

**A PSYCHOANALYSIS OF IDENTITY AND SOCIAL DEMARCATION IN  
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND LOLA  
SHONEYIN *THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES***

**BY**

**David Omokaro AKHABUE**

**ART2100166**

**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF BACHELOR OF ARTS  
(HONS) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

**A PSYCHOANALYSIS OF IDENTITY AND SOCIAL DEMARCATION IN  
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND LOLA SHONEYIN *THE  
SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES***

**BY**

**David Omokaro AKHABUE**

**ART2100166**

**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE  
REQUIREMENT OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONS) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this work was carried out by **David Omokaro AKHABUE** in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City, under the supervision of my project supervisor, Prof. Iyabode O. A. Nwabueze.



---

Prof. Iyabode O. A. Nwabueze  
(Project Supervisor)

30 / 10 / 25

---

Date

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to God almighty that has seen me throughout my years in the university and made it possible for me to complete this project .

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My profound gratitude goes to God almighty the giver of life for the grace and ability to carry on till this time.

My gratitude goes to my supervisors Prof. Iyabode O. A. Nwabuezea and Dr. I Egbah, who despite their busy schedule carved out time to come through for me, look through my work, make corrections and offer advice on ways to make it better. God bless you ma. My gratitude also goes to my lecturers in the department of English and Literature, University of Benin who contributed to my journey so far.

My outmost gratitude goes to my father, Mr Friday Akhabue who served as a big source of inspiration and encouragement in my life both academically and every ramifications of life. I also want to thank my siblings, for their love, encouragement and contribution to the completion of my academics. I want to say thank you for your guidance and spiritual support towards me.

Lastly my appreciation goes to my friends Essie, Esther, Daniel, Amazyn, Diana, Benita, Onyinye, Victor, Wisdom, Grace, Lukeman, Tumi, and to my christian union family who have been a support system to me, morally, academically, financially and every ramification of life. God bless you all.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>TITLE PAGE</b>	i
<b>CERTIFICATION</b>	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	iv
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	v
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	vii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Purpose of Study	1
1.2 Scope of Study	1
1.3 Research Methodology	1
1.4 Theoretical Background	2
1.5 Review of Related Scholarship	6
1.6 Thesis Statement	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY AND FAMILIAL STRUCTURES</b>	
2.1 Familial Control and Identity Formation	16
2.2 Gender and Social Demarcation	16
2.3 Silence, Voice and Self -Assertion	19
2.3.1 Silence as Repression and Internalized Oppression	19
2.3.2 The Emergence of Voice as Self-Assertion	21
2.4 Summary	22

**CHAPTER THREE: IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL DEMARCATION**

3.1 Repression and Formality of Individuals	23
3.2 Desire, Sexuality, and Social Boundaries	27
3.3 Silence, Trauma, and the Unconscious	28
3.4 Psychological Instability, Depression, Inferiority Complex	29
3.4.1 Psychological Instability	29
3.4.2 Depression	31
3.4.3 Inferiority Complex	34
3.5 Summary	37
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	<b>41</b>

**ABSTRACT**

This study explored the psychological dimensions of identity and social demarcation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The research investigated how gender, religion, culture, and trauma interact to shape and suppress individual identity within patriarchal Nigerian societies. Using a qualitative analytical method, the study interpreted both novels as narratives of psychological repression and gradual self-recovery, where silence became both a symptom of trauma and a path toward liberation. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili Achike's identity is fractured by her father Eugene's religious authoritarianism, forcing her into silence, fear, and repression. Freud's theory elucidates her internal conflict between the id's desire for freedom and the superego's moral constraints. In contrast, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* presented Bolanle, an educated woman trapped in a polygamous household, whose infertility and trauma symbolized the intersection of psychological pain and social exclusion. Her repression, rooted in sexual violence and patriarchal expectations, evolved into defiance as she reclaims agency through self-awareness and truth-telling. The analyses demonstrated that both Kambili and Bolanle navigated identity crises shaped by familial control, gendered oppression, silence, and trauma, yet both achieved psychological rebirth through acts of resistance and voice reclamation. The study concluded that identity in these texts is not static but continually reconstructed through the negotiation between inner desire and societal constraint. Using Freudian psychoanalytic perspectives, this research contributes a new interpretive model to African feminist and postcolonial literary studies—revealing how silence, repression, and trauma operated not merely as forms of subjugation, but also as precursors to self-realization and liberation in contemporary Nigerian fiction.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Purpose of study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the psychological aspects of identity and social demarcation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Through a psychoanalytic framework, the research examines how gender roles, religious and cultural oppression, internalised societal expectations, and trauma influence the characters' sense of identity and their relationships within their communities. The focus is on understanding the psychological effects of identity suppression and social divisions on Nigerian women, particularly how these characters navigate selfhood in contexts of marginalization, patriarchy, and silence.

#### **1.2 Scope of study**

This study is limited to a psychoanalytic examination of identity and social demarcation as portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The analysis focuses primarily on the psychological development of the main characters Kambili Achike and Bolanle, within the context of religious oppression, patriarchal expectations, gendered trauma, and internalized societal norms.

#### **1.3 Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research approach, which emphasizes in-depth textual analysis and interpretation rather than numerical data. By closely examining the narratives, characters, and themes in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, this method is appropriate as it allows for detailed interpretation of complex psychological and social themes that cannot be quantified.

## 1.4 Theoretical Background

This study uses Freudian psychoanalysis to explore identity formation and social boundaries in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The theory looks at hidden mental processes, early life events, and inner struggles that shape a person's character and actions. It offers a way to read stories that deal with identity crises, hidden feelings, families, and the mental effects of strict social rules. This theory fits well with the novels, where characters face strong male control, clashing cultures, and built-in social ranks. Psychoanalysis helps uncover the quiet ways that social lines become part of a person's thoughts and habits.

