

**SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND WOMEN'S AGENCY IN AYOBAMI  
ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME* AND LOLA SHONEYIN'S *THE SECRET LIVES OF  
BABA SEGI'S WIVES***

**BY**

**Favour Omonigho ULINFUN (Miss)**

**ART2100351**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY**

**FEBRUARY, 2025**

**SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND WOMEN'S AGENCY IN AYOBAMI  
ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME* AND LOLA SHONEYIN'S *THE SECRET LIVES OF  
BABA SEGI'S WIVES***

**BY**

**Favour Omonigho ULINFUN (Miss)**

**ART2100351**

**A LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE BACHELOR OF ARTS  
(B A) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**FEBRUARY, 2025**

**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by, **Favour Omonigho ULINFUN (MISS)** with Matriculation Number **ART2100351** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision .

---

**PROF. EMMANUEL B. ADELEKE**  
**Project Supervisor**

---

**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the resilient women whose voices inspire change, to the men who have joined hands with women to fight against patriarchy, to the writers, Ayobami Adebayo and Lola Shoneyin for their amazing narrative, and to everyone who try to confront and subvert patriarchal norms. May this essay contribute to the ongoing discourse about women's agency and the struggle for equality in our society.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude, I thank God Almighty for providing me with insight, strength, and grace during the course of my study. This could not have been completed without His direction and favor.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my project supervisor, Prof. Emmanuel Adeleke, whose important direction, encouragement, and knowledge helped develop this study into what it is today. I appreciate your corrections and guidance, sir.

To my dear mother, Princess Mabel Ulinfun, your love, prayers, and support have been my rock during this journey. Thank you for believing in me and always being available when I needed you the most.

I also thank my amazing sisters: Eji, Obehi, and Ehi, for their encouragement and continuous cheering, which kept me motivated even in the toughest moments.

To my incredible course mates and friends, Favour, Rosie, Naomi, Dorcas, Wealth, and Agatha, I am deeply grateful for your support, advice, and assistance in various ways during this process. Your kindness and contributions have left a lasting impression on me, and I will forever cherish your kindness.

To everyone who played a role in the completion of this work, I say thank you. May God bless you all abundantly.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page-	i
Certification	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements-	iv
Table of Contents-	v
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION-</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Purpose of Study-	1
1.2 Scope of Study-	1
1.3 Methodology-	1
1.4 Theoretical Background	1
1.5 Review of Scholarship and Justification of Study-	6
1.6 Thesis Statement-	12
<b>CHAPTER TWO: SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND WOMEN’S AGENCY IN <i>STAY WITH ME</i>--</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Yejide’s Struggle: Motherhood, Infertility, and Women’s Status in the Society -	13
2.2 Men as Agents of Patriarchy in <i>Stay with Me</i> : The Character of Akin	18
2.3 Women as Agents of Patriarchy in <i>Stay with Me</i> : The Characters of Moomi and Funmi	21
2.4 The Importance of Education and Awareness in Subverting Patriarchal Norms in <i>Stay with Me</i>	25
2.5 Women’s Resistance and the Assertion of their Agency: Strategies Employed	



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* subvert patriarchal norms and assert women's agency through resistance and navigation as displayed by the female characters. This study aims to investigate the various ways in which female characters in these books oppose or navigate patriarchal structures imposed on them, as well as how they express control over their lives despite cultural and social restraints.

#### 1.2 Scope of Study

This study focuses on the subversion of patriarchal norms and women's agency. To ensure accuracy and efficiency, this study will be limited to Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

#### 1.3 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, using close textual analysis to explore the subversion of patriarchal norms imposed by society and women's agency in the novels. The study will uncover these authors' portrayals of patriarchy, subversion, and women's agency in the two books.

#### 1.4 Theoretical Background

This study employs the feminist theory, particularly radical feminism. According to Webster's Concise Dictionary, "Feminism is an organized activity on behalf of women's right" (122). In describing feminism, Marilyn French claims that:

Feminism is the only serious, coherent and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures .... Feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized. They believe that qualities traditionally associated with women –the feminine principle are (at least) equal in value to that associated with men – masculine principle – and that this equality must be publicly recognized. (442)

Also, bell hooks describes feminism as:

... a struggle against sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a readymade identity or role one can step into. (51)

Mary Wollstonecraft is credited by many as the founder of feminism. This is largely due to her 1792 book titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where she explains that social class and ownership of property are the root causes of discrimination towards women. She emphasizes that women deserve equal rights just like men do. Feminist theory is the application of feminist ideas into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discussions. Its goal is to explore the reasons behind gender inequalities. It looks at the social activities, experiences, needs, tasks, and

feminist viewpoints of both women and men across many areas like anthropology, sociology, communication, media studies, psychology, political theory, home economics, literature, education, and philosophy. Feminist theory is an important area of sociology that changes its ideas, perspective, and subjects from studying men to understanding women's experiences and viewpoints. Through this approach, feminist theory highlights social challenges, patterns, and concerns that are often ignored or misunderstood by the traditionally prevailing male viewpoint in social theory. Common topics the feminist theory explores are bias, the way people are treated as objects (particularly in a sexual way), discrimination and exclusion due to sex and gender, oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, the history of art, modern art, and aesthetics.

Also, many individuals think that feminist theory is only concerned with females and that it aims to elevate women above men. In truth, feminist theory has consistently aimed to examine society in a manner that reveals the factors that produce and maintain inequality, oppression, and unfairness, and through this understanding, encourages the quest for equal rights and justice. This is the reason bell hooks says that "Feminism is for Everybody" (3). One does not need to be a feminist today to realize that women throughout history have always worked hard to find their place and to be accepted as a vital part of society. Judith Butler, a philosopher and expert on gender issues, wrote a book in 1990 titled *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. She argues that today's legal systems restrict identity categories based on what is accepted by the heterosexual matrix. In simpler terms, Butler believes that ending gender inequality begins with political actions aimed at breaking down the hierarchy of identities, and it mainly looks at how these identities are created and how their relationships are maintained.

That being said, because the experiences and views of women and girls have been left out of social theory and social science for a long time, much of feminist theory has concentrated on

their interactions and experiences in society. This is to make sure that half of the world's population is not ignored when we try to understand social forces, relationships, and issues. Although many feminist theorists in the past have been women, today, people of all genders can contribute to this field. By moving away from focusing only on men's experiences, feminist theorists have developed social theories that include more perspectives and are more inclusive and creative than those that assume social actors are always men. One reason feminist theory is both creative and inclusive is that it often examines how different power structures and oppression interact with each other. This means it does not only look at gender-based power and oppression, but also considers how these issues might relate to systemic racism, class hierarchy, sexuality, nationality, and abilities or disabilities, among other factors.

Furthermore, women have constantly struggled for a right that was taken away even before their existence, and this is because when society determines how people fit into politics, the economy, jobs, sports, family life, and education, it harms the equal rights and choices of everyone. Nancy Fraser pointed out that there needs to be a "fight for recognition" (245). She believes that the quest for "recognition of differences" supports the efforts of groups that come together under the mottos of nationality, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Radical feminism is a branch of feminism that advocates for a radical re-ordering of society in which male supremacy is eradicated in all social and economic contexts, while acknowledging that women's experiences are influenced by other social divisions such as race, class, and sexual orientation. The concept and movement originated throughout the 1960s. Paul Goring, et al. claim that:

Radical feminism usually consists of a rejection of most or all forms of collaboration with men or with organizations containing men ... Radical feminism

tends to be universalizing rather than to focus upon the socially, culturally, and historically specific characteristics of patriarchy [it fights against]. (195)

Radical feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchy and gender roles that keep women oppressed. Since the word "radical" means "of or relating to the root," radical feminists see patriarchy as the primary source of inequality between men and women and work to eradicate it. They believe that men's need or desire to control women is the basis for gender inequality. It is because the existing political and social structures are intrinsically linked to patriarchy that radical feminism seeks to challenge it. This can include government rules and legislation that limit what women can do with their bodies, as well as the church, which has traditionally limited women to the maternal role and opposes the concept of non-reproductive sexuality. Therefore, radical feminists are more likely to focus on cultural change that challenges patriarchy and related hierarchical systems than they are on political action inside the present system. Radical feminists take a more aggressive attitude than other feminists (radical as in "getting to the root"). Rather than making adjustments to the system, a radical feminist seeks to eliminate patriarchy by uprooting and dismantling these existing patriarchal structures in whatever form they are manifested.

Also, radical feminists oppose reducing oppression to an economic or class basis, as socialist or Marxist feminism has done or does. Radical feminism targets patriarchy, not men. To connect radical feminism with misandry implies that patriarchy and males are inextricably linked. Also, radical feminists characterize traditional marriage as a patriarchal institution since it makes women part of men's private property. Even today, marriage can be viewed as an institution that perpetuates inequalities through unpaid domestic labor, the majority of which is still performed by women. Radical feminists claim that women face physical and sexual violence from males.

They believe that men use violence to obtain power, dominate, and maintain women's subordination. They also argue that violence against women is a systemic issue rather than the fault of a few individuals. They assert that rape is enabled and encouraged by a patriarchal society. Some key radical feminists were Ti-Grace Atkinson, Susan Brownmiller, Phyllis Chesler, Corrine Grad Coleman, Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer, Carol Hanisch, Jill Johnston, Catharine MacKinnon, Kate Millett, Robin Morgan, Ellen Willis, and Monique Wittig. Radical feminists prioritize reproductive rights for women, including the ability to choose whether to give birth, have an abortion, use birth control, or be sterilized. They evaluate and then tear down established gender norms in both private relationships and governmental legislation. Also, they understand pornography as an industry and activity that does harm to women, albeit other radical feminists disagreed with this viewpoint. They offer a profound criticism of motherhood, marriage, the nuclear family, and sexuality, asking how much of our culture is built on patriarchal beliefs. A criticism of other institutions, particularly government and religion, as concentrated historically in patriarchal power.

