

**EXPLORATION OF WIVES' ATTITUDES IN LOLA SHONEYIN'S *THE
SECRET LIVES OF BABASEGI'S WIVES***

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **DANIEL NOSAKHARE EROMOSELE** with matriculation number **ART1900456** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

Prof. E.O. Okwechime
(Project Supervisor)

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty who has been there for me and to my family.

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I give all glory to Almighty God, the source and giver of knowledge who spared my life throughout the course of this work.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Study

This essay examines different attitudes wives display in polygamous marriage in order to highlight women's perceptions of life as illustrated in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secrets Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

1.2 Scope of Study

This essay is restricted to Lola Shoneyin's *The Secrets Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* because the narrative captures most attitudes co- wives display in polygamous homes.

1.3 Methodology

The essay employs qualitative approach to textual analysis. This involves reading a text closely and bringing out relevant aspects that revolve around a chosen topic. Secondary materials employ in this essay are taken from scholarly articles in textbooks, print and the internet based journals. This is to enrich the discourse.

1.2 Theoretical Background

This essay adopts Sociological Criticism and Psycho-analytical Approach theoretical frameworks. The two theories aim to help the researcher to understand the rationale behind the contention in a polygamous homes in relation to society.

Sociological Criticism

Sociological approach looks at the relationship between society, its people and their dispositions in extension. All literary works exist within the context of its society therefore it is important to examine how certain forces in the society influence the people living there. This is one of the tasks of sociological critics. In a way, our primary texts can be regarded as sociological novels which Benson Omonode describes thus, "sociological novel is usually concerned with the nature and the effect of social forces on the characters in a given society. Thus, we are made to understand why characters behave the way they do in the society" (25). Omonode's assertion has sufficiently pointed out the link between people living in a society and the institutions in such society. He hits the nail on the head when he argues that "we are made to understand why characters behave the way they do in society" (25). It is on this critical ground and understanding that M.H Abrams and Geoffery Galt Harpham argue that:

Sociological critics treat a work of literature as inescapably conditioned in the choice and development of its subject matter, the ways of thinking it incorporates, its evaluation of modes of life it tenders, and even in its formal qualities by the social, political, and economic organisation and forces of its age. Such critics also tend to view the interpretation and assessment of a literary work by reading the public as shaped by the circumstances specific to that public's time and place. (334)

From the position of Abrams and Harpham, it is clear that society and literature mutually co- exist. For a convenient application of the sociological approach to the study of literature, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren divide it thus, "the sociology of the writer, the social content of the work and the influence of literature on society" (96). Wellek and Warren hold that the society and literature interact and this explains why critics use sociological criticism in understanding the relationship among man, society and literature. Therefore, the deployment of sociological approach in this study is apt.

Psycho-Analytical Approach

Sigmund Freud's propounds the psycho-analytical criticism which interrogate human behaviours in relation society. In this case, all behaviours of characters are

interpreted, analysed and evaluated based Freud's positions. This theory beams its searchlight on human states of mind which explains the reasons behind characters and authors' actions. In the words of Sigmund Freud:

We feel justified in regarding "emotion" as a quantity which may become increased, derived and displaced. So we are forced to the conclusion that the patient fell ill because the emotion developed in the pathogenic situation was prevented from escaping normally, and that the essence of the sickness lies in the fact that these "imprisoned" (dingeklemmt) emotions undergo a series of abnormal changes... which occur during such hypnoidal states easily become pathogenic, since such states do not present the conditions for a normal draining off the emotion of this exciting processes. And as a result there arises a peculiar product of this exciting process, that is, the symptom, and this is projected like a foreign body into the normal state. (9-10)

Freud believes that any human action that commands others' attention comes from human emotion. That is human being's behavioural actions come from the inside. In his assessment of psychological criticism on a literary piece, Charles E. Bressler argues that:

Literature and psychoanalysis for Freud, to the resolved conflicts that give rise to any neurosis constitute the stuff of literature. A work of literature he believes is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind. Accordingly, the literary work must then be treated like a dream, applying psychoanalytic techniques to the text to uncover the author's hidden motivations, repressed desires, and wishes. (126)

This simply means that it is important to understand the psychological state of characters' minds before their societal actions are questioned and psychological criticism works in this direction. It is on this ground too that Abrams' and Harpham say that, "psychological criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression in an indirect and fictional form of the state of mind and structure of personality of the individual author" (289). B.F Skinner argues that the mind is the seat of reasoning which influences human behaviours. In line with Freud's assertion, he observes thus:

The crucial issue here is the Freudian distinction between the conscious and unconscious mind. Freud's contribution has been widely misunderstood. The important point was not that the individual was often unable to describe important aspects of his own behaviour or identify important causal relationships, but that his ability to describe them was

irrelevant to the occurrence of behaviour or to the effectiveness of causes. We begin by attributing the behaviour of the individual to events in his genetic and environmental history. We then note that because of certain cultural practices, the individual may come to describe some of that behaviour and some of those causal relationships. We may say that he is conscious of the parts he can describe and unconscious of the rest. (85-86)

It is clear that every human action is a by-product of what the human mind thinks. Every human action first takes place within the mind before it is displayed throughout actual actions of challenges.