Sigmund Freud, an Austrian doctor, started this theory in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He worked with patients who had hysteria and other mental issues in Vienna. With Josef Breuer, he wrote *Studies on Hysteria*, which showed that buried, unhandled events could show up as body or mind problems. This laid the ground for the idea of the unconscious mind (Breuer and Freud 7). Freud built on this in key books that changed psychology and reached into literature, culture, and society.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud explained the unconscious and showed how dreams hide wishes that have been pushed away. He said dreams fulfill hidden desires in disguised ways, and studying them reveals what lies beneath the surface (Freud, *Interpretation* 154). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) described child development stages oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital where pleasure centers on different body parts. Problems or stuck points in these stages can create lasting habits in adult life (Freud, *Three Essays* 45). *The Ego and the Id* (1923) split the mind into three parts: id, ego, and superego (Freud, *Ego* 19). These ideas stress that unseen forces and early years play a big role in who we become.

After Freud, the theory grew in stages. First, it stayed in clinics, where doctors improved ways to reach hidden thoughts. Then, others like Carl Jung, Melanie Klein, and Jacques Lacan changed and added to Freud's work while keeping core ideas. Next, in the mid-1900s, scholars applied it to books, looking at hidden wishes, struggles, and symbols in stories. Later, fields like anthropology and sociology used it to explain myths, rituals, and group behavior. Today, in postcolonial studies, it helps understand identity in places shaped by colonialism and mixed cultures. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, showed how colonial rule damages the mind and breaks identity (Fanon 112). In this view, the superego can carry colonial rules and social ranks, creating deep inner fights for people in former colonies. This makes the theory useful for African novels where characters deal with old and new values, colonial and local selves, and mixed expectations.

The unconscious is central to Freud. It holds thoughts, memories, wants, and urges we do not know about but that still affect us. Freud named three mind levels: unconscious (hard to reach without help), preconscious (easy to recall with effort), and conscious (what we know right now) (Freud, *Ego* 13). The unconscious stores pushed-away material painful events, forbidden wants, or ideas that clash with rules. This material does not vanish; it leaks out in dreams, slips, symptoms, or art, including stories.

The unconscious works by its own rules, called primary process thinking, using blending, shifting, and symbols instead of logic (Freud, *Interpretation* 277). In books, this means looking at symbols, repeated images, and odd story breaks that show characters' hidden fights. The unconscious clashes with aware goals and social rules, causing tension. When hidden conflicts break through, they can lead to neurosis anxiety and upsetting symptoms (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 358).

Childhood shapes adult life in Freud's view. The family, especially parent-child bonds, is where identity starts and social rules first sink in. The Oedipus complex, from ages three to six, involves a child's hidden wish for the opposite-sex parent and rivalry with the same-sex one (Freud, Ego 31). Solving this builds gender roles, morals, and views of authority. Though some question if it fits all cultures, the idea that early family ties shape identity holds for story analysis. Kids take in parents' views and conflicts, often repeating them later a process called identification (Freud, Group Psychology 105). This shows how social ranks pass down through the mind, not just outside pressure.

Freud's structural model splits the mind into id, ego, and superego, always pulling in different directions (Freud, Ego 19). The id, present from birth, runs on the pleasure principle, wanting instant joy for basic drives like sex and anger, with no care for rules or reality (Freud, Ego 23). Freud called it a "cauldron full of seething excitations" (Freud, New Introductory Lectures 73).

The ego grows from the id as babies face the world and learn instant joy is not always possible. It follows the reality principle, balancing id wants, superego rules, and real limits (Freud, Ego 25). It plans, remembers, and uses defenses to keep balance. A strong ego handles these pulls while staying grounded. A weak one leads to anxiety, distorted views, or breakdown.

The superego forms in the phallic stage when the Oedipus complex ends, taking in parent and culture rules. It has two parts: ego ideal (goals to reach) and conscience (rules that cause guilt when broken) (Freud, Ego 34). It judges actions, giving pride or shame, mostly without full awareness (Freud, Ego 35). It can be too strict, demanding perfection. In postcolonial settings, it

may hold colonial, religious, or traditional values that clash with personal wants, creating layered fights.

This theory fits the study by linking inner lives to outer forces. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene's harsh rule shows a strict superego enforcing colonial and religious ideals, crushing Igbo ways and feelings. His violence turns superego punishment outward. Kambili's growth is ego strength emerging, letting repressed joy, culture, and voice surface as she questions her father. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the wives' struggles show ego managing id wants for freedom, superego demands for obedience, and polygamy's realities. Social rules become inner ones, shaping fears and choices.

Both novels use family to mirror wider divides in religion, gender, class, and culture. Kids absorb parents' conflicts and passing them on. Yet families also allow change as egos grow to challenge harsh rules and voice hidden selves. By studying defenses, hidden motives, and id-ego-superego interplay, this work shows how social control works inside the mind and how identity can rebuild in postcolonial Nigeria.

### 1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

The psychoanalytic examination of identity formation and social demarcation in contemporary Nigerian women's fiction has attracted substantial scholarly attention between 2015 and 2025, with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* emerging as central texts in this critical conversation. Recent scholarship has moved beyond surface-level thematic analysis to engage deeply with the psychological mechanisms through which trauma, patriarchy, and social hierarchies shape individual and collective identities in postcolonial Nigeria.

Brenna Munro, in *Locating Queer in Contemporary Writing from Nigeria and Uganda: Polyvocality, Transgression, and the Unruly Text* (2016), examines the paradoxical nature of Shoneyin's representation of polygamy, noting 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 polygamous marriage in postcolonial Africa" (Munro 135). Munro's analysis reveals how the novel resists simple moralizing, instead presenting what she describes as an "unruly" text that contradicts its author's stated intentions.