### **1.5 Review of Scholarship and Justification of Study**

The subversion of patriarchal norms and the quest for women's agency are central themes in African women's literature. Authors such as Ayobami Adebayo and Lola Shoneyin have reimagined the traditional gender roles and expectations in their novels, presenting narratives that challenge patriarchal norms. Since literature is a method of expression, novels too are also methods of expressing one's thought. Therefore, several students and scholars study it. Some of these responses and reviews are:

Ezekwere Chidozie Ezekiel examines how women are represented in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. In his work, he demonstrates the depiction of women as victims of polygamy,

agents of patriarchy, and weak and inferior beings. According to him, “Women are portrayed as objects under the control of Baba Segi. Baba Segi is a man that boasts of his physical powers, and he played the role of the subject” (119).

He discusses how Baba Segi objectifies his wives, Bolanle and Iya Tope, by using words like ‘took,’ ‘inspected,’ ‘sold,’ etc., representing how the society has shaped his mind about women. Ezekwere highlights how Iya Tope is forced into an early marriage and used as an exchange for her father’s bad harvest. In other words, “She is exchanged from one patriarchal control to another” (120). This shows the ideology about the status of the female child from birth, that she is trained to cook, clean, marry, and birth children for her husband. These kinds of ideologies are what put men at liberty to do whatever they want with their wives.

Also, Ezekwere examines how women are depicted as weak and inferior beings in the novel. According to him, “In the novel under study, women are presented as weak and inferior to men, for they have no choice of theirs in certain issues but to obey orders from their domineering husbands” (120). Through the actions of some of the male characters, like Taju and Baba Segi, who see themselves as superior to their wives and women in general, the females are made to feel weak and inferior, thereby succumbing to the patriarchal society where the males rule over the females. That is to say, women are inferior to men. For instance, “Iya Tope sees herself as weak and inferior when she refused to be part of the plan to eliminate Bolanle” (121). He also highlights the depiction of women as agents of patriarchy, that is, “women oppressing their fellow women” (121). Bolanle, the fourth wife, is hated by the other wives because she is educated and seen as a threat to their authority within the home.

According to him:

The portrayal of womanhood in Shoneyin's work conform to the traditional perception of womanhood such that women are depicted as objects, stereotypes, helpless, weak, inferior, dependent, and victims of polygamy. However, the study demonstrates Shoneyin's departure from the traditional depiction of womanhood, which is the area of women's attitude to childlessness. The image of an adulterous woman brings out this important issue in the society. Childlessness, which is a bitter reality for any woman, has remained the bane of her marriage. Hence, the wives of Baba Segi resort to adultery in order to remain in marriage. However, it is the patriarchal society which has conditioned the woman to go into adultery in order to bear children for her husband and the reason Shoneyin allowed her female characters to be depicted as adulteresses is to point out that a childless woman should not be blamed without the husband's potency being confirmed. (122-123)

Also, Lizzie Skurnick says that "*Stay with Me* blends the personal and the political." She says that "the most subtly brilliant aspect of *Stay with Me* is how this stunning literary work serves as both astute political commentary and unfolding mystery." Adebayo makes a strong connection between the couple and the country; Akin and Yejide, like Nigeria's middle class, remain calm in the face of political change, accepting the unfathomable to keep their family together. As Yejide and Akin tell the narrative of their romance, they discover the falsehoods and omissions that are hurting them from inside. "Sometimes faith," Yejide says, "is easier than doubt" (qtd. in *Stay with Me* 251). This denial is harmful, and because the reader is likewise faithful to Akin and Yejide's stories, we see where we too decided to be blind. "The cost didn't matter," Akin tells us. "At the end of it all was this stretch of happiness that was supposed to

begin only after we had children and not before” (qtd. in *Stay with Me* 240). Skurnick says that it is only when Akin and Yejide discard that old narrative that they will be allowed to have it.

Furthermore, Tola Ositelu, in her review of *Stay with Me*, says that Ayobami Adebayo can only be applauded for daring to tackle the culturally sensitive topic of polygamy and infertility. She claims that it is not that African authors have never before explored the subject of a woman’s degradation by society if she ‘fails’ in her responsibility as a woman to produce children, or that the blame for infertility is almost always borne by the woman, as Lola Shoneyin, for example, takes a comical but firm stance on these similar issues in her book, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*, but with a concentration on polygamy. Nonetheless, these cultural norms may be challenged much more strongly. For Ositelu, unfortunately, *Stay with Me* is not the book to accomplish it. Despite a promising start and flashes of poetic writing, the plot is frequently hampered by ‘clunkiness.’ It is not that Adebayo is too verbose; she simply uses more words than are required. The author also struggles to develop a distinct voice for the major characters, instead resorting to bizarre linguistic oddities (for example, deleting pronouns in Akin’s chapters) as an ineffective substitute. Also, Adebayo’s attempt at connecting personal tragedy with national turmoil is not quite successful as she does not really include the historical context within the novel and the characters are only mouthpieces for background material that has been poorly interwoven into their dialogue.

However, where Ositelu’s criticism comes from the most in *Stay with Me* is its two-dimensional protagonists. These characters are not so much developed as they are arranged like chess pieces to match the author’s increasingly implausible storyline. Adebayo is fixated on a certain narrative trajectory, at the expense of truth, realistic characterization, and empathy. By the end of the story, Yejide has almost no agency or accountability for her decisions. Instead, she

acts like a disgruntled literary machine. The entire narrative is based on the premise that an educated and astute businesswoman is surprisingly unaware of how the reproductive process works. She says that in short:

*Stay with Me* is Nollywood in novel format. It has a similarly compulsive quality, abounding in the same dragged-out cliffhangers and sensationalist plot-twists. But much like the films, this does not amount to good craft, and unlike the films, *Stay with Me* lacks the sort of self-deprecating, aware-of-its-own-silliness humor that underlies many Nollywood flick.

Although Adebayo will receive recognition as an attractive, young female African writer, the issues she attempts to address in *Stay with Me* are not skillfully carried out, and these issues are worthy of being skillfully addressed.

In contrast to Tola Ositelu's review, Stephen Angbulu compliments the writing of Ayobami Adebayo in *Stay with Me*. In his review, he says that Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* has a remarkable emotional resonance and depth of field. From beginning to end, the novel is a story of conjugal bliss that is disrupted by biological barrenness, third-party interference, pride, and treachery. Adebayo's skill with language creates a clear image of modern African marriage. Angbulu says that *Stay with Me*, the only novel selected for the 2017 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, has undoubtedly cemented Adebayo's place in the lineage of African voices like Chinua Achebe, Nonviolet Bulawayo, Helon Habila, Lesley Nneka Arima, and, of course, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. With *Stay with Me*, Ayobami Adebayo has earned her place as a brilliant writer. She writes with not just astounding wit, but also a rare level of connection to her characters. It is a story filled with joy, sympathy, love, grief, comedy, suspense, and redemption.

Florence Ndiyah affirms that although polygamy is oppressive to women, it is prevalent in many contemporary African countries where a woman's culturally acceptable identity is that of a wife and mother, as portrayed in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Polygamous wives must seek resources elsewhere to deal with the hardships of their everyday existence, as mental health facilities are few in Africa, and seeking professional treatment is frequently the exception. At the end of her story, Shoneyin retains Baba Segi's three ignorant wives in the restrictive marriage she has portrayed, despite their husband's permission to leave. Bolanle, the educated and fourth wife, decides to divorce. In a patriarchal culture, the man's dominance is expected, but the woman's independence and emotional well-being are dependent on societal conditions, yet she has power over them by her response to being subjugated.

Debbakh Aridj says that:

Female representations in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* dive into the confines of a polygamous marriage. The novel digs into the lives of different female characters; each of them has her own unique story and issues. Through their narratives, the author investigates the gender dynamics, gender roles, and societal expectations that shape their encounters. The novel analyzes the diverse responses and coping mechanisms used by women to explore their roles and relationships within the marriage. A few characters adjust to social standards and desires, finding comfort in their traditional roles as spouses and caretakers. Others challenge the endorsed roles and seek independence, pursuing education or engaging in secret affairs. Through these different portrayals, the author provides a nuanced investigation of the agency and resistance displayed by the female characters. (30)

She also says:

The portrayal of women in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* generally revolves around their roles as housewives and caretakers. The female characters find pride, purpose, and identity in their roles as mothers and wives, with their lives primarily focused on fulfilling domestic duties and caring for their children. These representations show traditional gender roles and expectations within the context of the novel, where women's primary responsibilities lie within the household rather than pursuing external pursuits or career desires. In order to give a clear image to the reality of African women along with being housewives, Shoneyin portrayed the three wives as submissive and powerless women. They are often depicted as submissive and obedient, satisfying traditional gender roles within a patriarchal society. (33)

While these scholars have explored both texts on the basis of the depiction of women, connection between the characters and the country, polygamy and infertility, writing styles of the authors, and traditional gender roles for women, the subversion of patriarchal norms and women's agency has not been extensively explored which forms the basis of this study.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

In Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the characters are portrayed to suggest a subversion of patriarchal norms and assertion of women's agency through the resistance and navigation of oppressive societal structures in the Nigerian society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND WOMEN'S AGENCY IN *STAY*

#### *WITH ME*

#### **2.1 Yejide's Struggle: Motherhood, Infertility, and Women's Status in the Society**

In various African societies such as Nigeria, patriarchy influences cultural beliefs and standards, especially concerning gender roles and family interactions. Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* provides a touching exploration of these topics, illustrating how these patriarchal norms impact people's lives, particularly for women. The pressure on Yejide to birth a child is portrayed in various instances in the novel. Yejide's existence is strongly influenced by the patriarchal society she is part of, where a woman's value is frequently linked to her ability to have children. From the beginning of her marriage to Akin, Yejide faces internal and external

reminders of the importance of childbearing. Her mother-in-law, Moomi, personifies this societal pressure, constantly pressuring her to produce a child for Akin. The visit of Akin's family members to their matrimonial home with another woman for the sole purpose of a child being conceived further proves how many women are oblivious to the decisions being made in their lives that also affect them.