1.5 Review Related Scholarship:

This section of this essay examines the few critical comments found on Shoneyin in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's*, to the best of the knowledge of this writer. Chielozona Eze observes irony as a device in the narrative. He writes that:

the dramatic turning point in the narrative of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is when the truth of Baba Segi's infertility becomes known. The problem that was introduced in the first scene of the narrative is, after all, not the fault of the women in Baba Segi's life; rather the problem is

with the patriarch himself. But even after Baba Segi has been shown not to be who he presented himself to be, his power over the family is undiminished. On the contrary, his power increases dramatically. He threatens his wives with a nuclear option in the exercise of authority in order to bring them to order; he wants to send them back to where they came from, knowing full well that they have nowhere to go.(322)

As noted by Eze, Baba Segi often boasts of his sexual vigour but unknown to him, he is responsible for Bolanle's barrenness. This is revealed during a medical examination he sees as unimportant to him. The novelist uses irony to deflate Baba Segi's ego. He however retains his rigid patriarchal position even though his wives have let him down.

Muhammad Akali and Kehinde John Olorunshola studied the position of women in a polygamous setting and maintain that:

Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* reveals that polygamy, pornography of violence, objectification of women, forced marriage, and disinheriting female children succeed in the society because the women, either keeps quiet over what happens to her or uses confrontational method in righting the wrong. Thus, brooding in silence and/or attempting confrontation are both fundamental errors.(180)

Akali and Olorunshola note that polygamy thrives because some women promote it. For instance, Iya Segi does not see anything wrong with a second wife. Thus, she willingly allows her husband to bring in another woman. Besides, she knows that other wives will be under her control.

In addition, morality, chastity and commitment keep an ideal marriage going. It is sad that some wives in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* see adultery as a way out of their predicament. Akali and Olorunshola observe further that, "Iya Segi considers it obligatory to procreate in her husband's house and she pursues this awkwardly unlike Flora Nwapa's Efuru, who though considers it a curse and a failure not to have children, bears the resentment and pulls through and considers herself fruitful in her service to humanity" (174-175). A virtuous wife can turn her attention to something worthy rather than sleeping around in the name seeking solution to her husband's fertility puzzle.

Polygamy as a form of plural marriage goes with many issues. Some have seen these issues from positive perspectives while others do not. F. Fiona Moolla argues that

despite Lola Shoneyin's public condemnation of the impediments to female autonomy, equality, freedom, dignity, and self-realisation inherent

in polygamy, the polyvalent nature of her contemporary Nigerian novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, suggests the necessary material and moral complexity of any analysis of plural marriage in postcolonial Africa. Parodic play in this novel highlights how the apparently monstrous patriarch and the daily perversions of traditional marriage and household ideals represent the only security for both relatively advantaged and disadvantaged women in twenty-first-century Nigeria. I embed my literary analysis of the novel within a survey of history and religion to show how monogamy confirmed the moral superiority of the colonial and Christian missionary projects and justified their social interventions. To contextualise this study of the novel, I also use socio-anthropological literature that connects the global forces promoting romantic love as the sole foundation of monogamous marriage with, ironically, the global flows that create the punitive economic and social conditions to which plural marriage is an entirely rational response shaped by local cultural contexts. (Web)

Polygamy comes under the scrutiny Moolla's examination and he contrasts with monogamy better favoured by Christianity. Looked at from another perspective, Moolla

notes that the novel has a lyrical language and this is traced to the novelist's poetic background. According to Moolla:

Lola Shoneyin's reputation in Nigeria, where she was already established as a poet, has grown nationally and internationally with the success of her first novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). Her background in poetry is evident in the novel's compression and finely balanced architecture of expression, penchant for striking images, and lyricism. The title of the Despite the dual critique, most reviews of the novel and the drift of author interviews claim that the thrust of the novel is directed mainly at exposing the toxicity of polygamy in the modern world. While the novel casts a glance at both polygamous and monogamous households, it presents in its preliminary pages a family tree only of the polygamous household that is its primary emphasis. The novel also reflects its subject matter at the level of narrative structure. The plural nature of the marriage of the Yoruba patriarch, Ishola Alao, is replicated in the manifold voices presented in the story. The novel's short chapters combine first-person narration of the many household members and third-person narration focalised through the same characters. Both first- and third-person

narratives offer flashbacks, which allow the reader to construct short biographies for each of the significant characters. (Web)

As Moolla notes, the language of the novel reflects the poetic skill of a poet writing a prosaic work. The issue surrounding polygamy has been looked at by different novelists but Shoneyin's novel is unique in that she uses a creative language to present polygamy.