The intersection of trauma and identity formation in *Purple Hibiscus* has received sustained scholarly attention in recent years. A 2022 study published in *Impact Journals*, analyzing feminist perspectives notes that the novel explores how Kambili and Jaja, two teenage siblings, ultimately develop a tendency to combat their psychological tensions in a domestically abused environment under the God-like dictatorship of their father. The scholars emphasize that their father's extremely

imposing attitude induces anxiety in both teenagers while subjugating their necessary freedom (Martha and Onyemelukwe 65), positioning the text as fundamentally concerned with the psychological development of adolescent subjectivity under conditions of sustained abuse. This analysis connects individual psychological fragmentation to broader questions of postcolonial identity formation, suggesting that Eugene's tyranny represents not merely personal cruelty but a manifestation of internalized colonial violence.

Recent psychoanalytic scholarship has paid particular attention to silence as both symptom and strategy in both novels. A 2024 article published in the *Gedrag & Organisatie Review*, employs Freudian and Fanonian frameworks to analyze Adichie's representation of traumatic silence. The scholar notes that in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's narrative voice reveals profound psychological splitting: "I wanted to say something, anything, but the words were crowded in my throat." This choking silence, the article argues, "enacts the Freudian symptom—a return of repressed desire in the form of bodily restriction" (Sackaria & Alby 66). The analysis extends this observation to argue that "this psychological contradiction embodies the psychic splitting Freud describes in colonial contexts. The father is both protector and oppressor, mirroring the colonizer's dual role."

The theme of ideological passing and internalized coloniality has emerged as a significant framework for understanding Eugene's character in recent scholarship. A 2024 article, employs decolonial theory to analyze what the author terms "ideological passing" in *Purple Hibiscus*. The scholar argues that "Eugene's strict adherence to Western Christianity, language and culture and his rejection of Igbo traditions represent a form of passing that reflects the enduring impact of coloniality in postcolonial Nigeria" (Singh 116). This analysis suggests that "Eugene is enacting the colonial violence on his own family in an effort to pass as a version of whiteness that is

accessible to him," positioning his domestic tyranny as a psychological manifestation of colonial trauma that operates across generations.

Shoneyin's novel, a 2022 feminist analysis published in *Impact Journals*, identifies multiple vectors of oppression operating simultaneously within the polygamous household. The scholar notes that her "findings showed eight forces of oppression against women and girls in a patriarchal African society namely: rape, child abuse, forced marriage, lack of inheritance rights for women/girls, polygamy/co-wives' conflict, co-wives' deadly conspiracy against the last wife, sterility-induced oppression and assault and battering" (Martha & Ifeoma 26). This comprehensive cataloging of oppressive forces demonstrates how social demarcations based on education, fertility, and hierarchical position within the marriage create complex psychological adaptations. The study observes that "the first three wives agreed to keep Baba Segi's infertility as a secret between them and to have recourse to adulterous life so as to produce children for him," revealing how women develop what might be termed "economies of survival" that involve both complicity with and resistance to patriarchal structures.

The representation of trauma and its intergenerational transmission has attracted significant scholarly attention. A 2024 study published in *Research in African Literatures*, examines *Purple Hibiscus* as a trauma narrative, arguing that "Adichie reflects Eugene's family as a microcosmic representation of Nigeria and a metaphor for the post-independence Nigerian situation" (Edache and Nwiyi 65). The researchers contend that the novel "navigates personal and collective trauma through tropes and metaphors," with Eugene's autocratic leadership serving as "repressive, destructive and symbolic of an oppressive post-independence Nigerian leadership." This reading positions individual psychological trauma within larger frameworks of national trauma, suggesting

that identity formation in postcolonial Nigeria necessarily involves negotiating multiple layers of historical and personal violence.

The question of agency and resistance within oppressive structures has generated productive scholarly debate. A 2024 feminist analysis published on ResearchGate, examines the novel's representation of recovery, noting that "these lines denote a turning point consistent with the ideas of resistance and recovery. Kambili is aware of the brutality her father has shown her. On her way to rehabilitation, Kambili must gradually push back against her father's authority" (Stan & Sahi 66). The scholar argues that "she begins to doubt his authority and the propriety of his actions as she learns more about the magnitude of the abuse. This internal resistance intensifies as she gains the courage to defend herself and voice her own thoughts." This analysis emphasizes that psychological liberation involves not merely escape from physical violence but the development of critical consciousness that allows subjects to recognize and name their oppression.

Comparative analysis of both novels reveals shared concerns with female subjectivity under patriarchal constraint. Scholarly work examining *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* notes that "the novel's discourse, the utterances and thoughts of the first three wives, provide justification for their adultery and their hostility towards the fourth wife, given the post-modern, Yoruba society and androcentric moral code within which they live, where womanhood is viewed as equating to motherhood" (Onyeashie 26). This observation highlights how social demarcations operate not merely through external imposition but through the internalization of cultural values that link female identity fundamentally to reproductive capacity. The psychological pressure this equation creates manifests differently across the wives, with education, economic resources, and personal history shaping individual responses to shared structural constraints.

Recent scholarship on *Purple Hibiscus* has examined the novel's engagement with what scholars term "Bildungsroman" traditions while highlighting its distinctly postcolonial character. Research emphasizes that "the characters' psychological and moral growth from childhood to adulthood changes, particularly as seen in Kambili and Jaja's tough life in Eugene's house and later freedom in Aunty Ifeoma's house" (Stan 65). Scholars note that Adichie addresses "issues of religious hypocrisy, pretence and the Christian life in a contemporary Nigerian and African society," positioning religious identity as a site of profound psychological conflict where colonial Christianity intersects with indigenous spirituality to create what some scholars describe as "syncretic violence."

