truth was revealed, some blame Baba Segi, himself, for his lust for children; the true victimizer is no doubt the society endowed with patriarchal rules and regulations. Baba Segi's lust for children, his three wives' conspiracy of silence, and his fourth wife, through whom what had remained secret for long was finally known, are all mere victims of patriarchal norms. Thus, it is very important to attack the evil at its root.*

**Key words:** *Africa, patriarchy, gender, oppression, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*,*

## Introduction

It's true that writers write to inform, to persuade, to convince or even to change the world into a better living environment where both men and women live in total harmony, mutual understanding and pacific coexistence. This may be possible only when both men and women play positive roles towards achieving peace which implies respect of one another without consideration of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or even religions or political orientations. The above-mentioned values are known to the *Universal declaration of human rights*<sup>1</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

endows in its first item that: « All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood ». The declaration rationalizes that:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Despite all the above call by national, regional and international institutions to abide by the rules of the United Nations declaration which permit each and every one to live in peace and harmony; some of the rules of patriarchy which, unfortunately, have firm roots will not enable it to happen. This is so despite the tremendous effort by women and even men of good will. The yokes of patriarchy on African women, in general, and Nigerian women, in particular, is what Lola Shoneyin brought to surface on the pages of her novel.

*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* actually chronicles the tale of several ladies in a convoluted polygamous union in contemporary Nigeria. The patriarch of the family, Baba Segi, is a tyrant. His first wife, Iya Segi, loves to tell other women that she is the first and unquestionably the most important. Together, they 'have' two children. He has three children with Iya Tope, his second wife. The third wife, Iya Femi, is a mother of two. Baba Segi easily accepts his patriarchal obligations up until Bolanle, his fourth wife, marries into the family.

Bolanle is distinct from the other three wives as she has a university degree. She does not have a child, and her perspectives are generally progressive and modern. Bolanle has her own reasons for wanting to marry Baba Segi, despite her mother's opposition. Bolanle believes that despite her education and future prospects, she would never be able to move past the sexual trauma she endured as a youngster. As soon as Bolanle arrives, Baba Segi tries to get her pregnant quickly. However, as the weeks and months go by, she cannot get pregnant, and he does not understand why.

Then, Teacher, a friend of Baba Segi, advises that they go to a hospital to check what is wrong with her because public opinion holds the view that Bolanle alone can bear the blame. She neither receives a formal invitation to join the group of women, nor do other wives dare share their secrets with her. For instance, she does not even have her own armchair because she is not blessed with children. It is interesting to note that Iya Tope, who is quiet and modest, is the one who is cheating on Baba Segi by having extra marital sexual relation with Baba Segi's driver. She finds some degree of sexual satisfaction from the new relation. What is more, she was able to advise her co wives namely the then Iya Tope and Iya Femi to have extra sexual relation with an outcome of having a baby. Iya Tope was finally blessed with three children with a meat seller and Iya Femi had two with a certain Tunde.

As it turns out, the children in this novel have different fathers, much to Baba Segi's surprise at the end. He discovers Iya Tope is not the only unfaithful wife and he, in fact, is the one with trouble conceiving. This is why Bolanle, who has no other sexual relationships, cannot get pregnant. Bolanle ultimately leaves the household once she rediscovers her own power and her ability to heal from past traumas.

In sum, what is problematic in the current research is not that many students, whom I have questioned on who is to blame in

the story of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, have different opinions on the issue, as it is their right to see it from a given angle, but that these students do not even bother to distinguish between the attitudes of Baba Segi and his wives, as a prescribed patriarchal law, before they send the blame on them. Although polygamy and its associated repercussions are handled artistically in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, some of her characters' behaviors can only be explained by identifying the real victimizer. Indeed, the goal of the current research is to show that the only way to discover long-term remedies to the various issues that women face in patriarchal societies is to carefully examine the real victimizer. Upon identifying the real victimizer with sound evidences, many readers will be able to comprehend not only how women frequently appear to be fiercely competitive in their attempts to get their co-owned husband's affection, but also how even men's attitudes are influenced by social standards.