K. J. Pam in his study of the novel's language writes that:

language, in whatever way or circumstances it is used, is not an end but a means to an end. Every individual has a unique way he uses language to suit his purpose. This paper assesses the pertinent linguistic and literary peculiarities adopted by Shoneyin in portraying the societal mishap leveled against women in an African setting. The study reveals that the author uses the first and third person points of view in the narration. Shoneyin employs a simple diction and a diversified register. In giving accurate details, she uses a lot of obscene words and expressions which gives the work pornographic perceptions. Shoneyin's language habits have indeed resulted in linguistic disparity. (Web)

. Pam observation is in order because the language deployed by Shoneyin reflects what is expected in adult film. The characters especially the medical practioners do not relent in their use of obscene expressions. The same thing goes with the wives especially Iya Tope and Iya Femi.

Gift T Baloyi in her comment on the novel writes that:

in this fascinating novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2011), Lola Shoneyin deals with several African cultural pressures in marriage; although her text is located within the Yoruba of Nigeria, the challenges raised are prevalent in other societies (including South Africa) as well. Iya Segi, Iya Tope, Iya Femi and Bolanle are married to one man, Ishola Alao known as Baba Segi (this name shall be used throughout this work). As the opening section commences, we find that Baba Segi's youngest and the only formally educated wife, Bolanle (fourth spouse), is causing him worries through her alleged failure to conceive. Baba Segi is, after all, the father of seven children with his first three wives and because he is no slacker in his marital sexual obligations, something needs to be done to address Bolanle's condition. Bolanle scoffs at traditional healers and remedies...(Web)

Baloyi notes that it is the worry Bolanle causes Baba Segi that brings out the hidden truth. Moreover, her formal education also propels her to reject the use of traditional approach to solving her supposed barrenness. Bolanle perhaps reasons that going to prophets or consuming concoction will degrade her personality as an educated woman.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Lola Shoneyin's *The Secrets Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* has been studied from some perspectives but it is disturbing that the mechanism deployed by characters to survive their challenges has not received the critical attention it deserves. It is this gap that this research tries to fill.

1.6 Thesis Statement:

This essay posits that wives' various attitudes towards their husband and co – wives largely determine what becomes of polygamy presented in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secrets Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

CHAPTER TWO

INFIDELITY AND CONTENTION AS WAYWARD WIVES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLYGAMY

Infidelity involves any unfaithful act that undermines a relationship. In Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, some of the protagonist's wives resort to infidelity as a way out of their husband impotency. In extension, they contend with the wife who they see as a threat to their matrimonial bliss. .

In the area where Baba Segi lives, the women there are restless and daring. One of the major settings of the novel is porous so that no man can hide his infertility nor lord it over women. The women are desperate and determine to solve fertility challenge in their own ways. Male infertility is a challenge that makes it difficult for a man to put his wife in a family way. It is a problem that is caused by different factors but then it can be fixed. The desperate wives in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* are crooks therefore they resort to adultery therefore bastard infest their husbands nest. Immorality and infidelity therefore define the lives of people in the narrative's setting. The women in this environment are smart though mostly loose so that they see immoral conducts as a way of life. The narrator reveals that the women in the novel are wolves in sheep cloth:

Teacher's shack was in Ayikara and Ayikara was a place for children. It wasn't a special place but when you asked for directions, people look away from their twirling wrists. There are three reasons for this. First, absolutely no one wanted to admit to knowing where it was, in case their neighbours were listening. Second, Ayikara didn't have distinct boundaries. Last, Ayikara was more than four or parallel streets laced by lasciviousness: it was a spirit. The dark buildings were full of women whose faces glow under ultraviolet lights. These women lived for other women's men. They cooked for them, drank with them, fought over them, fucked them, nursed them, slapped them and loved them. And when the longing love caused made them ill, they surrendered their lives and died for them. (2)

Indeed, this is a terrible abode for any man to dwell for it is certain that to survive in Ayikara is to surrender to the will of its women. The women here are mean towards marriage therefore they indulge in sexual escapades. Shoneyin uses the household of Baba Segi to illustrate what it means for a man to live in Ayikara without a complete set of dutiful testicles.