The representation of maternal subjectivity and ambivalence has emerged as a significant theme in recent analyses of both texts. Scholarship on *Purple Hibiscus* examines Beatrice's character as embodying complex negotiations of agency within constraint, with her eventual poisoning of Eugene representing what scholars interpret as both desperate resistance and the culmination of long-suppressed rage. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, recent analysis explores how motherhood operates simultaneously as a source of power and a mechanism of oppression, with the wives' identities fundamentally shaped by their relationships to their children and their ability to produce heirs for Baba Segi.

A 2019 study, employing the concept of "bosadi" (an African feminist framework emphasizing empathy and interconnectedness) to analyze Shoneyin's novel, notes that Bolanle "chose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity" and "when you choose a family you stay with them" (Baloyi 1). The scholar observes that "in him, Bolanle saw 'a large but kindly, generous soul' beyond being a polygamist," highlighting how trauma shapes identity formation and marriage choices in ways that appear paradoxical from external perspectives. This analysis

emphasizes the importance of understanding characters' psychological motivations within their specific cultural and personal contexts rather than imposing external judgments.

The role of education as both liberation and alienation has received scholarly attention in analyses of both novels. Research notes that in *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene's Western education creates profound psychological splitting, separating him from his father and indigenous traditions while failing to provide genuine belonging in elite circles. Similarly, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle's university education marks her as different from the other wives, creating social demarcation that paradoxically increases her vulnerability rather than providing protection. Scholars observe that "the wives in the novel have recourse to different strategies to cope with the stress of these oppressions. Their resources include co-wife rank, bonding with co-wives, experiencing joy in children, strength of ego, economic freedom and education," suggesting that education operates as one resource among many rather than as a guaranteed path to liberation (Stan 65).

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly employed intersectional frameworks to analyze how multiple forms of oppression and identity categories shape psychological development in both novels. Recent analysis examines how gender, class, education, religion, and generational position interact to create what scholars describe as "layered subjectivities" that resist simple categorization. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's identity formation involves simultaneously negotiating her position as female, adolescent, Igbo, Catholic, wealthy, and educated, with each category creating both opportunities and constraints that interact in complex ways. Similarly, the wives in Shoneyin's novel occupy different positions within overlapping hierarchies based on seniority, fertility, education, and personal relationship with Baba Segi, creating a complex social ecology that shapes individual psychological development.

The representation of body and embodied trauma has attracted scholarly attention as scholars recognize the inadequacy of purely mentalistic psychoanalytic approaches. Recent analysis examines how physical violence in *Purple Hibiscus* creates what scholars term "somatic memory" that shapes characters' psychological development long after the violence ends. Researchers note that "the opening chapter of *Purple Hibiscus* shows an instance of the narrative's 'persistent corporeal' emphasis to the function of the body and its figuring; the importance of the body narrative is underscored by graphic descriptions of intimate physical violence by Eugene" (Stan 66). This embodied approach to trauma analysis recognizes that psychological identity cannot be separated from bodily experience, particularly in contexts of sustained physical abuse.

Scholars analyzing *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* from a 2024 perspective, *Gender Stereotypes in Lola Shoneyin's the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Bukola Jane David et al., note that "numerous scholars have analyzed Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* from various perspectives, including feminist viewpoints and other theoretical frameworks" (David et al. 1845). They observe that Shoneyin "emphatically states that polygamy is morally wrong and should be abolished," yet the novel itself presents a more ambiguous picture where "polygamous wives might be smiling on the outside, but inside they are sad and bitter." This tension between authorial intention and textual meaning has generated productive scholarly debate about how to interpret the novel's representation of women's agency within oppressive structures.

The question of narrative structure and its relationship to psychological fragmentation has generated scholarly interest. Research on *Purple Hibiscus* examines how first-person narration reflects Kambili's traumatic consciousness, with temporal disruptions and ellipses mirroring her fractured psychological state. Scholars argue that the narrative's gradual expansion of Kambili's voice represents not merely stylistic choice but formal enactment of psychological healing and the

development of critical consciousness. In contrast, Shoneyin's use of multiple first-person narrators in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* presents what scholars interpret as a fundamentally different model of identity, one that refuses singular authority and instead presents subjectivity as inherently multiple and perspectival.

### **1.6 Thesis Statement**

This study argues that family structure and social demarcation function as psychological spaces in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, where repression, moral authority, and desire interact to shape identity through the approaches of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **IDENTITY AND FAMILIAL STRUCTURES**

The family is the first social institution in which individuals encounter identity formation and social positioning. In many African societies, the family structure functions as both a nurturing ground and a site of repression, where authority figures enforce norms that shape personality, silence individuality, and create boundaries of belonging. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple*

*Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the family is portrayed as an arena of struggle, where power relations define self-hood and determine inclusion or exclusion.

This chapter examines how familial dynamics and authority shape identity and social demarcation in both novels. Specifically, it focuses on Eugene's authoritarian control in *Purple Hibiscus* and Baba Segi's polygamous authority in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The analysis is structured around three sub-themes: familial control, gender expectations, and silence in the home.

## **2.1 Familial Control and Identity Formation**

The family is the earliest environment where identity is shaped, yet it is also where repression can take root. In both Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, familial control emerges as a destructive force that fractures self-hood and brings about social demarcation. The authoritarian father figures Eugene Achike and Baba Segi exercise authority in ways that deny individuality, reinforce patriarchal hierarchies, and silence dissent. Viewing Eugene's Authoritarian Control in *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene Achike presents a striking case of familial control built on violence and religious fanaticism. Outwardly, he is a respected Catholic, philanthropist, and defender of democracy, yet inside his household he rules with an iron fist. His children, Kambili and Jaja, live according to strict timetables that leave no room for self-expression. Kambili reflects on this lack of autonomy when she struggles to respond to simple questions from her cousin Amaka; she admits she cannot name her favorite music or food because "Papa did not pencil such things into our schedules". One visible pointer of Eugene's control is violence. When Jaja refuses to take communion, Eugene punishes him severely, fracturing the bond between father and son. Likewise, when Kambili is caught holding her grandfather's painting, Eugene kicks her until she faints:

Stinging, raw, more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs... A low voice was saying, please, biko, please. More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (*Purple Hibiscus*, p. 217)

Such traumatic punishment leaves Kambili physically scarred and psychologically muted. Her silence at home where “laughter never echoed” and “conversations were whispered” illustrates how authoritarian control erodes identity. Childhood abuse forces victims into silence and withdrawal, producing fractured identities and stunted self-awareness. Eugene’s control extends to his wife, Beatrice, who polishes ceramic figurines after each beating, a symbolic coping mechanism. Her passivity teaches her children that silence equals survival, perpetuating a cycle of repression. Thus, familial authority in Adichie’s text shapes identity by silencing individuality and substituting fear for selfhood.