In simple terms, the current research and its findings are not intended to impose a framework on students or scholars who have been reading or writing a paper on *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*; however, I firmly argue, utilizing a reader response criticism, that the true victimizer of women is the patriarchal society that imposes them code of conducts.

## **1. An overview on Reader Response Criticism**

Almost all the literary theories differ with one another in their attempt to approach the meaning of a text. Each theory places the meaning of a text in a certain ground and then tries to reach the truth with reference to the meaning. Some theories such as New Criticism use textual analysis rather than external facts as framework to extract meanings (Lois.T, 1999); some other theories such as the Formalists believe that one can come at a better understanding of a reality through the form of the text

rather than through its context or message (Steiner. P, 1984). H. Baktir (2018, p.98) supports that: « The central issue in literary theory is the problem of meaning; each critical theory places the meaning of a text in a certain internal or external ground and tries to reach at truth with reference to this ground».

As for Reader Response Criticism, it is a school of literary theory that supports that the meaning of a text resides in the reader's interpretation of a text. It is a Criticism which gained prominence in the late 1960s, particularly, in the US and Germany with scholars such as Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, Roland Barthes.... L.Tyson (2006, p.170) informs that: «Reader-response theorists share two beliefs: (1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and (2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature». L. Rosenblatt (1995) made the commendable observation that reading literature is an investigation in which readers draw on histories and emotions in order to generate meaning. That is, the reader and the text itself engage in a transaction that creates the meaning. D. Bleich (1975) aligns with the above analysis when he views that the reader response approach is predicated on the idea that when a reader demystifies literature and connects it to personal experience, a literary work occurs in a reciprocal interaction between the reader and the text. To him, understanding can be strengthened by the emotional responses that result from this reciprocal relationship.

The theory is based on a more democratic method that benefits multiple readers of a text, with each reader's interpretation being valid because of their individual viewpoint. In other words, Reader-response is not an anything goes theory, rather, any reader's interpretation is a sound one. Thus, it values an individual viewpoint. Now, after tentatively setting a

background to the subject matter and stating a theory that aligns with it, it is now fortunate to deal with the methodology.

A methodology is about the procedures applied to carry out the current research. Thus, a qualitative method is used owing to its suitability to the current research. J. Creswell and N. Cheryl (1997, p.76) assert that "... a hallmark of qualitative research today is the deep involvement in issues of gender, culture and marginalized groups". What is more, C. Palmer and B. Amanda (2006, P.16) hold the view that "qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and social and cultural context within which they live".

After providing a framework to the current research and toward achieving or providing evidences that justify the current state of affairs, it is fortunate to provide an overview on patriarchal rules.

## **2. The rules of patriarchy**

In order to characterize the practices, procedures, conventions, ideals, and, above all, the structures that define the topic, patriarchy is investigated in this study. This is so because it is good to understand patriarchy to be able to better understand the relationship between men and women in African societies. The word "patriarchy" denotes the rule of the father. It implies that within patriarchy men have power and women are weak. For G. Learner (1986, pp.216-217), patriarchy is the «manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance in society in general». S. Walby (1990, p.20) defines «patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women».

The fundamental issue with patriarchy is that traditionalists firmly think that males are meant to rule and women to be subservient. They think that this hierarchy has always been there, and that it cannot be altered for whatever cause. This is in

line with the definition of O. Ezenwa (2018, p.29) who perceived patriarchy as «the social system where men are the primary authority figure and their decisions are central to social organization. In this system, women are not accorded much recognition; they are seen as suzerains to be owned, either by the father, an uncle or a husband». Rightly, upon remarking the then Iya Segi entrepreneurial orientations, her mother warns her in the following terms: «...you cannot buy land and build your own house. The village men will say *you are ridiculing them*, doing what they can't! ... *You have made money your husband* » (S. Lola, 2010, pp. 109 – 111 Italics mine).

As women write in a largely patriarchal environment where the woman is not positively recognized, M. Ouarodima (2018) rightly affirms that African women writers have a variety of perspectives to take into account when producing literature that addresses the socio-cultural position of women. This is so because patriarchy constantly teaches women to be obedient. Women are taught to rely on men for support and protection be they their father, brother or husband.