Marriage is an institution founded on truth and honesty, but the failure of Baba Segi to present valid manhood that can sustain his wives' urge, opens the portal of sexual misconducts for them. Oge A Ikediugwu and Kola Eke quote Rafai Sannis's perception of marriage. According to Ikediugwu and Eke, Sanni points out that:

marriage is a sacred act in Islam, with rules and regulation guiding it. It is one of the signs of Allah that a man and a woman will live together as husband and wife for a particular purpose mentioned in the Quran which is beyond mere sexual satisfaction or production of off springs. She argues that marriage in Islam is an institution that safeguards the rights of men, women, children and the community at large and at the same time takes care of the emotional, spiritual, physical, social, economic and intellectual needs of the family members. (144)

Society is ruled by the people therefore the wives of Baba Segi work contrary to Sanni's blissful description of marriage. Africans cherish children and any marriage that cannot children is doom and its players are beaten. What this means is that any marriage without children will be considered a failure. To this end, husband and wife do everything possible to have children. Adoption is hardly considered as an option because Africans believe that having one's biological children is a great sign of social fulfillment. It

ensures continuity in a family. It is this need that forces Baba Segi and his wife to seek children wherever it is possible to get them. Iya Tope, one of Baba Segi's wives recalls how Iya Segi helps her to become pregnant for their husband. She recalls thus:

several months after, she knocked on my door in the middle of the night. She must have crawled out from under Baba Segi because back then it was just the two of us. She had Baba Segi four times a week and I had him thrice. I would have happily given up my nights as well. There were weeks I ached so much I could hardly sit. 'Get pregnant quickly or he will start to force-feed you bitter concoction from medicine until your belly rumbles in your sleep'... (83)

As the first wife to unravel the empty testicles that Baba Segi drags around, Iya Segi sets the stage for other wives to frolic with other men. Their orientation towards life tilts towards the doctrine of *carpe diem* hence their id rules over their ego and superego which could have propelled them towards the right path in their quest to have children. Rather than seeking medical counsel and helps in acceptable places, some of Baba Segi's wives look for secret lovers who impregnate them. Ironically, Baba Segi often boasts about his supposed sexual potency. Unknown to him, he is worse than a eunuch. His smart wives play along with him even though they know that his virility is not intact as he often

claims. Shoneyin uses irony here to reflect on Baba Segi's sexual emptiness which gives room to infidelity among some of his wives. Moreover, the wives of Baba Segi who choose deception as a way of life are deviants. They quite know that every societal institution has codes of conduct which must be adhered to but it is, however, sad that they break certain marital codes and norms which portray them as evil. According to Ogaga A. Obaro, "individual deviance is deviant behaviour involving a person acting alone contrary to established customs, mores and laws of the group or society. Thus, the armed robber, the thief, the burglar, the murderer, the rapist, the drug addict, the prostitute and so forth who acts as single individual is an individual deviant" (26-27). Ogaga clearly points out that some irresponsible individuals find it difficult to abide by laws guiding social conducts hence they do things in their ways. This is because their id is reckless. For example, Baba Segi's first three wives engage in deception to born children and by all standards, this is an act of deviance which civilized people and society condemn.

Bolanle, a university graduate, finds her way into the harm of Baba Segi and the lamp of deceit suddenly deem before his desperate wives. She leads her husband Baba Segi's to the hill of revelation and the riddle behind his children emerges. Being an enlightened woman, Baba Segi does not have the inner strength to "force-feed" her with bitter concoction as he does to Iya Segi prior to the conception of her first child. Baba

Segi suggests a pastor who can help Bolanle solve her presumed barrenness problem but she declines because she does not see everything from spiritual point view. Flashback is used here to refresh Bolanle's past experiences:

just a month ago, he'd barged into my room. 'Get dressed,' he yelled. 'God has called a prophet to the mountain-top and he will only be there for four more days. Let us go so he will lay hands on your belly and perform a miracle.' 'One of those white-garment conmen, no doubt,' I said. I told my husband that the only miracle the prophet would perform was relieving Baba Segi of his hard-earned money. 'Listen to yourself'. He shouted. 'Does your blood not boil when you see other women carrying their babies on their back? Do tears not fill your eyes when you see mothers suckling infants? You of all people should be willing to try everything. Offspring make our visit to this world to remain a barren maggot? (43)

The fact that Bolanle is considered barren worries Baba Segi psychologically. Besides, he finds it very difficult to cope with her challenge. This makes him to become hyper emotional about their relationship he talks to her without any sense of affection. Shoneyin uses contrast to differentiate the personality of Baba Segi and Bolanle. Besides, Bolanle's

education has refined her so that she does not allow Baba Segi's reckless behavior to disturb her peace. Her presence in Baba Segi's house however puts pressure on Iya Segi et al. Iya Segi and Iya Femi perfect their scheme to get rid of Bolande because they know how children are born in Baba Segi's household. Without doubt, Baba Segi loves children far more than anything else. His love for children is revealed in this conversation by his first three wives:

Iya Segi, your words are like proverbs, I said. 'Kruuk, let me ask you this: what does our husband value more than what fills his mouth? Iya Femi's eyes widened "Children!" 'Ah! Wisdom at last,' Iya Segi said. When Bolanle 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. I don't want to see anyone scratching her door frame with their toenails! "Both women turned to stare at me"(50).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Baba Segi loves children and he considers himself to be fertile enough to have as many as he wishes. In his response to a doctor's question (about the number of children he has), Baba Segi brags thus, 'I would have had more than ten children if this woman's womb was not hostile to my seed' (37). Unknown

to Baba Segi, he is not in any way fertile. He carries dead testicles around yet he wants to have many children. This drives his first three wives to fill his home with bastards.

Men may have patriarchal control over women but when it comes to the use of crafty methods to achieve a goal, women can beat men to it. In other words, women sometimes use their sexual power to suppress men and this ungodly act is what happened in Baba Segi's house. For example, his first wife seeks to solve her husband's infertility problem through deceit. Joy O. Ogbonnaya states that:

the roles women play are not purely a function of their biology and this goes for men. As a result of biology, they are unequal in terms of physical strength. It is society that imposes all these on the woman. Moreover, differences do not signify inequality. Society upholds male domination and this is the cause of women not given as much freedom as the men in family and national matters. This results in a struggle, the men strive to maintain their position while women strive to change theirs. (83)

As rightly noted in the above submission, Baba Segi strives to maintain his patriarchal position and his wives strive to change their position as barren women. They know that

society will tag them unfruitful wives even though the fault is theirs therefore they find solution to their husband's problem, in their own way.

Being the first wife, Iya Segi is the first to discover that her husband has fertility problem. In Africa, most men believe that infertility problem is associated with women alone. Upon her realization that her husband cannot father a child, Iya Segi imported pregnancy into his home. She prevailed upon Taju, her husband's driver so that he makes himself available for the adultery to fetch Iya Segi instant pregnancy. Taju recounts this thus:

....next thing I knew, she was sitting on top of me, riding me like a horse. I cannot say I resisted, but remembering my boss's wife is not a woman of modest proportions. She pinned me down with the strength of three men. I thought maybe I should tell her to stop but she covered my mouth with her hand, or maybe I covered my mouth. (223)

Taju cannot resist the temptation brought before him because his id is dominant over his ego and superego. He ignores the sexual boundary that ought to exist between him and his boss's wives. This continues, "after that, whenever my boss sent me to his home on errands, I found myself sitting on that armchair being ridden like a new saddle. I don't

know what I like more, the fan above our heads, my boss's armchair or the riding I received in it. Within a few months, her belly swelled like a boil." (223). Freud's pleasure principle states that deviants seek immediate satisfaction. This is evident in Iya Segi and Taju who condone extra-marital affairs.

Unlike Iya Segi who has affairs with her husband's driver to get pregnant, Iya Tope seeks hers from a meat seller Iya Segi encourages her to meet. In her account:

even when my belly was rounded, I continue to go to him. I couldn't help myself. There was something he gave me that I wanted constantly, endlessly. Three days after I gave birth to my first daughter, I waited for Baba Seyi to leave for his new building material store. As soon as Taju drove him away, I tied the infant to my back and sat on a boulder outside the meat-seller's home... By the time he has hung up all his tools, I had removed the baby and my clothes and laid them down in a neat pile on the floor ... For four years, that was how I live: three days of pummeling from Baba Segi and a day of healing from the meat-seller. (85-86)

This is a reckless life style but Iya Tope enjoys it because it offers her an opportunity to be a mother and a supposed responsible wife as Baba Segi often claims. Unlike Bolanle

who guides Baba Segi towards a godly path in her quest to get pregnant, Iya Segi and Iya Tope chose deception.

Iya Femi opts for her former boss's son in her quest to get pregnant for her husband. She works as a maid for a wealthy woman and the woman's son has a soft spot for her. Their sexual recklessness leads to adultery that pollutes Baba Segi's home with bastards:

He took me to a hotel not far from his office ... It was good to have him back between my thighs, especially after two night with Baba Segi , whose penis was so big that two men could share it and still be well endowed ... During one of our frequent short-time sessions, I told Tunde that I was married to Baba Segi. He didn't seem surprised at all. He just smiled. 'It can only make our time sweeter,' he said. (132)

Both Iya Femi and Segun are immoral because they failed to stick to the societal norms that guides married life. It is a taboo for Segun to sleep with a married woman but this is what gives him pleasure. Psychologically, Segun has turned his mind towards fornication and Iya Femi has tuned hers towards adultery. At this point, it is safe to conclude that Baba Segi's first three wives are guilty of infidelity. They deploy deceit as a survival

strategy in the face of their husband's impotency. This is against the ethics of marital life.