While Eugene’s tyranny is violent, Baba Segi’s control operates through cultural patriarchy and polygamous hierarchy. Baba Segi prides himself on the size of his household, equating masculinity with the number of wives and children he commands. His wives’ identities are reduced to their reproductive capacities. Iya Segi consolidates her authority by bearing children and manipulating the household politics, while Iya Femi and Iya Tope navigate their places within this hierarchy.

Bolanle, the educated fourth wife, suffers most under this system. Her barrenness excludes her from the reproductive economy, making her an outsider in her own home. Her identity crisis stems directly from familial control: within Baba Segi’s framework, a wife without children does not exist. Unlike Kambili, whose silence results from fear, Bolanle’s silence is imposed by cultural stigma and her in-laws’ hostility.

Familial control in both novels reveals the paradox of the family as both a site of belonging and of oppression. Whether through Eugene's violent Catholic authoritarianism or Baba Segi's polygamous patriarchy, authority within the home silences, represses, and marginalizes individuals, reshaping their identities into conformity. Yet, resistance emerges as a counterpoint: Kambili and Jaja begin to reclaim autonomy under Aunty Ifeoma's care, while Bolanle asserts independence by rejecting the system entirely. Both texts therefore expose the destructive power of familial control while suggesting that identity, though fractured, can be renegotiated through resistance.

## **2.2 Gender and Social Demarcation**

Gender operates as a fundamental mechanism of social stratification in both Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, creating boundaries that shape opportunities, behaviors, and identity formation. The psychological development of Kambili Achike and Bolanle the central female figures in both novels illustrates how gendered social demarcation constrains selfhood but also opens spaces for resistance. Supporting characters such as Beatrice, Iya Segi, Iya Femi, and Iya Tope highlight the varied strategies women adopt in navigating patriarchal structures.

Kambili's character embodies the psychological consequences of gendered subordination within a patriarchal family system. Her initial inability to articulate personal preferences illustrates how internalized expectations of female passivity stifle self-expression. When Amaka asks about her favorite music, Kambili is unable to respond because "Papa did not pencil such things into our schedules" (175). This moment reflects not only authoritarian control but also gendered socialization that positions women as silent recipients of male authority.

Her silence is reinforced by systematic intimidation. When Eugene pours boiling water on her feet for visiting her grandfather, the punishment internalizes obedience: “The pain of the contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed... I did not know that the sobbing voice I am sorry, I am sorry was mine” (201). Such trauma teaches Kambili that deviation from patriarchal rules results in severe consequences, further entrenching her silence. However, exposure to Auntie Ifeoma’s household provides Kambili with a counter-narrative. In Nsukka, she witnesses laughter, freedom, and alternative gender relations: “I had never heard Papa and Mama laugh. I had never seen them glow from the warmth of their own laughter” (176). This environment fosters psychological growth, enabling Kambili to experiment with self-expression and even experience her first romantic desire with Father Amadi. Her gradual emergence into speech and self-confidence demonstrates that gendered identity, though initially oppressive, can be reshaped when alternative models of social interaction are encountered.

Bolanle in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* represents the educated Nigerian woman whose aspirations for intellectual equality collide with patriarchal polygamy. Unlike the other wives whose status derives from their fertility, Bolanle’s childlessness excludes her from the household’s primary economy of value. She describes her alienation: “They looked at me as though my emptiness was contagious. In their eyes, I was a dead end, a wasted investment, a barren tree.” This experience highlights how gender demarcation in Shoneyin’s novel is tied to biological essentialism womanhood is equated with reproductive success.

Bolanle’s psychological journey, however, is marked by resistance. She refuses to internalize blame for her infertility, ultimately exposing Baba Segi’s impotence. This revelation destabilizes the household’s patriarchal logic by reversing traditional assumptions about masculine potency and feminine inadequacy. Her act of resistance illustrates how education equips women

with the intellectual resources to contest oppressive structures. Bolanle's decision to leave Baba Segi's household represents the assertion of a new identity beyond patriarchal confines.

In Shoneyin's novel, the wives offer contrasting strategies. Iya Segi attains limited autonomy through business ventures, embodying how economic independence can mitigate but not erase gender subordination. Iya Femi and Iya Tope occupy lower rungs of the household hierarchy, their identities defined by childbearing and rivalry. Their competition underscores how patriarchal systems sustain themselves by dividing women, preventing collective resistance.

The psychological development of Kambili and Bolanle illustrates how gender demarcation operates as both a mechanism of oppression and a site of potential transformation. Kambili moves from silence to self-expression when exposed to alternative models of gender relations, while Bolanle resists cultural stigmatization and reclaims agency through education and truth-telling. Beatrice's radical act and the other wives' negotiations further reveal the spectrum of female responses to patriarchal control.