Even then, I could sense that they had come prepared for war. I could see them through the glass panes on the door. I could hear their chatter. They did not seem to notice that I had been standing on the other side of the door for almost a full minute. I wanted to leave them standing outside and go back upstairs to sleep. (12)

In the above passage, the visit of the family members is considered as 'war.' This emphasizes how many women have been made to feel uncomfortable in their own homes, proven further by what is considered to be Yejide's fault in birthing a child. It should be contemplated why Yejide, the female protagonist, is seen as having the 'fault' in not having a child rather than Akin, the male character. This is zeroing in on the patriarchal norms already established in the society, and everyone, consciously or subconsciously, acts as an agent in upholding these norms. This is why being a feminist is not tied down to any gender. As bell hooks puts it, *Feminism is for Everybody*. Additionally, *Stay with Me* demonstrates how women are not always active participants in the decisions concerning their lives.

Also, Yejide reveals that "A number of my in-laws had been in our home previously to discuss the same issue. A discussion consisted of them talking and me listening while on my knees" (13). She finds herself surrounded by her husband's family, who try to take charge by having a "discussion" that is really just them talking and her having no other choice than to listen. Her physical position of kneeling symbolizes submission and powerlessness. This position

highlights a larger issue in society, where women are often pushed into positions of lower roles, particularly when it comes to having children. Her in-laws do not treat her as an equal in the discussion; rather, they force their opinions on her, highlighting the patriarchal norm that women have very little say about their own bodies and marriages.

Furthermore, Yejide faces pressure from her mother-in-law, Moomi, to become pregnant. Moomi, who once treated her with love and comfort, turns hostile and blames her for her inability to conceive a child.

When I arrived at the house, Moomi was sitting on a low stool in the front yard shelling groundnuts into a rusty tray that sat on her lap. She looked up as I approached and looked down again. I swallowed and my steps slowed. There was something wrong. Moomi always greeted me by shouting Yejide, my wife. The words were as warm as the embrace that usually followed them. ‘Good evening, Moomi.’ My knees trembled as they touched the concrete floor. ‘Are you pregnant now?’ She said without looking up from the tray of groundnuts. I scratched my head. ‘Are you barren and deaf too? I say, are you pregnant? The answer is either, yes, I am pregnant or no, I still haven’t been pregnant for a single day in my life.’ ‘I don’t know.’ I stood up and backed away until she was not within the reach of my clenched fist. ‘Why won’t you allow my son to have a child?’ (48)

The conversation between Moomi and Yejide illustrates the dehumanization that women face when their value is tied to their ability to bear a child. Moomi’s words are not only harsh but also demeaning. By calling Yejide “barren and deaf,” she attacks her sense of self-worth. The repetition of the question concerning Yejide’s pregnancy status reflects how Moomi is only

concerned about children, not Yejide's mental or physical well-being. This implies that a woman's status in the society is mostly dependent on childbearing capability. This is one of the struggles Yejide faces continuously throughout the novel. Moreover, infertility is tied to the female gender in the African society. In the biological process of producing a child, both the man and the woman are involved in this process. However, in the African society, the women are mostly blamed for infertility, not the men.

Also, Moomi asks Yejide "Have you ever seen God in a labour room giving birth to a child? Tell me, Yejide, have you ever seen God in the labour ward? Women manufacture children and if you can't you are just a man. Nobody should call you a woman" (48-49). Her asking Yejide if she has ever seen God in a labour room implies that childbirth is a task exclusively assigned to women in patriarchal societies. This assertion emphasizes the belief that a woman's primary duty is to "manufacture" children. The use of the word "manufacture" reduces childbirth to a mechanical, factory-like process, degrading women by viewing them as machines rather than people with identities not limited to motherhood. The subtle use of metaphor here highlights the belief that women's bodies are for childbearing where their value is tied solely to their ability to "manufacture" children. The phrase, "If you can't, you are just a man," portrays how society views infertility as a total failure for women. This remark creates a clear divide between what men and women are expected to do, suggesting that a woman's worth comes from her ability to have children, while men do not face similar expectations. By comparing an infertile woman to a man, Moomi takes away Yejide's identity as a woman. This concept illustrates the strict gender expectations within patriarchal societies where men are linked to power, control, and heritage, while women are appreciated mostly for their ability to bear children. If a woman cannot fulfill this role, she is considered to be less of a woman, leading

to deep emotional and mental stress. Women are seen as the ‘manufacturers of children.’ This also shows how the patriarchal society has shaped not only men’s views but also those of women, many of whom have come to support these traditional beliefs.

Furthermore, due to the pressure from people and within herself, Yejide resorts to consulting unconventional methods to get pregnant. According to her, “She needed a miracle fast. She felt that the only way she could save her marriage from polygamy and keep Akin to herself was to get pregnant before Funmi; that way Akin might let the girl go” (51). Yejide decides to visit a kind of miracle center called the “Mountain of Jaw Dropping Miracles.” Putting herself through stress physically and mentally is part of the exercises Yejide does just so she can get pregnant.

I was thirsty, my throat was dry and there was hardly any saliva in my mouth. There would be no reprieve for me. I had been asked to come fasting. No food, no water and, as the escort had informed me when he met me at the foot of the hill, if I stopped to rest as we climbed up the hill, I would be sent back home with no prayers and no meeting with the Highest Priest ... ‘You will have a child,’ the man beside me shouted and the moaning stopped. He opened his eyes. ‘Behold your child,’ he said pointing at the goat ... ‘Your child.’ I took the bundle. ‘Hold it close and dance,’ he commanded. The moaning stopped and the men began to sing. I shuffled along, holding the bundle to my chest, labouring under its weight ... The goat appeared to be a newborn and I believed. We sang and danced until my ankles ached and I longed to fall on my knees. Hours must have passed before Prophet Josiah spoke. ‘Feed the child,’ he said ... ‘Breastfeed the child’ ... I did not think of Akin and how he would have said I was going mad. I did not

think of Moomi, who would have reminded me that my feet were shaky in her son's house without a child ... I did not even think of Funmi, who might be pregnant already. I looked down at the bundle in my arms and saw the little face of my child, smelled the fresh scent of baby powder and believed. (50-53)

In the passage above, it describes the unconventional methods Yejide follows to try and bear a child for the fear that Funmi might get pregnant before her and take Akin away from her. These methods symbolize not only the conflict she is facing within herself, but also the way these patriarchal norms push women to the limit to the point that they start to defy logical ways and personal beliefs and seek illogical ways of conceiving. It also highlights how the society has been constructed to pressure mostly the women more than the men. The moment she is asked to cradle a goat as her child reveals how far she has been pressured. Initially, the absurdity of holding and breastfeeding a goat might seem funny or delusional, but within the context of Yejide's situation, it reveals how vulnerable and weak her mental state is. Adebayo uses this as a portrayal to show how infertile women, or women who have not been able to conceive in many patriarchal societies have been stigmatized and driven to different ways just to escape this marginalization. Moreover, the need to become pregnant also affects Yejide's mental health drastically. She thinks she is pregnant when she is not pregnant; she displays all the signs and symptoms of a pregnant woman: a protruding stomach, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes pain, but when a test is performed, no baby is found. 'Mrs Ajayi, there is no baby' (66). She even goes on to another hospital to check again, and still, the same thing. 'Madam,' he drummed his fingers on his desk, 'there is no baby.' I clapped my hands three times and laughed. 'Doctor, are you blind? I don't want to insult you, but can't you see? 'Please, let me explain. These things happen sometimes. Women think they are pregnant, but they are not' (75).

## 2.2 Men as Agents of Patriarchy in *Stay with Me* : The Character of Akin

Akin Ajayi, the husband to Yejide, can be considered a flawed and complex character. Consciously and subconsciously, Akin reflects and acts as an agent of patriarchy in the society. Through his character, Adebayo portrays how men drive patriarchal oppression, often at the expense of the physical and mental well-being of women.

Tonight I see the bedside lamp you gave me a few weeks after we got married. I could not sleep in the dark and you had nightmares if we left the fluorescent lights on. That lamp was your solution. You bought it without telling me you'd come up with a compromise, without asking me if I wanted a lamp. (10)

This extract from the novel reflects how the patriarchal norms influences the characters' lives. It highlights how men, even with good intentions, can subconsciously act as agents of patriarchy. This is actually very symbolic; it portrays how the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of women are barely put into consideration in a patriarchal society that upholds the men as the superior gender. Patriarchy frequently functions through such ordinary actions, in which males claim power or control in the name of thoughtfulness or protection. Rather than talking or sharing authority, Akin takes it upon himself to "solve" the problem. This demonstrates how males, conditioned by patriarchal norms, may favor their own viewpoint while feeling they are intelligent or responsible. Moreover, it reflects how Akin is subconsciously an agent of patriarchy by acting into these norms.

Also, when Akin's family members come to visit for the purpose of him marrying another wife, his prior knowledge of this arrangement and Yejide's obliviousness also highlight how most men act as agents of patriarchy. Yejide asking "Akin, you knew this?" (17) is a classic

indicator of patriarchal control, in which males set the rules of family and marital life and women are often left unaware.

Additionally, another significant example of Akin's conscious involvement as an agent of patriarchy is his decision to secretly arrange for his younger brother, Dotun, to sleep with, and impregnate Yejide. This act reveals how desperate he is to meet societal expectations of fatherhood while maintaining the appearance that everything is still normal in his marriage. Instead of addressing his fertility and impotency issues openly with his wife, Yejide, Akin chooses deceit and manipulation. By doing so, he prioritizes how he will be viewed by the society rather than the trust in his own marriage. Also, Akin hiding the fact that he is impotent from Yejide and making his brother, Dotun, impregnate her proves how far he goes to save his name in the face of society.

Besides, I already knew that Dotun was the sperm donor. That was how I thought about what he did for me— sperm donation. I knew Dotun would never claim he was Sesan's father, which is the reason I went to him when I eventually accepted the fact that I needed someone else to get my wife pregnant. (178)

Akin is the mastermind of everything. It is true that Yejide cheats on him, but he is the perpetuator of everything. Akin's choice to secretly include his brother, Dotun, as a "sperm donor" captures his acceptance of the patriarchal pressure to have children, particularly male heirs. Instead of openly discussing the matter with Yejide, Akin seizes control of the situation, considering conception as something he can manage and influence without her awareness or permission. By making this decision alone, Akin promotes the notion that males have the right to make life-altering decisions for women, particularly in terms of reproduction. His explanation, that Dotun would never claim the child as his own, exemplifies patriarchal mentality, which

values lineage and male power over honesty, trust, and collaboration. Akin's actions demonstrate how males, even in private, may maintain patriarchal norms by promoting concepts of male superiority.