In addition to addressing interactions including oppressive practices between two subjects, research on patriarchy must also explore socio cultural areas that embody the ruler-subject duality. In the next section, we shall examine how is the institution of patriarchy manifest in the African societies. It means that we shall look at various acts of violence that are directed against women. This will be followed by the identification of some factors that contribute to the incidence of violence against women in our society.

### **2.1. Polygamy**

It is good to point out that the society that is being examined in the current paper is Nigeria and that any literature is a literature of a given community at a given time. G.G. Darah (2008, p. xvii) foregrounds his presentation with the affirmation that «the



literature of every community reflects in its totality the values and counter-values that characterize that community in a given period ».

Throughout the paper, we will be referencing polygyny when using the term polygamy. It is important, as well, to note that polygamy is not only an African phenomenon, as it is found on almost all continents, nor is it solely connected to Christianity or Islam, the two dominant African religions, as it is found in numerous civilizations. However, while there is debate on whether Christians could be polygamous or not, Islam, for instance, accepts it but offers it a restricted space to grow under certain guidelines. As for the African traditional religion and customs, for instance, they do not limit the number of wives a man can have. C. Achebe (1958) informs that Nwakibie, a character in *Things Fall Apart*, has nine wives and thirty children.

In the *Holy Bible*, though the assertion that Christians could be polygamous is contrary to the claims of a number of contemporary influential scholars; it is stated in the *Old Testament* that some patriarchs were polygamous. M. Ryan (2019, p.7) supports that: «David, the second king of Israel, was yet another patriarch of the Old Testament who practiced polygamy; he had eight wives». In a footnote address, M. Ryan (2019, p.7) rationalizes that: «All wives that are indicated include: Michal, Abigail, Ahinoam, Maachah, Haggith, Abital, Eglah, and Bathsheba (1 Sam. 18:20–27, 25:39-43; 2 Sam. 3:4, 11:27; 1 Chron. 3:2-3). Scripture also indicated that David had at least ten concubines (2 Sam. 15:16) ».

As for Islam, as said earlier, the *Holy Qur'an* accepts it but offers it a restricted space to grow under certain guidelines. That is any Muslim, under certain conditions, can marry up to four wives if he wishes. A.Y. Ali (1983, P.100) recalls a verse from the *Holy Qur'an*: «Mary women of your choice, two, three or four but if ye fear that one shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then

only one». However, the quote makes it very evident that a husband must treat his wife equally in the home, at least in terms of material possessions. It is good to highlight that the reason why women are marginalized in polygamy, particularly in Islamic context, is not because of polygamy as a divine commandment, but rather it is mainly due to people's ignorance about its practice.

The highlight of the two dominant religions, namely Christianity and Islam, is not only due to the fact that they are dominant religions in Africa but also and mainly most African men conduct their life based on the tenets of either religion; yet none of the two religions opens for them the door to subjugate women or to treat them as object rather than subject. The following comment, by E. A. Ezinwanyi and W. B. Alheri (2018, P.73), proves that Baba Segi's decision to marry many wives is not religiously inspired but culturally directed: «Baba Segi works hard to impress his friends and society by marrying four wives. He had thought it would make him seem more fruitful and earn him more respect and admiration from other men in Ayikara since, like he thought, a man's success is not only in terms of money but also in the number of wives he has».

There is no doubt that Polygamy is one of the channels through which some men express their masculinity to mean that they are real product of their patriarchal culture. Such attitude is quite apparent in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, where Segi marries women as it pleases to him. Y. N. Florence (2021, P. 1), upon analyzing *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* through the emotional well-being of African women, supports that «While the man's domination is customary in a patriarchal culture, the woman's freedom and emotional well-being are subject to conditions laid down by her society...».