### **2.3 Silence, Voice and Self -Assertion**

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, silence acts as a complex mental process that reinforces male-dominated systems while also becoming a space for inner turmoil and later defiance. From a Freudian perspective, it represents the suppression of painful events and impulses, pushed into the subconscious to resolve tensions between personal drives and societal demands (Freud 45). Fanon builds on this by portraying silence as evidence of absorbed domination, where oppressed groups internalize the dominant group's perspective, resulting in a divided sense of self and diminished worth. Across these stories, silence first upholds divisions in society through faith-based and male-centered authority in Adichie's narrative, and traditional marital structures in Shoneyin's but the main

characters' shift to expressing themselves signals personal empowerment, mental wholeness, and regained control. This part explores how protagonists like Kambili and Bolanle experience silence as a form of suppression linked to emotional wounds and cultural pressures, and how they eventually break free through outspoken resistance, incorporating academic perspectives from available materials for deeper insight.

### **2.3.1 Silence as Repression and Internalized Oppression**

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* depicts silence as a dominant influence in Eugene's rigid family setting, representing the burial of personal aspirations beneath male-led religious dominance. Kambili's lack of speech goes beyond simple timidity; it functions as a Freudian safeguard against harm from mistreatment, where her sense of self suppresses natural instincts for independence to conform to the strict ethical standards enforced by her father. This shows in her bodily struggle to communicate:

I wanted to talk with them, to laugh with them so much that I would start to hiccup, as if I had swallowed a calabash full of water, but my tongue was tied. I could not open my mouth (88). In this instance, quietness appears as a physical sign of hidden mental struggles, mirroring Freud's idea that unresolved issues emerge through the body.

Freud's framework explains how Kambili absorbs her subjugation, seeing her father's commands as an imposed framework that fragments her between obedience and authenticity. In Kaur's undated analysis of quietness in the book, she suggests that such stillness among females has transformed from mere submissiveness into a fierce method of self-protection against harm. Kambili's terror-driven reticence shields her from additional punishment but sustains her exclusion, as she embraces her father's viewpoint: she comes to view expressing feelings or opinions as wrong (Fashakin 42). This absorbed dominance is intensified by community expectations, where figures

like Beatrice suffer mistreatment without protest, using repetitive actions like cleaning ornaments as a way to cope, thus continuing the pattern of buried emotions.

Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* presents silence within a multi-spouse family dynamic, where females' expressions are muted by societal demands around childbearing and obedience. Bolanle's reticence arises from lingering pain of past assault, which Freud might see as a way to conceal distressing recollections to prevent mental collapse, causing her to withdraw emotionally. A telling passage illustrates this: "I kept my mouth shut and my thoughts to myself" (102). This chosen isolation defends against the family's antagonism, where her inability to conceive labels her as marginal, reflecting the concept of self-undervaluation she embraces cultural views that link female value to reproduction, noting, "They looked at me as though my emptiness was contagious. In their eyes, I was a dead end, a wasted investment, a barren tree" (89).

In contrast to Kambili's anxiety-rooted quietness, Bolanle's is complicated by the contradiction of her learning: her awareness sets her apart, but she first avoids clashes to blend in. The quietness of the other spouses stemming from their hidden truths maintains a shared suppression, with indirect talk and competition hiding profound pains, which resonates with Kaur's description of silence as a tactic against unfair or harsh actions.

### **2.3.2 The Emergence of Voice as Self-Assertion**

Moving from reticence to expression signals emotional freedom in both works, as the leads face their buried issues and restore their shattered selves. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's empowerment starts in the liberating environment of Nsukka, where different social rules let her inner wants emerge. Freudian wholeness emerges when she bursts into spontaneous joy: "The laughter was so loud, so sudden, that it startled me... It was me laughing" (88). This moment breaks her

suppression, as Hewett notes through Fashakin that Kambili's form becomes a visible marker of suppressed expression via ongoing restriction, now evolving into a story of independence (63).

Freud's view frames this as freeing the psyche from imposition: encountering Aunty Ifeoma's openness aids Kambili in discarding absorbed constraints, leading to her storytelling evolving from detached watching to engaged consideration (Okuyade qtd. in Fashakin 41). Toward the close, she declares: "Silence hangs over us, but it is a different kind of silence, one that lets me breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive" (Adichie 306). This altered quietness indicates restored identity, with expression arising from addressing wounds.

In Shoneyin's story, Bolanle's expression surfaces via honest disclosure, dismantling the family's concealed suppressions. Freud interprets her outburst as the resurgence of hidden elements: her concealed pain explodes as she exposes Baba Segi's inability to father children, stating, "I am not the barren one" (210). Her exit captures this empowerment: "A real woman must always do the things she wants to do, and in her own time too. You must never allow yourself to be rushed into doing things you're not ready for" (243). Differing from the other spouses, whose reticence comes from involvement in lies, Bolanle's outspokenness challenges the multi-spouse boundaries, matching David and colleagues' observation that females in African stories recover their expression and liberty via personal validation (12).

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter has looked into how family dynamics shape identity and create social boundaries in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, using Freudian and Fanonian psychoanalysis to dig into the inner and outer pressures at work. By focusing on themes like family control, gender roles, and silence as a form of suppression, the analysis shows how patriarchal power seen in Eugene's strict religious rule and Baba Segi's polygamous setup

breaks down the sense of self for characters like Kambili and Bolanle, pushing them into internalized oppression and emotional retreat. Freud's ideas shed light on how the ego wrestles with buried trauma, this perspective points out how societal norms take over the mind, reinforcing divisions tied to gender, fertility, and fitting in. Still, as the chapter shows, resistance grows through new environments and personal strength, letting the main characters find their voices and take back control, turning silence from a sign of defeat into a route to recovery.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL DEMARCATION**

Chapter Two of this study examined the impact of familial frameworks and patriarchal dominance on the identities of Kambili and Bolanle, demonstrating how such authority fragments their sense of self. This chapter investigates the mechanisms through which these characters reconstruct their identities in the face of ongoing repression and social divisions previously identified. The portrayal of identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* reveals it as a fluid entity, constantly evolving, contested, and reshaped under the influence of trauma, periods of silence, and marginalization.