'You need to spend just a weekend. Next weekend, she'll be ovulating.' 'And Yejide? She agreed to this thing you are saying?' He looked as if he was about to vomit all over the green rug on his sitting-room floor. 'Yes.' Truth is I hadn't discussed it with Yejide, but I just wanted him to agree to the plan so I could go to bed and forget the discussion. (178)

By falsely claiming that Yejide has consented to the idea, Akin effectively removes her from decision-making. This represents a fundamental part of patriarchy: the belief that males have the authority to govern women's bodies and decisions. Instead of seeing Yejide as an equal partner, Akin sees her as a means to an aim, motivated by a fear of public criticism. His wish to "go to bed and forget the discussion" demonstrates how frequently males may ignore the emotional and psychological consequences of their actions and decisions on women, focusing solely on their own image. This highlights how patriarchal norms are maintained not just through physical oppression, but also by the passive acceptance of harmful cultural standards by men. Knowing that he is the cause of their childlessness and allowing Yejide to take the brunt of everything shows how the patriarchal society mostly favors men over women.

### **2.3 Women as Agents of Patriarchy in *Stay with Me*: The Characters of Moomi and Funmi**

The characters of Moomi and Funmi reflect how some women are also agents of patriarchy. Moomi, Akin's mother and Yejide's mother-in-law, constantly pressurizes her son and daughter-in-law for a child, thereby succumbing to the patriarchal norms in the society.

After I'd been married to Yejide for two years, my mother began to show up in my office on the first Monday of every month. She didn't come alone. Each time, she brought a new woman with her, a potential second wife. She never missed a first Monday. Not even when she was ill. We had an agreement. As long as I continued to let her bring the women to my office, she would never embarrass my wife by showing up at our home with any of her candidates; she would never mention her efforts to Yejide. When my mother threatened that she would start visiting my wife each week with a new woman if I didn't choose one within a month, I had to make a decision. I knew my mother was not a woman who made empty threats. (26)

In this instance, Moomi actively encourages polygamy by encouraging her son to take a second wife, disregarding the potential consequences for Yejide, his first wife. Her frequent visits and threats demonstrate how older women, frequently mothers or mothers-in-law, can become agents of patriarchy. Rather than questioning the system, Moomi supports it, thinking that her son must have more than one wife, especially because Yejide is unable to give birth. Her actions not only reveal a passive support of patriarchy but also an active involvement in it. This demonstrates that patriarchal control is not necessarily enforced by males alone; women can also be patriarchal agents by prioritizing tradition over the well-being of other women. Moomi uses her influence and authority to ensure that her son maintains this tradition, even if it creates emotional stress for Yejide. Women like Moomi feel they are defending family honor or

upholding tradition, but in reality, they are perpetuating a system that restricts women's choices and well-being.

Furthermore, we can see how her behavior with Yejide drastically changes when, after four years of marriage, she is still unable to get pregnant. Initially, she shows love and affection towards Yejide as her daughter-in-law. However, the affection and love are based on Yejide's ability to conceive a child.

‘Are you pregnant now?’ She said without looking up from the tray of groundnuts. I scratched my head. ‘Are you barren and deaf too? I say, are you pregnant? The answer is either, yes, I am pregnant or no, I still haven't been pregnant for a single day in my life.’ ‘I don't know.’ I stood up and backed away until she was not within the reach of my clenched fist. ‘Why won't you allow my son to have a child?’... ‘This life is not difficult, Yejide. If you cannot have children, allow my son to have some with Funmi. See, we are not asking you to stand up from your place in his life, we are just saying you should shift so that someone else can sit down.’ (48-49)

She pressurizes Yejide to "shift" and let another woman, Funmi, have children with Akin. Her statements represent the patriarchal view that a woman's primary duty in marriage is to give birth, and if she is unable to do so, she must give way to another woman who can. Instead of supporting Yejide or empathizing with her, Moomi criticizes her, seeing her as a barrier to her son's right to have children. Her harsh words, such as labeling Yejide "barren and deaf," highlight how patriarchal norms may degrade women's dignity and humanity. In this way, Moomi enforces patriarchal norms, forcing Yejide to embrace polygamy and reducing her value

as a wife. She goes on to say that “nobody should call Yejide a woman” (49) because of her inability to conceive.

Also, when Rotimi is sick and in the hospital, she still insists that Akin takes another woman as a wife because she feels that Yejide is not destined to have children in this life. She says that “There is this girl, you may even know her ... 'No, she is not your mate at all, you can't know her. She is just out of secondary school. She is a good girl, her eyes are not open yet, you know, like these girls of nowadays” (245). She suggests that Akin marry a younger, more obedient girl to have children, claiming that Yejide's inability to have children is due to destiny. Her description of the girl as “just out of secondary school” with “her eyes not open yet” demonstrates how patriarchy rewards young, inexperienced women who are perceived as more obedient and easier to dominate. This perpetuates the notion that women should be passive participants in marriage, with the primary duty of conceiving. Moomi's statements clearly indicate that Yejide has failed as a wife because she has not carried out her duty of conceiving.

Hence, Moomi's actions reveal that men are not the only agents of patriarchy but also women, as she prioritizes the societal belief that women are responsible for any inability to bear children over her daughter-in-law's mental well-being.

In addition to this, the character of Funmi expands on how women act as agents of patriarchy, often for personal gains. Unlike Moomi, who acted as an agent for the sake of upholding tradition, Funmi's actions are driven by a need to assert dominance over Yejide for the purpose of competition.

It was only Funmi who squeezed her mouth around the first mouthful of beans and looked at me with suspicion. Our eyes met and she smiled a wide red-rimmed

smile ... I stifled the urge to pull out Funmi's *jheri* curls because she slipped into the front seat beside my husband and pushed the small cushion I always kept there to the floor. (20-21)

Furthermore, Funmi actively seeks to reduce Yejide's position in the household. Rather than showing pity or empathy, she embraces the patriarchal norm that pits women against one another. For instance, Funmi often flaunts her status as the "fertile" wife, using her potential to conceive as a weapon against Yejide.

I know people say you are barren, but there is nothing God cannot do. I know that once I conceive, your own womb too will be opened. If you say I should not come here, I will not come, but I want you to know that this bitterness can be one of the things causing the barrenness-o. Goodbye, *Ma*. (41)

Here, Funmi considers herself as superior to Yejide since she thinks she will have children, while Yejide will not. Funmi hints that Yejide's inability to have children is her own fault by calling her "barren" and hinting that her "bitterness" may be the reason for her infertility. Instead of demonstrating empathy or unity, Funmi exploits patriarchal norms to exert her dominance over Yejide. Her statements reflect society's demand on women to prove their value through childbearing. Funmi portrays herself as a helper to Yejide, implying that her pregnancy will "open" Yejide's womb, but this is a subtle kind of ridicule masked as charity. Her actions reveal that women may succumb to patriarchal norms and use them to compete with each other rather than support one another.

Therefore, Funmi uses the patriarchal norm that ties a woman's value to her ability to give birth to children for rivalry and personal benefits, thereby increasing Yejide's sense of not

being good enough and her loneliness. This also demonstrates how patriarchy brings about rivalry among women, making Yejide think that she “simply had to get pregnant, as soon as possible, and before Funmi did” (46).

#### **2.4 The Importance of Education and Awareness in Subverting Patriarchal Norms in *Stay with Me***

In *Stay with Me*, the importance of education and awareness in the subversion of patriarchal norms is highlighted through the ignorance of the characters. The novel portrays how ignorance and unawareness shape the lives of the characters and produce harm to both the men and the women as it encourages patriarchy. By emphasizing the importance of education (sexual) and awareness, Adebayo demonstrates how knowledge can go a long way in subverting patriarchal norms in the society.

Firstly, the absence of sexual education in *Stay with Me* expands on how open discussions about sex are frowned on.

As they talked, I became uncomfortable. I thought about the last time Akin and I had made love and I wanted to ask Auntie Sadia questions – she seemed like the kind of person who would slap the back of my hand and give straightforward answers. But I bit my tongue because I was not the kind of woman who discussed her sex life with women in a salon. (158)

Yejide’s hesitation in asking Auntie Sadia questions about sex reflects a wider cultural norm in which open conversations about sex are seen as inappropriate or embarrassing. The fact that she “bit her tongue” rather than ask questions demonstrates how women are conditioned to keep silent about their sexual encounters, even when they have legitimate concerns. Her

conviction that she is “not the kind of woman who discussed her sex life” demonstrates how traditional expectations influence women’s conduct, making them believe that discussing sex is wrong or a sign of moral failure. This silence stops women from learning important information about their bodies and relationships. Without sufficient sexual education or safe settings for free discussion, women are left to explore complex topics like sex, marriage, and fertility alone, and this can lead to frustration and wrong decisions.

Also, Yejide’s belief that climbing the "Mountain of Jaw-dropping Miracles" can cure her infertility reflects the desperation created by lack of awareness. This reliance on superstition, rather than evidence-based information, portrays how lack of awareness leaves women vulnerable to being used and doubting themselves. Moreover, the silence from Akin concerning his infertility and not openly discussing his struggles with Yejide portrays how important sexual education is. If Akin had told Yejide everything there was to know about his infertility and his visits to a urologist, they would have found a solution together as a married couple. Akin plays on the fact that Yejide is not adequately sexually educated and lacks awareness about certain things involved in sexual intercourse. Akin’s decision to involve his brother, Dotun, in conceiving a child with Yejide is a direct result of his inability to discuss his infertility openly with his wife. When she asks Akin, “Did you fool Funmi too?” and he replies, “She was not like you.” She asks, “You mean she was not foolish?” and he replies “I only mean she was not a virgin” (251). Her description of herself as “foolish” for being deceived highlights a larger issue: women who are kept uneducated about sex are more vulnerable to manipulation. Akin’s reply, “She was not like you,” supports the notion that women who have had past sexual experiences are less vulnerable to being deceived. This suggests that sexual inexperience, often associated with virginity, is regarded as both a desirable feature in women and a tool of control. The lack of

adequate sexual education is at the heart of this dynamic of this novel. In a society where sex is kept hidden and women are discouraged from asking questions or seeking knowledge about it, ignorance might be mistaken for innocence. This innocence is then valued in women, yet it leaves them vulnerable to deception. Thus, women who are educated and aware about their sex, relationships in the society, and independence will be able to defend themselves from deceit and manipulation. By highlighting the nuances between Yejide and Funmi, Adebayo reveals how a patriarchal society uses ignorance and unawareness as a tool of dominance, thereby highlighting the importance of education and awareness in subverting patriarchal norms.