According to Jude Chiedo Ukaga:

it is a common experience that we make promises to ourselves and others in our everyday life. In marriage for instance, promises are made which are ratified with some oath-taking. We see promises being made in resolutions, contracts, political campaigns, agreement, pact, treaty, appointment, vows and so on. In each of these situations, one announces something depending on one's will. As it were, a commitment to a future action is made (in words of course) Thus, promise involves an ethics of responsibility. (68)

Ukaga argues that moral conducts demand honesty so that other people's trust will not be let down. In marriage, couples are therefore expected to stick to ideal conducts because sexual immorality breeds disasters such as the one Baba Segi endures.

The denial of Bolanle a place in Baba Segi's house reveals his first three wives' deceptive scheme and this ironically brings out the truth that they have hidden for long. In Baba Segi's house, it is certain that Bolanle will not conceive without other wives'

help. This is because the deceitful wives of Bba Segi guide their secrets jealously. According to Iya Femi:

“one night when Baba Segi was busy pummeling Iya Tope, Iya Segi came to my room and told me how children were born in Baba Segi’s household. She said it as if the solution wasn’t out of choice but necessity. When she left my room, I smiled to myself. I was already pregnant”(132).

This is a terrible act that should not be found in an ideal setting but it is a way of life that some of Baba Segi’s wives embrace.

Truly, Bolanle’s character is symbolic because she brings light to the darkness that shrouds Baba Segi’s wives’ activities. This happens in a hospital setting where reason prevails over ignorance. This is captured thus:

are you saying your husband is not the biological father of your first child?
Dr Dibia asked. Eureka! ‘not my first, not my second.’ Baba Segi ducked as if someone has taken a swing at his face. ‘Woe it cannot be’ “And the other wives? What about their children? Dr Dibia asked. It might as well come out in one big gush; better than in dribs and drabs. ‘I misled them. Perhaps if I had not shown the second one my way, this shame would have

come out sooner. But you see, they were so desperate to be fruitful. They knew that my husband valued children above all things so when I saw their desperation, I took pity on them and shared my secret. They also followed the same path. (215-216)

This point of revelation deflates Baba Segi's ego. Prior to this moment, he thinks he can impregnate as many women that come his way but sadly he cannot. His deceptive wives often make mockery of him whenever he boasts about his sexual vigour. Shoneyin uses the novel to satirise wives who see adultery as a way of life. Moreover, she uses this work to condemn infidelity as a solution to impotency or infertility problems. There are alternatives or morally acceptable ways of solving infertility problems. For instance, adoption of children or IVF method would have been fine but his reckless wives opt for adultery. Baba Segi's desperate wives resort to adultery to end their barrenness. Their attitudes toward their marital distress lead them astray therefore their marriage crumbles.

CHAPTER THREE

TOLERANCE AS AN HONEST WIFE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLYGAMY

Tolerance is the ability to accommodate others under any condition. Bolanle's educational background distinguishes from the other crude wives of Baba Segi. She neither embraces adultery nor venerates the deceit lifestyle that defines other wives' unholy quest. Prior to her wedding, Bolanle does not really realise that polygamy is a dangerous and dirty endeavour. She ventures into it and this opens her to attacks from co-wives whose secrets matter more than her place as the favourite wife. She recalls her unsavory experience thus:

looking back, now that two years have passed, I realized how naïve I was to expect a warmer welcome. I was foolish to think I would just be an insignificant addition when, in reality, I was coming to take away from them. With my arrival, 2.33 night with Baba became 1.75. His affections, already thinly divided, now had to be spread amongst four instead of three.

(21)

Bolanle suffers from the highest level of exclusion when she joins the dubious wives of Baba Segi in their unruffled nest. She becomes an enemy of where she hopes to be a

partner in progress. Polygamous home is known for such intrigue which often consumes neophytes.