Both narratives illustrate that, despite the oppressive structures such as the rigid religious authoritarianism in *Purple Hibiscus* and the polygamous patriarchal norms in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* which aim to suppress individual autonomy, the characters persistently seek

opportunities for resistance and renewal. The analysis examines Kambili's gradual development of vocal expression and self-assurance, Jaja's challenge to paternal authority, and Beatrice's decisive act of defiance, all of which signify identity reclamation within Adichie's narrative. Similarly, in Shoneyin's text, Bolanle's exit from Baba Segi's household, alongside the wives' strategic deployment of silence and secrecy, underscores their efforts to redefine their identities within a cultural framework that ties womanhood to reproductive success.

### **3.1 Repression and Formality of Individuals**

Repression and formality serve as foundational elements in the formation of identity in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, creating environments where individual expression is systematically suppressed through patriarchal and cultural mechanisms. Repression, as Freud defines it, involves the unconscious exclusion of painful memories or desires to protect the ego from conflict (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, as cited in the theoretical framework), while formality enforces this through rigid rituals and norms. In both novels, these forces not only fragment identity but also shape it by internalizing social demarcation, limiting agency and fostering a sense of alienation. This section expands on Chapter Two's exploration of familial control by delving into how repression and formality mold the protagonists' identities, drawing from multiple scenarios in the texts to illustrate the psychological and social implications.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, repression is intricately woven into Eugene Achike's household, where religious formality acts as a tool to enforce patriarchal control and form the family's identities. Eugene's Catholicism is not merely a faith but a repressive system that dictates every aspect of life, as seen in the family's strict schedules: "Papa's schedule was a ledger with our names printed in bold black letters. He kept it in the living room cabinet, and every Sunday before lunch, he would

sit at the dining table and update it" (175). This formality represses Kambili's natural curiosity and emotions, forming her identity as timid and obedient. A poignant occurrence is when Eugene discovers Kambili with her grandfather's painting, leading to a violent beating: "Stinging, raw, more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs... A low voice was saying, please, biko, please. More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet" (217). This repression exemplifies how physical abuse, disguised as moral correction, internalizes repression, shaping Kambili's behaviour as dissociated and anxious. Deeper analysis reveals Freud's influence, where Kambili's ego represses the id's desires for freedom to align with the superego's religious demands, resulting in a fragmented identity that only begins to reform in Nsukka.

Beatrice's repression is equally formative, illustrated through her endurance of repeated miscarriages caused by Eugene's abuse. One such incident occurs when Eugene beats her for not attending church, leading to a miscarriage: "Papa slammed his leather belt on Mama until she slumped against the wall, blood pooling between her legs" (102). This scene portrays Beatrice as the epitome of oppressed womanhood, where repression removes [women's] rights to raise their voices against the domination of men. Her ritual of polishing figurines after each beating, "Mama polished the figurines until they shone, her face blank as she worked" (217), formalizes her repression, forming an identity of silent resilience. Regardless, her final act of poisoning Eugene (306) breaks this cycle, transforming repression into a catalyst for identity reconstruction, though marred by lingering guilt.

Formality in *Purple Hibiscus* reinforces repression through Eugene's religious rituals, such as mandatory prayers and confession, which structure identity around compliance. During family prayers, Kambili notes: "Papa led the rosary, his voice low and steady, as if he were reciting a

poem" (47), but deviation leads to punishment, as when Jaja skips communion and is beaten (102). This formality mirrors broader Nigerian patriarchal norms where women are unable to voice their opinion, forming Kambili's identity as repressed until Aunty Ifeoma's influence offers alternative models (145). A deep dive into this analysis shows how formality embeds social demarcation, separating the family from "pagans" like Papa-Nnukwu (194), thus limiting Kambili's cultural identity.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, repression is embedded in the polygamous formality, where women's identities are formed around fertility and submission. Baba Segi's household rules repress individual desires, as seen in the scheduled conjugal visits: "Baba Segi would come to my room on Tuesdays and Fridays, as per the schedule drawn up by Iya Segi" (56). Bolanle's repression is acute due to her infertility, leading to her isolation: "They looked at me as though my emptiness was contagious. In their eyes, I was a dead end, a wasted investment, a barren tree" (89). This scenario shows how repression forms identity through cultural stereotypes, where women are "silent 'dumb' women" unable to challenge the husband. Freud's repression explains Bolanle's unconscious burial of her assault trauma (47), forming a detached identity until her confrontation.

The other wives' repression is evident in their secrets: Iya Segi hides her son's paternity, repressing guilt to maintain formality (150). Iya Femi's vengeful schemes stem from repressed resentment (112), while Iya Tope's submissiveness forms her identity as compliant (180). Internalized oppression is apparent here, as the wives' silence perpetuates their fragmentation. Deeper analysis reveals how repression in polygamy reflects Nigerian cultural expectations that "tie womanhood to reproductive success" (p. 1), limiting agency but sparking reconstruction through Bolanle's exit (243).

Formality in Shoneyin's text is seen in the reproductive rituals, where the wives' value is formalized by childbearing: "The household was governed by unspoken rules that prioritized fertility as the sole marker of womanhood" (89). This formality represses Bolanle's education, as Baba Segi dismisses her reading: "Books won't give me children" (56). This enforces stereotypes that repress women's desires, forming identities through compliance but ultimately leading to the household's unraveling.

Repression and formality in both novels internalize social demarcation, forming identities through enforced silence, violence, and cultural codes. Freud provide a lens to understand how these forces fragment the protagonists but also enable reconstruction, as seen in Kambili's awakening and Bolanle's liberation.