Therefore, the absence of sexual education and awareness reflects the importance of education and awareness in subverting patriarchal norms. It is because of the misconception that masculinity is linked to the ability to produce children and womanhood and motherhood are linked to the ability to give birth that affect the lives of Akin and Yejide negatively. If these misconceptions were cleared through education and awareness, Akin and Yejide would have approached the issue of infertility as a shared responsibility rather than as a burden on one person. This reveals how important education and awareness are in the lives of every being, irrespective of their gender, to subvert the patriarchal norms constructed in the society.

### **2.5 Women's Resistance and the Assertion of their Agency: Strategies Employed by Yejide to Assert her Agency**

Women's agency refers to the ability of the female characters to have control to make decisions over the course of their lives, economically, politically, and culturally, and assertion of their agency involves controlling their lives, making their own choices, and influencing their futures, even when faced with societal limitations and this can be done with tactics that can be seen as good or bad.

In *Stay with Me*, Yejide's journey is influenced by the patriarchal norms and societal pressures that seek to restrict and define her. From facing stigmatization because of her inability to conceive to learning about secrets her husband, whom she trusted, keeps away from her and using her ignorance as a tool of manipulation, Yejide still comes out strong and there are different strategies she employs to assert her agency in her own way.

Firstly, Yejide's earlier action of resistance and asserting her own agency is by refusing to be in a polygamous marriage even before she married Akin. 'I don't do polygamy' (28). Even after they got married, Yejide still refuses to be in a polygamous marriage. When Akin's family members come to visit them, bringing Funmi as Akin's second wife, Yejide blatantly insults Akin asserting her resistance and how she would not allow such thing to happen.

'Yejide, pull her close.' I was not sure who had just spoken. My head was hot, heating up, close to boiling point. Anyone could have said those words – Iya Martha, Baba Lola, God. I did not care. I turned to my husband again. 'Akin, you knew about this? You knew and could not tell me. You knew? You bloody bastard. After everything! You wretched bastard!' (18)

Here, Adebayo reveals how Yejide reacts when she finds out that Akin is aware of his family's plan of another wife. Her angry outburst, filled with harsh words, is a big change from the quiet suffering that women like her usually have to bear. By calling Akin a "bloody bastard" and a "wretched bastard," Yejide expresses her hurt and also challenges the idea that her husband is always right and untouchable. This act of insulting him reflects her rebellion, as she chooses not to stay quiet or submissive after his betrayal. Her words take away Akin's power, as she questions the moral authority he thinks he has as her husband. Yejide's determination to speak out is made stronger by her demand for explanations. When she asks, "You knew about this?"

“You knew and couldn’t tell me?” reveals that she expects truth and openness in their marriage. Her questions reveal Akin’s dishonesty and betrayal, but more importantly, they show that she wants him to take responsibility for his actions. Despite polygamy being a normal concept in the Yoruba culture, Yejide sees Akin’s relationship with Funmi as a betrayal of their marriage, and this is what really pushes her to find unconventional methods to get pregnant. This is a strategy she employs to resist oppression from her in-laws and assert her agency, knowing how it will affect her life and her marriage.

Additionally, another strategy employed by Yejide in resisting societal pressures and asserting her agency is walking out of her marriage with Akin. Many African women are of the belief that they must be with their husbands through thick and thin, even when they cheat or oppress said women. After the truth is revealed of Akin’s manipulation and deceit, Yejide makes a decision to leave.

‘I am not coming back to you.’ ‘What are you saying?’ ‘I am not coming back to Ilesa. I am not coming back to you.’ ... I went into the street and flagged down a taxi that was going to the motor park. Tears clouded my vision as I got into the car and I almost stumbled. I admitted to myself then that I had failed and Rotimi too had taken a part of me. As I got out of the taxi and wiped my tears away so that I could see the signs indicating where each bus was heading, I knew that I would never forget Rotimi, I would never be able to erase her the way I wished.

(266-267)

Nevertheless, Yejide’s ability to bear the pain of leaving her daughter, even when she knows she will never be physically and mentally complete without her proves how she decides to

finally assert her agency after everything she has been through in the hands of her husband, in-laws, her family, and the society at large.

Also, Yejide's decision to remain a single mother after she returns and discovers that her daughter, Rotimi, whom she thought was dead, is still alive proves how she maintains her stance on prioritizing her physical and mental well-being by being away from Akin and his family members.

You raise your voice, like you expect me to disagree. 'I need to be with her tonight.' 'Of course,' I say. 'I've prepared a room for you at home. We can leave right now if you want to.' You stare at me as if I've just given you a knife and asked you to stab yourself. 'No, I can't come to your place.' Your last two words are all it takes for me to swallow all the foolish words I've prepared. *I want you to live with me. We can be companions. I have missed you. If you want to keep lovers, just be discreet about it. We can start again, on new terms.* (278)

Thus, this is a way of embracing motherhood on her own terms, not like the way that is expected by the society, but a way that suits her and that she can live with. Despite Akin's attempts to renew their relationship by providing her a room in his house, Yejide remains resolute. Yejide's rejection reflects her will to maintain the control she has taken over her life. Instead of being dragged back into a relationship that may hurt her again, she chooses herself. This action challenges the patriarchal norm that requires women to always return to their husbands, even after betrayal or suffering. Yejide asserts her agency by refusing to return.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Therefore, Yejide's journey in *Stay with Me* expands on the different experiences that women face in a patriarchal society where the patriarchal norms are upheld by both the men and the women. The importance of education and awareness is also highlighted as important tools in the subversion of patriarchal norms. Yejide's breakdown, ability to get back on her feet, and finally make the decisions that benefit her act as a way to portray how women should not succumb to societal pressures, but should rather assert their agency in every step they take.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND WOMEN'S AGENCY IN *THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES***

#### **3.1 Men as Agents of Patriarchy in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives***

Most men play a huge role as agents of patriarchy by upholding the patriarchal norms and allowing it to influence and shape their lives and experiences. The truth is that patriarchy is not only harmful to women, men also suffer from it often in ways they don't realize. Men have to act in the way that is known as 'hegemonic masculinity,' the 'perfect man' (rich, career-driven, stylish, tough) to gain respect from others. Unless they reject these ideologies, they still continue to play a major role in upholding these patriarchal norms. Through the character of Baba Segi, Shoneyin portrays how the male gender act as agents of patriarchy, the roles they play in upholding these patriarchal norms and structures in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The novel focuses on Baba Segi, a polygamist, who controls his household and expects his wives and children to follow his orders without defiance or hesitation. His world centers on power, honour,

and the urge to prove his manliness. Through the character of Baba Segi and other male figures, Shoneyin illustrates how men frequently behave as agents of patriarchy, utilizing their power to maintain dominance. To Baba Segi, a man's masculinity highly depends on his ability to have many wives and children. More wives, more respect and power—this is his ideology. He sees his wives as prizes, not as humans that they are with feelings and emotions. This mindset stems from the belief that men are superior to women and have the power to control them. His constant belief that anything that has to do with a female is irrelevant highlights how his reasoning is shaped by the patriarchal norms in the society, and he reflects this in his everyday life.

Furthermore, Baba Segi is of the belief that as long as he can provide for his family, whatever he says is law and should be followed. This need to control his wives and children portrays the broader social beliefs that men must always make the final decision and women must obey them. As stated before, Baba Segi believes that a man's masculinity is tied to his ability to produce many children, especially sons. When Bolanle is unable to get pregnant, he becomes worried and frustrated. He continuously blames Bolanle for her lack of children, not stopping to consider that the problem might be coming from him. This portrays a common belief in patriarchal societies where women are often seen as the cause of infertility when it naturally takes two to produce a child. He never misses the opportunity to remind Bolanle of her childlessness, saying, "A woman cannot know the weight of a child until she has carried one in her womb" (13). Also, not only does he reduce her self-worth to her ability to bear him children, but he constantly uses derogatory terms on her without caring about the effect it will have on her mental health, often referring to her as a "guava that is rotten" (39) or "a barren maggot" (43). Even when the possibility arises that he might be the cause of their infertility, he receives it with disdain, hoping the doctors are not saying "that he might be the cause of these difficulties" (189),

attesting to the fact that he has many children, both males and females. Baba Segi's fixation on having kids is not merely to grow his family but to safeguard his male ego. He believes that being a father demonstrates his strength and control. When it comes to light that he is the one who cannot have children, his world crumbles. This instance illustrates how weak the male pride can be when linked to patriarchal norms about masculinity and authority and how the men who succumb and follow these beliefs allow them to influence their daily lives, thereby acting as agents and upholders of these patriarchal norms.

However, Baba Segi is not the only male character that acts as an agent of patriarchy and upholds these norms; Shoneyin demonstrates how other men in the novel contribute to these patriarchal norms. The other men at Ayikara act as major agents of patriarchy. When Baba Segi goes to see Teacher to complain about Bolanle's barrenness, he is offered all sorts of advice from the men and this reveals that they are also of the belief that a woman is responsible for infertility. One proposes that Baba Segi should use physical means to get Bolanle to see a medicine man saying, "Baba Segi, I think you should drag her to a medicine man if she doesn't follow you. You are the husband and she is a mere wife, and the fourth one at that! If you drag her by the hair, she 'll follow you anywhere, I swear it!" (4). This reflects a deeply rooted belief system that supports male control and the oppression and dehumanization of women. The idea to "drag her by the hair" and calling Bolanle a "mere wife" illustrates how women are looked down on and viewed as objects instead of being treated as equals. The suggestion of physically dragging Bolanle to a medicine man portrays how violence and force are used as weapons by men to assert control over their wives in a patriarchal society. Also, describing Bolanle as a "mere wife" further highlights how women's opinions mostly do not matter in the society.