Bolanle's personality finds a place in Nairne's claim on human personality in relation to the components of the mind. He writes that:

Freud believes that human personality consists of three parts, the id, ego and the superego. He was convinced that each of us is born with powerful instinctual drives, particularly related to sex and aggression, which motivate and control our actions. Freud used the term *id* to represent the portion of personality that is governed by these forces (translated from Latin, *id* means "it"). As a component of personality, the *id* seeks immediate satisfaction of natural urges without concern for the morals and customs of society... the superego is the part of our personality that encourages us to act in an ideal fashion-to act in accordance with the moral customs defined by parents and culture. The superego is acquire from experience and it acts, in part, as a conscience; it makes us feel good when we act the way we should and feel guilty when our behaviour strays from acceptable standards. (389)

Education is a powerful weapon that empowers those who pursue it with sound knowledge. Such people's judgment is often considered smart and sound. Bolanle is an educated woman and her exposure is most feared by her jealous co-wives who have a vital secret to keep. They are convinced that Bolanle is capable of destroying them unless they get rid of her. According to the narrator, "the second evil thing that Iya Segi did was to banish Bolande's friends from our home. Yemisi and other friends visited the third time, Iya Segi told our husband that they were bad role models for daughters in the family" (54). Iya Segi values her secret so much that she guards it with her whole life. She sees Bolanle and her friends as threats therefore she bars them. Bolanle however continues to struggle hard against Iya Segi's overbearing might and one day, she reflects on her relationship with all the wives generally. According to her statement:

the other two are different story they have not forgiven me for the affection Baba Segi has for me. Iya Segi and Femi still shout, hiss and spit. They sweep the floor, all the time singing satirical songs to ridicule me. But it's not their fault that they are uncouth. Living with them has taught me the value of education of enough tenements. I have seen the dark side of illiteracy. 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. I have often found missing pages from novels in the dustbin, the words scribbled over with charcoal. (22)

Having identified illiteracy as the cause of Iya Segi and Iya Femi's hatred for her, Bolanle seeks to emancipate them from their web of ignorance. This is an intelligent way to go in a situation like this. She does not go to their wayward level but rather she device an acceptable way to fight their unworthy course.

Many African folktales are exemplum of life threatening polygamous home. Yetunde Olukemi Akorede argues that "many African folktales depict the breakdown of harmony among co-wives... co-wife tales depict the rivalry, sorrow and suspicion that exist in polygamous family." (80). Akorede's observation is valid because her claim is applicable to Baba Segi's wives. In other words, Iya Segi, the first wife and Iya Femi, the third wife do everything possible to frustrate the stay of Bolanle in their midst.

Bolanle knows how painful it is to be displaced so she tried to make peace with all the members of the family. She takes it upon herself to teach them how to read and write in order to help them see the light of deep wisdom and sound reasoning. She begins with the children some of whom have been poisoned by their mothers. Iya Segi allows this to happen just once and she kicks against it the next day:

I have tried to help the children too. I once told them to assemble in the dining room every evening so I could read to them. Only Iya Tope's daughters turned up the first day. The next morning, Iya Segi told me not to be in a hurry, that I should wait until I have my own children, if I am so eager to become a teacher. Such is the extent to which they conceal their yearning for knowledge. They try to throw me off by pretending their coarseness is a thing of pride but I see through the subterfuge. I will not give up on them. I will bring light to their darkness. (22)

As a logical and enlightened woman, Bolanle tries to dispel the darkness of ignorance that rules over the house of Baba Segi. This earns her more hatred but she does not yield. According to Iya Tope, "Iya Segi was wrong about the skin of educated types. The more those two poked Bolanle, the more mercy her eyes showed, the more her hands opened to the children. I have never known anyone like Bolanle before. Even after two years of their wickedness, she still greets them every morning. What more do they want?" (54). This is the style of an educated fellow. Bolanle does not allow her id to rule her actions therefore she tries to fight the cause of other wives hatred through a non-violent means.

Bolanle relies more on her ego and superego hence she does what is right at all times. According to Bressler's assertion quoted earlier, the id controls the dark side of life while the ego counters it. Iya Segi and Iya Femi's id is reckless so they find fault in every step Bolanle takes. The super ego strives to ensure that things are done accordingly especially in line with societal laws. This make Bolanle to greet her enemies even though they ignore her. She does not allow their wayward behaviour to stop her from being reasonable and refined. Bolanle does not believe in violence or crude way of asserting her place in Baba Segi's house therefore she adopted a reasonable way of dealing with her accusers. For instance, reflects on her diplomatic way of reaching onto her bitter co-wives children:

one day, they will all love me. I will buy their affection with the money Baba Segi gives me if I have to. I will bring chocolate home for the little ones. I will buy Akin a brand new satchel and get Segi one of those velvet hair band to harness that wild mane of hers. I will be a sister to her. I will tell her everything I know about the world outside so she doesn't make the mistakes I made. (23)

As part of her strategy to survive the onslaught against her, she tries to buy the emotion of her rivals' children. This is a tactic that is sure to win the children to her side and

eventually their mothers. The attractive gifts she plans to buy for the children symbolizes material affection. They are items that children love so it is most certain that Bolanle will win the children to her side by capturing their psychological wits that have been poisoned by their mothers.