Most often, it is socio-cultural norms that urge women to aspire to be wives. For instance, when women live within polygamous compound, there is even high competition between the women

just to earn their husband's affection. This could go up to giving their economic resources to the husband who may still end up marrying another wife rather than providing comfort and security to the woman under his shelter. In the novel, «Iya Segi was instructed to close down all her shops and relinquish every kobo she had saved to him» (S. Lola 2010, p. 278). To survive the competition in Baba Segi's house, the first three wives were bound to utilize cooperation strategy through protecting the secret of their husband's sterility by struggling hard to prove him a 'man'. This attitude by the women provides more strength to the husband to make him feel comfortable. The fact that the first three wives refuse to involve Bolane in the game is certainly because they find Bolanle too educated to understand the cultural norms.

In the novel under analysis, even when Ishola Alao alias Baba Segi grants his wives permission to go, the first three wives stayed in the compound. Their rejection of divorce establishes the dominance of patriarchy. That is a woman without a husband, within a patriarchal society, is an unfulfilled woman. This can find explanation in the novel as S. Lola (2010, p.54) points it out through the attitude of Iya Segi. Even when Iya Tope, the second wife, describes Iya Segi as the wife who «already owned his [Baba Segi's] mind and did with it as she pleased»; the latter controls the house but gives her husband the impression that he does.

Another aspect related to polygamy which contributes to debase women is the fact that, in a polygamous family, even the ranking matters. That is, a first wife is liable to enjoy privileges compared to the second, the third or even the fourth, if we have to abide by the tenets of Islam that allow maximum four wives for a single man. In the novel, Iya Segi, the first wife of Baba Segi, plays her role effectively. She says: «it is important that the wives know their place in this house. They must know what they can and cannot do. They must remember that I am the one who

tells them when to eat, sleep or even work» (S. Lola 2010, p. 82). It is unfortunate that Bolanle's status as the final wife makes it easier to mistreat her. The next issue to be discussed is the perception of women as the only reproductive power.

## ***2.2. Cultural perceptions of women as the only reproductive power***

Using the preeminence of motherhood or childbearing as an imperative rationale behind marriage is a patriarchal norm that, beyond the men, has even brought many more women to believe in it. African traditions, particularly tribal ones, are criticized by African feminists for the oppressive gender distinctions they establish between men and women. Such distinctions privilege men to be free of default, while disadvantage women as responsible for any mistake or inconvenience either voluntarily or involuntarily. That is, they are held responsible for matters that are beyond their control: such as reproductive power.

It is good to point out right from the onset that childbearing is a joint action of a man and a woman. What is more, when a woman is not conceiving, it does not mean that she lacks sexual pleasure or that her vagina, both in form or content, is different from other women who conceive. It is also unfortunate to accuse men who are infertile as sexually weak. For instance. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Iya Segi has her side of the story to tell about her infertile husband's sexual power: «Baba Segi, whose *penis was so big* that two men could share it and still be well endowed» (S. Lola 2010, p. 148 *Italics mine*). However, the patriarchal society of Baba Segi holds the view that only women are barren.

Baba Segi believes that Bolanle's barrenness is a fault of hers and not his. Baba Segi humiliates Bolanle as follows:

A woman cannot know the weight of a child until she has carried one in her womb... Your barrenness brings

shame upon me ... Does your blood not boil when you see other women carrying babies on their backs? Do tears not fill your eyes when you see mothers suckling infants?... Do you want to remain a barren maggot? ... this is the wife who cannot conceive. (S. Lola 2010, pp. 15, 16, 49, 213).

No doubt, Baba Segi's wives, themselves, are fully aware of the burden on their shoulders regarding social expectations related to motherhood. In other words, they are fully aware that pregnancy legitimizes marriage in Africa. Iya Segi urged Iya Tope, her co-wife, to «Get pregnant quickly or he [that is Baba Segi] will start to force-feed you bitter concoctions from medicine men until your belly rumbles in your sleep» (S. Lola 2010, p. 93). Though Lola describes her Yoruba community, the reality is similar in many other communities in Africa. Efuru, the female protagonist in Nwapa's *Efuru*, which is set in an Igbo context, is looked down upon and solely held responsible for the childlessness in her marriage with Adizua.

To get back to the subject matter, since Baba Segi ties his masculinity to procreation, his wives struggled hard to find solutions to see ends meet. Then, Iya Segi takes time to educate the other two wives, namely Iya Tope and Iya Femi, on how to surmount this societal challenge. Interestingly, Iya Tope begins to have an affair with a meat seller and cheating on Baba Segi. The sexual adventure was blessed with three children. Iya Femi materializes her sexual relation with a certain Tunde and was blessed with two children. Only Bolanle who is esteemed not to have such societal awareness was taken apart.