Also, Iya Tope's father is another male character that acts as an agent of patriarchy in the novel, reducing his daughter's self-worth to that of an animal, referring to her as a donkey saying that "She is not a great beauty ... But she is as strong as three donkeys. And thorough too. What she loses in wit, she gains in meticulousness" (81-82). This reveals how most women are often valued based on what they can offer rather than their unique individual characteristics. Her father saying she is not beautiful portrays how a woman is normally measured based on her physical appearance and if she lacks that, she should be at least rich in strength in order not to be deemed worthless. Being treated as compensation for the failed crops like she has no value and is just equivalent to crops and animals. Iya Tope says, "I was like the tubers of cassava in the basket. Maybe something even less—a tuber with eyes, a nose, arms and two legs" (82). Iya Tope's father deeming his daughter's worth to an equivalent of tubers of cassava or even less portrays how many men practice these beliefs that subjugate and marginalize women for their own gain. Her father using her as compensation for his failed crops highlights how he is not only an agent of patriarchy but a steady practitioner of these beliefs that are harmful to mostly women. Hence, it can be deduced that in order for equality and equity to be achieved, the male gender has to play a major part in the subversion of patriarchal norms in the society.

In addition to this instance of men as agents of patriarchy, we have the character of Iya Femi's uncle. Although a minor character, his mindset and actions portray how men play a major role in upholding these patriarchal norms. He plays a part in removing Iya Femi from her parent's house after their death because of the patriarchal norm that a girl child cannot inherit her father's house. Sending her away to go and work as a minor does not only buttress his involvement in child labour, but also his mindset that girls are not major parts of the society, hence, they should not be able to inherit lands, houses, etc.

### 3.2 Women as Agents of Patriarchy in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

When exploring the topic of patriarchy, we rarely recognize the role women play in supporting this issue, as it is in the public and private areas that women occupy where patriarchal behaviors appear and men are glorified, even when they are not present. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Shoneyin tries to not only portray women as the victims of patriarchal norms but also as the agents that uphold these structures. The women act as agents by upholding these patriarchal norms consciously or subconsciously. In most cases, they are unaware that they serve as agents or perpetrators of these norms. This portrays how deeply rooted the patriarchal norms are in the society. They are so entrenched in the lives of the people that they barely realize when they succumb to these norms, including women. In the novel, it is reflected how most women act as these agents.

Firstly, the characters of Iya Segi and Iya Femi are the best examples to reflect the ideology of women being agents of patriarchy. The first time Bolanle arrives at Baba Segi's house as his newly wedded wife, she is received with hostility by these two wives. They treat Bolanle with so much hatred, taking her as a rival rather than their own fellow woman just because Baba Segi shows her more affection.

The other two are a different story: they have not forgiven me for the affection Baba Segi's has for me. Iya Segi and Iya Femi still shout, hiss and spit. They sweep the floor, all the time singing satirical songs to ridicule me ... So deep-seated is their disdain for my university degree that they smear my books with palm oil and hide them under the kitchen cupboards. (22)

This reflects Iya Segi and Iya Femi's animosity towards Bolanle. This animosity not only stems from jealousy but internalized patriarchy. Bolanle is perceived as a threat not only because she is the newest and youngest wife, but also because she is educated and has a university degree. The wives consider that degree as a tool of oppression and threat by Bolanle towards their status and influence in Baba Segi's house. Women maintain this oppression and inequality that has already been constructed in the society, for instance, through the glorification of being above the other wives in a polygamous marriage, where women would intentionally oppress and maltreat their fellow wives to gain favour from their husband as seen in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. This is concerning because women keep fostering the belief that they can only maintain their status in their husband's home by oppressing and getting rid of any other wife that may come in their way. This is the ideology of both Iya Segi and Iya Femi. They do not only treat Bolanle with hostility and disdain, but also try severally to use her barrenness as a tool to harm her emotionally. Iya Segi even tells her "not to be in a hurry, that I should wait until I have my own children if I was so eager to become a teacher" (22). The wives actions become so entrenching that even their children follow their examples. This is a good example to portray how patriarchy can influence not just a generation, but also upcoming generations. Bolanle is alienated in a place that is supposed to be her home not just by the wives, but also the children.

Iya Femi's sons will not sit on a chair I have vacated. When I walk past them in the corridor, they turn to the wall and flatten themselves against it. No matter how many times I offer them sweets, they treat me as if I have a contagious disease. I can only wonder what their mother has filled their young ears with. (23)

Also, Iya Segi and Iya Femi strongly uphold the patriarchal norm that ties a woman's self-worth to her ability to have children. Their behaviors and attitudes portray how society

determines the value of women based on their fertility, and they utilize this idea to maintain their status in the family and acquire respect. Iya Segi, the first wife, is a clear illustration of a woman who feels that having children is essential to her survival and power. From the onset of the novel, she recognizes that having Baba Segi's children will raise her standing in the home. Iya Segi does not only have children, but uses them as a tool to assert her dominance over the other wives. Her success as a mother gives her power and control, emphasizing her belief that a woman without children is worthless and thus, acting as an agent of this patriarchal norm. To Iya Segi, motherhood is the ultimate proof of a woman's value. Iya Femi also upholds this belief by treating Bolanle with contempt and hostility and being happy that she will surely be thrown out of the house due to her barrenness. Her and Iya Segi are so sure that Bolanle will be thrown out because of her inability to conceive. Iya Segi says that, "When she fails to give him a child, Baba Segi will throw her out! We know she will not give him children so we should watch from a distance" (50).

The first thing Iya Segi did was to talk to Baba Segi about Bolanle's armchair. Baba Segi had broken his rule for Bolanle. The tradition was that the comfort of an armchair had to be earned, which meant that unless you were pregnant with edema, breastfeeding or watching over toddlers, you were not entitled to one ... Iya Segi and Iya Femi shook with anger when she sat among us. I asked myself: what is in a chair? Is it not just to sit down? Did she not have a chair in her father's house? But Baba Segi soon started to grumble about the flatness of Bolanle's belly and Iya Segi seized this opportunity to advise him that comfort made the female form complacent. She reminded him that she would know

because she was a woman. Bolanle's armchair was returned to the store the next day. (53-54)

Furthermore, it is demonstrated through the above text how Iya Segi and Iya Femi use patriarchal norms to oppress Bolanle and uphold the idea that a woman's comfort and advantages in the home must be earned through childbearing. The "armchair," a seemingly basic object, becomes a symbol of rank and power associated with a woman's fertility. In Baba Segi's home, tradition says that only pregnant or breastfeeding women are allowed the comfort of an armchair. This tradition reflects the patriarchal belief that a woman's worth is tied to her reproducing responsibility. Baba Segi defies tradition by allowing Bolanle to have an armchair despite the fact that she is not pregnant, thus angering Iya Segi and Iya Femi. Their rage arises from the conviction that Bolanle has not "earned" the right to such luxury because she failed to perform her primary task of producing children. Iya Segi's exploitation of Baba Segi reinforces her devotion to patriarchal norms. She uses Baba Segi's frustration with Bolanle's childlessness to argue that comfort leads to complacency, indirectly indicating that Bolanle's advantages should be lost until she performs her duty of becoming a mother and giving Baba Segi children. By persuading Baba Segi to remove Bolanle's chair, Iya Segi supports the belief that only childbirth offers a woman status and comfort in the home. This not only depicts the power relations within the family, but it also highlights how Iya Segi and Iya Femi support and reinforce the patriarchal norm that a woman's value and entitlement are linked to her ability to have children.

Moreover, Iya Segi and Iya Femi being conscious of the fact that Baba Segi cannot produce any children because he had no sperm and still watching Bolanle suffer the brunt of their deceit highlights how they act as agents of patriarchy and how these patriarchal norms have

stemmed rivalry among many women. These are few instances that portray Iya Segi and Iya Femi as agents of patriarchy through their actions and behaviors.

In addition, another female character in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* that acts as an agent of patriarchy is the wife to Iya Femi's uncle. Though a minor character, her mentality proves how most women support patriarchy mostly for their personal benefit. She says that, "A girl cannot inherit her father's house because it is everyone's prayer that she will marry and make her husband's home her own. This house and everything in it now belongs to your uncle. That is the way things are" (121-122). This reflects the traditional norm that only the male gender may inherit property, which limits women's financial freedom. Instead of criticizing this norm, the wife enforces it, conveying the message that women must accept it as usual and highlighting her support for this patriarchal norm. Moreover, the wife promotes marriage as the only option for women, claiming that it is "everyone's prayer" that a girl marries and make her husband's home her own. This demonstrates how women are conditioned to feel that marriage provides stability and identity, rather than owning property or being independent. Therefore, this reveals how women may act as agents of patriarchy, imposing boundaries that limit the independence of other women.

### **3.3 The Importance of Education and Awareness in Subverting Patriarchal Norms in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives***

Education serves as a strong tool in subverting patriarchal norms. It brightens minds, creates pathways to opportunities, and provides women with tools to confront and break down gender

inequality. The value of education in women's empowerment is immense, it is the foundation upon which women can create a base for equality. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, it is portrayed how patriarchal norms dictate the lives of the characters: the women, men, and children. It is reflected what traditional roles are expected of the women: to be wives, caretakers, mothers, etc. However, Shoneyin uses *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* to reveal the importance of education and awareness as important tools in subverting patriarchal norms. Through the experiences of Bolanle and other characters, the novel reflects how education and awareness are critical weapons in the subversion of patriarchal norms.