The rivalry among co-wives is not something that can be easily resolved. The old wives in Baba Segi's house (apart from Iya Tope) are bent on sending Bolanle away but their scheme proves less successful. This is because Bolanle uses a civil or polite approach to relate with them. This earns her Iya Tope's admiration:

it surprise me that Bolande could still 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. Bolande wanted to play in the dark. She did not leave. 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 read (51).

Bolanle drew from her learned skills to deal with the other wives and she is able to attract one of them that she tutors intellectually. Some of Baba Segi's wives go around with the impressions that Bolanle is not as strong, dominant and aggressive and warm or

independent like them. She is and that is why she offers to educate them. Iya Tope is delighted that Bolanle offers to teach her. In her testimony she says, “The first day, I sat at the table and watched as she showed me how to write by letter ‘A’. I copied the letter out myself. Even though she said it was upside down and not quite right, my stomach was swollen with pride. Me? Writing?.” (51). This is a big blow to Mama Segi who does not want the light of Bolanle to dispel her deceitful darkness.

Non-violent approach to evil yields good result to Bolanle. To this end, Iya Tope declares to the other wives, “have we not done enough already? I don’t think I want to be part of this anymore” (55). Bolanle has proved to be intellectually sound to her co-wives therefore she is able to compel Iya Tope to submit to her life style. She does not place emotion over reason therefore Iya Tope aligns with her. This angers Iya Segi because one person has left her camp. Iya Segi uses her children to spite Bolanle because of her supposed barrenness. After her illness, Segi however draws close to Bolanle and this shocks her mother. According to Iya Segi’s account:

when I returned with his food, I found Bolande in the sitting room. She was at my daughter’s side. She touched Segi’s cheek with the top of her finger. To my surprise, Segi clutched Bolanle’s hand and drew it to her breasts. They traded words I could not hear. That was when Seyi spoke the words

that burnt my heart. 'my father,' she said, 'it would please me to recuperate in Auntie Bolanle 's room.' (203-204)

This is a major victory for Bolanle. She has won the affection of Segi whose mother is her major rival. Her non-violent tactic gives her cheap success. The fact that she does not fight violently to gain the love of Iya Tope and Segi justifies her intellectual approach in tackling unworthy hatred meted to her by her rivals. She deploys her intellect such that she does not react based on the crude way she is treated. According to Emma Goldman:

the problem that confronts us today and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities... Emancipation should make it possible for women to be human in the true sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression, all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery. (1)

Bolanle is able to achieve this intellectual attitude describe by Goldman. She does not lose focus of her person and she tries her best to over the attacks she suffers from her co-

wives' hatred. This distinguishes her so that Teacher, her husband's friend admires her personality. She proves to everyone around her that education has been able to refine her id which could have made her reckless. Her ego guides her well such that she is not carried away by her challenges. Some people readily subscribe to the mantra which says that if you cannot beat them, join them. Bolanle does not join the likes of Iya Segi and her cohorts who fill their husband's home with bastards. She is morally guided and this seen in all her conducts and relationship with others.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's* features different wives who see polygamy from personal point of views. The Yoruba society is polygamy friendly therefore men under patriarchal umbrella celebrate acquisition of wives. Unknown to Baba Segi, it is fertile men it favours because polygamy is open to adultery. His inability to get his wives pregnant pushes them to seek children wherever they can find.

His first three wives resort to extra marital affairs and this favours them by all standards. They are united in deceit and this goes on for a long time. These wives are mean therefore they see marriage as an institution for the wise. Things however fall apart the moment their husband marries an educated woman. Unlike the other wives, she is honest and dutiful therefore she leads her husband to the discovery of his first three wives' deceit.

Freud's psychoanalytical theory demonstrates that some individuals go to the extreme to satisfy their inner yawning for selfish desires. Iya Segi is desperate to retain her place in her husband's so she seeks to get children outside her home. She considers it as a response to her husband's call for children to fill his house.

Luckily for Bolanle, the last wife, her western education becomes a lamp before her feet. She prefers a science based solution and this drives her to hospital where it is proves useful to the understanding of Baba Segi. Apart from being honest, Bolanle relates with her co-wives with an informed mind. She treats them as queens but they treat her as a cast out. This is because her presence brings them close to their doom. Irony is employed here to show contrast in expectation. Again, the narrator uses contrast to juxtapose the desperate wives and the one noble that is Bolanle. In the end, it is evident that each wife's character and personality trait goes a long way in determining what becomes of their once rosy matrimonial nest.

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