The above statement finds justification in Iya Segi's reaction when she utters: «Let Bolanle draw on every skill she learned in her university! Let her employ every sparkle of youth! Let her use her fist full breasts. Listen to me, *this is not a world she knows*» (S. Lola 2010, p. 56 Italics mine). Ironically, Baba Segi's

presumed seven children, illegally given to him by his three wives, give him hope to continually point his accusing finger at Bolanle, qualifying her as a «barren maggot » (S. Lola 2010, p. 49) vociferating with words such as: «your barrenness brings shame upon me» (S. Lola 2010, p.16). The attitude of Baba Segi's wives can find illustration only through understanding the heavy hands of patriarchy that has made it a rule, for women to bear children, but not the exception. All those efforts are devoted by women just to avoid the social criticism.

### ***2.3. Escaping social criticism***

B. Adeleye-Fayemi (2000) remarks that history has it that Africa has the oldest civilizations in the world; it has, as well, the oldest patriarchal institutions that continuously work to maintain women in subjugation. This is manifest in almost all areas of human life. To mention but few, marriage, for instance, is often not celebrated with contentment. Women often involve themselves in just to avoid social criticism. One such is Bolanle's marriage to Baba Segi.

In fact, Bolanle, despite having a problematic mother, was raped at the age of fifteen and as such, she finds herself as a second-hand material ready to be sold to the first customer. She desperately accepts to be Baba Segi's fourth wife because she finds herself not worthy of a marriage with too much protocol and celebration. She says «How could I tell her [Mama] that I had failed to preserve my dignity? I was too ashamed to let her see the fickle shell I'd become.... I just wanted the war between who I used to be and who I'd become to end » (S. Lola 2010, p.18). For Bolanle, Baba Segi, who is already and formally married to three wives, is the right suitor because due to his age, he would not take time investigating on Bolanle's past. Bolanle rationalizes that: «it all made perfect sense when I met Baba Segi. At last, I would be able to empty myself of my sorrow... so yes, I chose this home. Not for the monthly allowance... I

chose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity» (S. Lola 2010, pp.18 -19). To avoid the criticism of the society and as it is evident in the above quotation, Bolanle was able to keep the secret for long without even her mother's knowledge. The fear of being raped is one thing and the fight to keep the secret is another thing. All this happens while the victimizer peacefully enjoys his life or even busy gazing at another victim.

What is more, Iya Femi, Baba Segi's third wife, lost her parents at a younger age and as a result she becomes dispossessed of her father's house. She married Baba Segi by mere survival necessity, thus escaping her traumatic past as well. Baba Segi, himself, says: «I took the third because she offered herself with humility. What kind of human being rejects the fullness of a woman? » (S. Lola 2010, p. 227). Iya Femi's marriage to Baba Segi could be read as a mere survival strategy that will enable her to escape from unsuitable living conditions.

Also, the fact that Segi's wives, namely Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi, conspires to keep their procreation secret deep in their mind is that they simply want to escape from their past; thus, avoiding social criticism as well. They struggled hard to keep Bolanle, Baba Segi's fourth wife, ignorant from what is happening in their marital life; that is the outside partnership they have with other men. This is sufficient to be cited as an indication that the hands of patriarchy are so heavy on women that conformity to it often requires very complex strategies. Patriarchy is so strong that, sometimes, its effects is even visible on men's attitude.

In fact, at the end of the novel, Baba Segi comes to realize that the seven children he had been taking care of are for other men rather than his. While many readers of the novel would expect divorce, the fear of what the society would think or say stops Baba Segi, himself, from ejecting his three wives who had been unfaithful to him. This proves that the power of society transcends individual decisions. The whole story reverberates

around what would the society say, what would the society think and how would the society judge individual decisions, actions or reactions. Then, who is really to blame?