Firstly, since Bolanle is a university graduate, she is considered as a symbol of the importance of education and awareness, while the other wives and Baba Segi are seen as symbols of the dark side of illiteracy and unawareness. Bolanle's education is not just academic or limited to her university knowledge, it reveals a growth in her confidence and self-awareness. Bolanle, as opposed to Iya Segi, Iya Femi, Iya Tope, and Baba Segi who have succumbed to the deeply-rooted patriarchal norms, rejects these norms and subverts them through her education and awareness. She understands that women's education rights are fundamental human rights that allow women to engage fully in all activities. Having access to education provides women with the awareness and abilities they need to stand up for their own rights and those of others, creating a fairer and more equal society for them. For instance, she refuses to engage in the petty rivalries that is consistent among her co-wives.

It surprised me that Bolanle could speak to us after Iya Femi turned her like a spinning top. But they say a child who will play in the dark must first learn how to close its eyes. Bolanle wanted to play in the dark. She did not let Iya Femi's

behavior move her eyeballs. The very next day, she came to the sitting room and asked if any of us wanted to learn how to read. (51)

It is obvious that Bolanle understands the importance of being educated and aware, hence, why she tries her best to teach the other wives and their children, even when her kind and selfless gesture is received with hostility, she does not weaver. By offering to teach them even in the presence of hostility, Bolanle subverts the patriarchal norm that makes women become enemies just because they want to get the attention of their husband, and frees herself from the bitterness of the cycle that defines the lives of the other wives.

Furthermore, Bolanle is perceived as a threat because of her education status. The other wives recognize that her education and awareness can be a tool to expose all their dark secrets that they have been hiding before her arrival. There is also the presence of jealousy in the demeanor of the other wives such as Iya Segi and Iya Femi because Bolanle is educated. Bolanle tries to break the awkward situation when she first arrives by complimenting Iya Femi on her lovely attire, but she answers defensively, stating, “Uneducated women wear good things too” (21). This response displays her insecurity. She interprets Bolanle’s compliment as a reminder of her lack of education, rather than a genuine admiration for her attire. Iya Femi’s defensive response demonstrates how she has internalized feelings of inferiority as a result of her inadequate education.

Nevertheless, Bolanle’s afterthought reflects the long role education plays in subverting patriarchal norms. Rather than receiving the response with offense, Bolanle sees it as a symbol of Iya Femi's insecurity. Bolanle saying that she will teach her how to take compliments gracefully reveals that she understands the emotions of the other wives. This reveals a subtle way education

and awareness works toward subverting patriarchal norms, allowing women to have more empathy towards other women and challenge some behaviors that constitute patriarchy.

Also, education and awareness leads to better health decisions for women. Educated women are more likely to make informed health choices, leading to lower maternal and child death rates and improved overall well-being. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle understands the importance of seeing a professional doctor for her condition rather than an unprofessional. When Baba Segi tells her that they will be going to a prophet on a mountain top, she tells him that “the only miracle the prophet would perform was relieving Baba Segi of his hard-earned money” (43). She understands the disadvantage of meeting an unprofessional, she is aware and knows that all they do is scam one of their money and resources with no result. So, when Baba Segi seeks advice from Teacher, he tells him that that “Since the woman is educated, she will only listen to people from the world she knows. The place to take her is the hospital” (5).

However, to understand the importance of education and awareness in subverting patriarchal norms, the lack of it in the lives of some characters must be known and understood to further emphasize the importance. Without education, Iya Segi, Iya Femi, and Iya Tope have to depend completely on Baba Segi for financial support and social status. In societies dominated by patriarchal norms, men are seen as the providers and women, who have no other means of surviving, have to accept these norms, even with the disadvantages. When Baba Segi calls on a family meeting after the death of Segi and the revelation of his wives' deceit to send them away, the women find themselves in a state of dilemma as they know that they have no other means to survive. Iya Femi asks Baba Segi, “But where? Where? Go where?” (241). She is terrified because she knows that she has no other option in life. She is uneducated, has no means of livelihood as she has been dependent on Baba Segi since she got married to him. This leaves her

in a state of fear as she considers her life and her children's life nothing without Baba Segi. Even Iya Segi that has a means of livelihood outside the confines of Baba Segi's house sees herself as nothing without him because of lack of awareness. Many women feel that if there is no man in their life, they will not be able to move forward. This is the mentality of Iya Segi, Iya Femi, and Iya Tope. It is because of this that they become total prisoners in the house of Baba Segi, he is finally able to do what he has always wanted to do. He is able to a shutdown Iya Segi's businesses, prevent them from leaving the house without his permission, etc.

An agreement was drawn: they could stay if they promised to be the wives he wanted them to be. He promptly banned them from leaving the house without his permission. Iya Segi was instructed to close down all her shops and relinquish every kobo she had saved to him. Iya Femi was forbidden to wear makeup and there would be no more church. God hears your heart no matter where you are, he'd said. Surprisingly, he didn't have any rules for Iya Tope. Rather, he came to favor her and now decided to spend most of his nights with her. In return, Baba Segi swore to buy them all the jewelry, all the lace, every luxury they needed and wanted, provided these were only worn within the four walls of his home. (243)

By taking away their freedom to work, earn, or move around freely, Baba Segi makes them completely dependent on him for money, clothes, and even self-expression. This dominance is a key feature of patriarchy, where men maintain power by limiting women's independence and the wives can not dictate this agreement because they have no skill or education to live their own lives, hence, they agree to depend solely on Baba Segi.

Moreover, because of Iya Segi and Iya Femi's little exposure to education and awareness, they see most of these patriarchal norms as normal, such as submission and the belief that a

woman's self-worth is tied to her ability of having children. They expect Bolanle to submit to them because they were there before her, and they also believe that since Bolanle has no child and is not performing any motherly duties, she has no right to have her own armchair like the others. Since they submit to Baba Segi, they expect Bolanle to submit to them. Therefore, it is because these characters grow up in a society where patriarchy is highly entrenched that they follow these patriarchal norms. Since they are not aware of the power that the tool of education and awareness plays in subverting these patriarchal norms, most of them have learned to live by it and allow these norms to shape their lives. Bolanle does not allow this as she is educated and aware, but rather chooses to leave Baba Segi's house even if she is seen as a second hand woman as this is how the society views women who have left their husbands. This further shows that even the society needs a reconstruction and this can be achieved by educating both the men and women and creating awareness about the dangers of patriarchy in the lives of both genders, thereby highlighting the importance of education and awareness in subverting patriarchal norms.

### **3.4 Women's Resistance and the Assertion of their Agency: Strategies Employed by the Female Characters to Assert their Agencies**

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, each wife tries to assert their agency and resist oppression and dominance in different ways by employing different strategies to survive in not just Baba Segi's home, but the society at large. For instance, the character of Bolanle. Bolanle is faced with various obstacles and suffering from an early adolescent age. She is brutally raped after being lured by a man and does not feel like herself again.

After everything happened, I tried hard to continue being myself but I slowly disappeared. I *became* Bolanle -the soiled, damaged woman. Except that was hard too because Mama kept trying to make me do all the things the old Bolanle would

have done. Don't you think you should get a job, Bolanle? Won't you apply for this bank job in the newspapers, Bolanle? Didn't you see the handsome boy that was looking at you, Bolanle! How could I tell her that I had failed to preserve my dignity? I was too ashamed to let her see the fickle shell I'd become. (16)

Hence, this is the reason she decides to marry Baba Segi even when she knows that he has other wives and children, even when her friends call him "a polygamist ogre" (16), even when her sister, Lara, cackles and makes fun of her, even when her mother abruptly refuses, she sees it as a way of getting herself back. This was her way of initially asserting her agency, she makes decision that she feels will make her regain her life and heal with anonymity, away from the pressure her mother constantly places on her, this is the assertion of her agency. While hoping to heal and regain her self in Baba Segi's house, she also wishes to have a good relationship with his wives, her co-wives, and their children although this does not happen.

Furthermore, Bolanle resists oppression from her co-wives, Iya Segi and Iya Femi through her conscious silence. When faced with oppression and bullying from them, she does not fight back or retaliate, rather, she keeps quiet and continues in her bid to try and gain their favor. This strategy employed by her proves to be helpful for her as she is consider different from the other wives although it solicits more hatred from them. Not only does she assert her agency and resist oppression at the onset of the plot, but she also asserts her agency at the conclusion of the plot. Bolanle decides to leave Baba Segi's home after discovering the lies and secrets on which the family is built. She realizes that she has been the scape goat in the whole situation, as she is not only left oblivious of what is happening, but blamed and insulted for something she could not control from both Baba Segi and his wives.

One after the other, they offered to help me gather my belongings, but I told them I could manage. There wasn't much left to pack anyway; much of it was never unpacked. Akin offered too. Even if I'd said no, he wouldn't have listened. He helped me load up the waiting taxi. He stood alone by the gate and waved until I was out of sight. Don't think I can't see the challenges ahead of me. People will say I am a secondhand woman. Men will hurt and ridicule me but I won't let them hold me back. I will remain in the land of the living. I am back now and the world is spread before me like an egg cracked open. (245)

She understands that others may look down on her, labeling her as a "secondhand woman," which suggests they view her as someone who has been "used up" or is no longer appreciated. She also knows that some men may try to harm her or make her feel ashamed. Despite this, she will not let their opinions or actions hold her back. She is committed to progressing in life. This is her way of asserting her agency, by leaving even when she sees all the obstacles that will be awaiting her, her ability of choosing her own path that will influence her future reflects the assertion of her agency.

Furthermore, Iya Segi also resists oppression and asserts her agency in the novel. Although the strategy she employs is seen as morally questionable, she asserts her agency through manipulation and deceit. Iya Segi knows the ins and outs of Baba Segi, since she is the first wife and has been with him the longest. She knows what he is thinking even before the thoughts are turned into utterances and she uses this to her advantage through her subtle manipulation of him. After giving birth to her son, Akin, she starts throwing signs to Baba Segi to show that she is not happy and she knows that to men, they are not considered as perfect husbands if their wives are sad. She goes to the extent of using onions to bring tears to her eyes

since she could not evoke any. When Baba Segi finally notices her behavior, he asks what is wrong with her, perfectly entering the trap that she has set for him. She told him of her wish to work.