#### **2.4. The true Victimizer**

The reading of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* offers so many perspectives from the angle of finding out who is to blame in the story. As said earlier, the current research is not in the logic of contradicting those who think that Baba Segi is a victimizer, or Iya Tope is the victimizer, or even Bolanle is a victimizer; rather it seeks to bring out the real victimizer from a reader response perspective. From the discussion; the real victimizer is neither the men nor the women but patriarchy, which is a system that imposes its rules and regulations on societal life which happens to value men more than women. M. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, p. 25) explains :

No, men are not the enemy. The enemy is the total societal structure which is a jumble of neocolonial and feudalistic, even slave-holding structures and social attitudes ... As women 's liberation is but an aspect of the need to liberate the total society from dehumanization and the loss of fundamental human rights, it is the social system which must change. But men become enemies when they seek to retard, even block, these necessary historical changes for selfish interests in power, when they claim culture and heritage 'as if human societies are not constructed by human beings, when they plead and laugh about the natural and enduring inferiority of women', when they argue that change is impossible because history is static, which it is not.



The truth of the matter is that despite the efforts of national and international institutions, despite the efforts of female writers and social activists, despite the efforts of men of good will, patriarchy is still very strong and it has firm roots in African societies. B. Adeleye-Fayemi (2000, P. 88) notes that:

Africa has some of the oldest civilizations in the world, it has the oldest patriarchies, and therefore the oldest tradition of resistance to patriarchy. To believe otherwise is to falsely imply that for centuries African women have crossed their arms and accepted being battered and depersonalized by patriarchy.

Since patriarchy is institutionalized and deeply rooted and knowing that the very first school is the family; men and women at birth and throughout the process of their growth, they are manipulated to obey the norms of patriarchy. This is manifest in almost all men's attitudes. It is common, in Africa, that when a father travels, he comes back home with some gifts. If he has both male and female kids, he is tempted to bring guns to the male kids and dolls to the female kids. This process of socialization creates psychological impacts that men are the protectors of women and that a woman has to be dependent on men for support.

It is, thus, clear that the coping strategies of Lola's female characters, namely the first three wives, to maintain some measures of peace in their roles as wives or mothers is dictated by the patriarchal code of conducts that a married woman must bear children. Furthermore, the condition of affairs that African women live in today is extremely oppressive due to patriarchal concepts that are ingrained in the minds of men. A. A. Aidoo, the Ghanaian woman writer, seemingly conveys Lola's preoccupations when she says: «...it is not possible to advocate independence for our continent without also believing that

African women must have the best that environment can offer» (U. Marie 1998, pp. 304-305).

That is certainly why Lola uses the aesthetics of education which is, according to her, one of the major agents of women's liberation and emancipation. For instance, when it was known to Baba Segi that the children are not his own, he granted them permission to leave his house but only Bolanle who is educated was ready to take the action. Lola's aesthetic message tends to say that the syndrome of dependency has no place in educated women and that even if fate turns out to be the case that Baba Segi's wives find themselves in, education can be a source of contentment.

## Conclusion

In sum, Lola Shoneyin is more than a bench warming spectator as what she, aesthetically, conveys in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is to prompt African women to be conscious of the roles they play in the society and redress distorted images. This is because patriarchy is deeply rooted and holding it back requires a great deal of courage and perseverance.

In fact, Lola knows her society very well and she is able to depict the structure of the society by directing her writing through the relationship between men and women. Lola's poignant illustration of the hardship of the women she depicts in the Yoruba patriarchal society, through *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, leads the reader to think that there is hardly anything more difficult, in this world, than being a woman.

The identification of the real victimizer certainly helps readers not only understand the female characters behaviors that are assumed to be fiercely competitive in their attempts to get their co-owned husband's affection, but also how even men's attitudes are influenced by social standards. The careful examination of the patriarchal society as a real victimizer

certainly helps discover long-term remedies to the various problems that women face in the societies.

In sum, we can deduce that the greatest enemy for women is neither the men nor their fellow women but patriarchy. It is hard time that both men and women struggle hard to eliminate elements of patriarchy that debase women. To achieve this, there is a need for a great deal of courage and perseverance for the societal scales of justice to shift towards the correct balance.

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