I dropped to my knees and told him of my wish to have a small stall where I could sell sweets wholesale, interact with other women and learn of new recipes, the best household detergents on the market, better ways to please a husband. I slipped it in when I noticed each blink weighed down his eyelids longer than the one before. (74)

Undoubtedly, she knows how the minds of men work because according to her , “Men are like yam. You cut them how you like” (75). Her use of this simile reflects how easy manipulating men is because of their pompous ego. This is one of the strategies Iya Segi employs to resist oppression and assert her agency. Also, the use of deceit is another strategy she employs to resist oppression. She lies to Baba Segi constantly throughout the novel and it is even later revealed that none of the children Baba Segi considers his own are actually his. She sleeps with the driver, Taju, just to get pregnant so as not to be driven from Baba Segi’s house and the main reason she does this is because of her money. To her, money is her path to freedom and she knows that everybody wants to be free from whatever binds them, and what binds her is Baba Segi, and the only way she can get her freedom is through her money. She manipulates Baba Segi to the end, even when he offers her and the other wives “freedom,” she uses her manipulation tactic to make him accept her back. Her methods may be deemed morally questionable, but these are the strategies she employs to assert her agency knowing it will influence her future. This further portrays how many women have to use questionable tactics just to get freedom from oppression and the society’s restrictions.

Along with Iya Segi, Iya Femi also tries to resist oppression and assert her agency through marriage and deception. After the death of her father, Iya Femi is subjected to face oppression from the family she works with, the Adeigbe family. She works for the children and the children's children having been with them for over fifteen years. She faces a lot of oppression during her time there. She is stripped naked after Grandma catches her talking to the gateman and chili is rubbed between her thighs. After Tunde reminds her that she can leave if she wants, the thought of freedom excites her, but also brings fear to her heart. Eventually, she ends up marrying Baba Segi. Her marriage to Baba Segi is one of the strategies she employs to resist oppression and assert her agency. When she is unable to produce children for Baba Segi, she continues sleeping with Tunde and this is how she conceives. She keeps the secret until it is finally exposed. This reflects how the strategy of secrecy is used by her to assert her agency. Also, she uses revenge as a strategy against her uncle and his wife who subjected her to the aforementioned oppression.

Starting from the backyard, I poured kerosene along the walls. I poured some on the concrete bench my mother placed her baskets on. I poured some on the doormat we used to scrape mud from our feet ... How quickly fire eats! I ran outside and could see that the insides of the house were half-consumed. Flames burst through the windows and the bungalow looked like a blackened shell. You thought I killed her, didn't you? I went seeking revenge, not death. I let her out of the front door, yelling and tearing at her scarf. She didn't know whether to summon her husband or brave the flames. I prayed that her most precious possessions were aflame, forever beyond reach, destroyed before her very eyes.

(135-136)

Clearly, revenge is the way she considers she can avenge her lost years. This is another strategy she employs to assert her agency. She considers herself not to be weak but just smart. Even her decision of staying with Baba Segi at the end is a strategy she uses to resist oppression from the society because she knows the society will not accept her after being cast away by her husband.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* demonstrate that women possess strength and are not ultimately powerless, even in societies where men are viewed as the highest authority. The wives strategically find ways to resist oppression and assert their agency, using tactics like deception, secrecy, silence, or taking back their freedom. This mirrors real life, where women in patriarchal societies discover ways to express their power, even when facing challenges. By showcasing the various strategies women employ to survive and succeed, Shoneyin emphasizes that true strength is not always loud or easy to see. The message is straightforward; women can fight against unfairness, whether from inside the system or by completely breaking away from it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

In exploring the topic of the subversion of patriarchal norms and women's agency in *Stay with Me* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, this study has delved into the societal expectations placed on women within the framework of marriage, family, and motherhood and how these patriarchal norms are subverted along with the assertion of the agency of the women. These novels serve as windows into the complex world of patriarchal societies, revealing the patriarchal norms established in the society and suggesting how the female characters subvert these norms and assert their agency.

One of the central findings that has emerged from this study is the way in which these novels portray the involvement of both men and women as agents of patriarchy in the society. This study reveals the way men act as agents of patriarchy in *Stay with Me*. Akin, Yejide's husband, acts as an agent of patriarchy through his deceit and manipulation of Yejide. Although these patriarchal norms benefit the male gender mostly, they are also affected by them negatively. It does not allow them to be vulnerable as the norms equate masculinity with rigidity. So, although Akin benefits from patriarchy by being able to hide his impotency, as infertility is

mostly attributed to the fault of the woman, this same system destroys the relationships he has with his wife and brother. The characters of Moomi and Funmi are significant as they highlight women as agents of patriarchy through their oppression and marginalization of Yejide. Similarly, this study has revealed how men and women also act as agents of patriarchy in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Through the character of Baba Segi and other male characters, Shoneyin portrays how men frequently behave as agents of patriarchy, utilizing their power to maintain dominance. The characters of Iya Segi and Iya Femi are significant as they highlight women as agents of patriarchy through their oppression of Bolanle. Due to jealousy and resentment, they do everything possible to get rid of Bolanle, even if that means they become upholders of these patriarchal norms.

Also, another finding that this study has revealed is the importance of education and awareness in subverting these established patriarchal norms. In *Stay with Me*, the importance of education and awareness is emphasized through the ignorance of the characters like Yejide. Her lack of sexual awareness is what leads to her ignorance of Akin's impotency. Also, characters such as Moomi and Funmi reveal that education and awareness go a long way in shaping the minds of individuals into accepting ideas that will benefit them without being harmful, thereby subverting these established patriarchal norms in the society. They both uphold the traditional mindset that a woman's self-worth is determined by her ability to bear children. Similarly, this study has revealed the importance of education and awareness in subverting patriarchal norms in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and this is highlighted through the character of Bolanle and the ignorance of her co-wives, Iya Segi, Iya Femi, and Iya Tope. Bolanle, a university graduate, understands the importance of being educated and aware, as it plays a major role in women's daily activities. Being educated and aware provides her with the knowledge of going to

a hospital for any medical issue rather than mountain prophets who will scam one of their money. It is through the tools of education and awareness that she later finds out about Baba Segi's impotency, which is kept as a secret by her co-wives.

Furthermore, another finding that this study has revealed are the strategies employed by the female characters in *Stay with Me* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* to resist oppression and assert their agency. Some of the strategies that Yejide employs to resist oppression and assert her agency is rebellion against polygamy and divorce. By rebelling against the norm that states that a wife must always be respectful to her husband in the presence of his family after her discovery of his prior knowledge of Funmi's purpose, she resists oppression, and also outrightly rejects polygamy. Yejide also leaves her marriage and family and decides not to return to Akin, even after she discovers that her daughter is alive. This strategy employed asserts her agency as she makes decisions that can influence and shape her life and future. Similarly, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the wives employ different strategies to try and resist oppression and assert their agency, such as manipulation, deception, secrecy, marriage, silence, divorce, etc., and they strategically use these tools to resist oppression from their family and the society at large and also assert their agency. Though some of these strategies are morally questionable, it reflects the extent some women will go just to achieve their freedom from oppression and to have the ability to make their own decisions, which will influence their own future.

At the center of these novels is an exploration of a patriarchal society and the ways women can subvert and assert their agency within it. Both *Stay with Me* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* challenge the restrictions society places on women regarding marriage, motherhood, and family life. Through the personal battles and resistance exhibited by their

female characters, Ayobami Adebayo and Lola Shoneyin reveal the resilience of women in subverting patriarchal norms and asserting their agency in oppressive situations.

### Works Cited

Adebayo, Ayobami. *Stay with Me*. Ouida Books, 2017.

Angbulu, Stephen. “*Stay with Me*: Book Review.” 2019,  
<https://stephangbulu.wordpress.com/2019/11/01/stay-with-me-book-review/>.

Crossman, Ashley. “Feminist Theory in Sociology.” ThoughtCo, 23 July 2024,  
<https://thoughtco.com/feminist-theory-3026624>.

Da Silva, Borges, and Sofiane Labidi. “Rethinking What It is to be a Feminist.” *Advances In Applied Sociology*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2021.

Debbakh, Aridj. “Challenging Patriarchy: Feminism and Gender Dynamics in Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* (2010).” 2023.

Ezekwere, Chidozie Ezekiel. "The Depiction of Females in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*." *ANSU: Journal of Language and Literary Studies (AJLLS)*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2021.

Fraser, Nancy. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 245.

French, Marilyn. *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*. New York: Summit, 1985.

Goring, Paul, et al. *Studying Literature: The Essential Companion*. London: Arnold, 2001.

Guy-Evans, Olivia. "Feminist Theory in Sociology: Definition, Types & Principles." Edited by Saul McLeod, 2024, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/feminist-theory-sociology.html>.

— — — "Radical Feminism: Definition, Theory & Examples." Edited by Saul McLeod, 2024, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/radical-feminism.html>.

hooks, bell (sic). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End, 1984.

— — — *Feminism is for Everybody*. Pluto Press, 2000.

Lewis, Jone Johnson. "What Is Radical Feminism?" ThoughtCo, 7 June 2024, <https://thoughtco.com/what-is-radical-feminism-3528997>.

Ndiyah, Florence. "The Emotional Well-being of African Wives: Perceiving the Generalised Resistance Resources (GRRs) in Stress Management by Co-wives in Lola Shoneyin's Novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*." *Journal of Literary Studies*, 3 July 2021, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Emotional-Well-being-of-African-Wives%3A-the-in-Ndiyah/24c8a4dc24655b2c4f4e6681ec85dbace419e245>.

Ositelu, Tola. "Book Review: *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo." 10 July 2017, <https://afropean.com/book-review-stay-with-me-by-ayobami-adebayo/>.

Shoneyin, Lola. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Cassava Republic Press, 2010.

Skurnick, Lizzie. "Subtle, Brilliant *Stay with Me* Blends The Personal And The Political." 26 Aug. 2017.

Webster, Merriam. *Webster's Concise Dictionary & Synonym Guide*. Federal Street Press, 2001, p.122.

Wikipedia. "Feminist Theory." Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_theory).

— — — "Radical Feminism." Wikimedia, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical\\_feminism](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_feminism).