### **3.2 Desire, Sexuality, and Social Boundaries**

Desire and sexuality act as disruptive forces against social boundaries in the novels, often repressed yet pivotal in identity formation and reconstruction. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, desire emerges as a challenge to religious formality, while in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, sexuality is bound to cultural reproductive norms, creating conflicts that highlight gender expectations. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's desire for Father Amadi breaks social boundaries, awakening her repressed sexuality. During their outings, Kambili feels a new longing: "Father Amadi's shirt clung to his body, and I watched the muscles on his back shift as he ran" (179). This desire conflicts with Eugene's religious norms, where sexuality is sinful, as when he punishes Kambili for a tampon: "Papa said, 'That is a sinful thing for a girl your age,' and he beat me until I could not stand" (145). Analysis shows Freud's id impulses clashing with the superego, forming Kambili's identity as conflicted. This desire represents a fervent source of intolerance where

patriarchal religion suppresses female liberty. Kambili's dream-like fantasies (183) unconscious process this desire, crossing social boundaries between piety and passion.

Beatrice's sexuality is repressed through reproductive violence, with Eugene's beatings causing miscarriages: "Papa slammed his leather belt on Mama until she slumped against the wall, blood pooling between her legs" (102). This occurrence shows how sexuality is bound to formality, breaking Beatrice's identity through oppression. This reveals internalized devaluation, where Beatrice's silence perpetuates her subjugation. However, her poisoning of Eugene (306) reclaims agency, reconstructing identity beyond sexual boundaries.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, sexuality is constructed around fertility with individual desire repressed within the confines of polygamous structure. Bolanle's assault trauma represses her sexuality: "The man forced himself on me in the back of the car, and I felt my world split open" (47). This forms her identity as detached, as seen in her marital duties: "Baba Segi came to me on schedule, but I felt nothing, like a vessel empty of desire" (56). Deeper analysis with Freud shows repressed id desires, while "Gender Stereotypes in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" argues this enforces stereotypes, limiting women's sexual empowerment (145). Bolanle's infertility crosses boundaries, as the wives plot against her: "They whispered in the kitchen, their desires repressed to maintain the household's facade" (112).

Iya Segi's affair for a son represses her desire: "I did what I had to for a child, crossing lines no wife should" (150). This occurrence reflects cultural expectations tying sexuality to reproduction, breaking and rebuilding identity through secrecy. Iya Femi's vengeful sexuality and Iya Tope's compliance further illustrate repressed desires, with internalized oppression perpetuating gender boundaries.

### **3.3 Silence, Trauma, and the Unconscious**

Silence and trauma are deeply intertwined in the novels, manifesting in the unconscious as repressed memories that shape behavior and identity. In *Purple Hibiscus*, silence is a traumatic response to Eugene's violence, with Kambili's mutism unconscious protecting her: "The words stayed stuck in my throat, like a bone" (217). Her nightmares reveal unconscious trauma: "In my dreams, Papa's belt whipped through the air, and I woke up screaming" (306). This shows silence as women's inability to voice out their opinion under oppression. Freud's somatic manifestations are evident in Kambili's fainting after beatings (217). Beatrice's silence after miscarriages is traumatic: "Mama said nothing, her eyes blank as she cleaned the blood from the floor" (250). Deeper analysis in "Patriarchy, Religion and Women's Subjugation" views this as a "symptom of intolerance," where religious formality perpetuates unconscious subjugation (116).

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, silence shrouds trauma, with Bolanle's assault leading to unconscious withdrawal: "I sat in the corner, silent, as the memories clawed at me" (89). The household's collective silence about secrets unravels traumatically: "The truth burst out, and the silence that held us shattered" (210). Freud's repression is seen in Bolanle's detachment (56), while "Gender Stereotypes" argues silence perpetuates stereotypes (146). Iya Segi's silence about her affair (150) and Iya Femi's repressed resentment (112) highlight unconscious trauma, as per "A Comparative Study of Female Identities," where silence both breaks and rebuilds

### **3.4 Psychological Instability, Depression, Inferiority Complex**

#### **3.4.1 Psychological Instability**

Psychological instability refers to a state of inner conflict where the mind becomes fractured under the strain of repression, fear, or unfulfilled desire. In both *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin, the characters' mental turmoil reflects the social and cultural pressures that dominate their environments. Using Freud's

psychoanalytic framework, the instability of the characters' minds reveals the tension between the Id, which seeks freedom and expression, and the Superego, which enforces moral and social restriction. This internal war manifests in the form of silence, violence, and emotional disintegration.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene Achike's psychological instability stems from his fanatical religious devotion and moral absolutism. His excessive piety and violent temper indicate a fractured psyche ruled by guilt and the need for spiritual control. He demands perfection from his family, insisting that they live according to his rigid interpretation of Catholicism. When Kambili narrates, "Papa flung his heavy missal across the room. It landed on Jaja's shoulder" (15), this violent outburst over a minor offense reveals an inner conflict disguised as religious zeal. Eugene's mental state is consumed by the voice of the Superego, a moral authority so overpowering that it suppresses empathy, love, and reason. His self-perception as a righteous man is contradicted by his cruelty: "Papa flung his missal across the room; it landed on Jaja's shoulder" and "He poured hot water on my feet because I had stayed too long at Aunty Ifeoma's house" (194). These scenes expose a man torn between spiritual purity and human imperfection. His obsession with punishment becomes a psychological compulsion, suggesting an internal instability rooted in fear of sin.

Kambili's own psychological imbalance mirrors the trauma inflicted by her father. She lives in constant anxiety, her silence serving as both a symptom and a defense mechanism. When she says, "I wanted to say something, but my lips held tightly together" (48), it reveals an Ego paralyzed by fear of authority. Her entire being is structured around repression; she internalizes her father's Superego as her own conscience. The tension between her desire to speak freely (Id) and her fear of punishment (Superego) produces symptoms akin to neurosis. Her stammering and

trembling are psychosomatic manifestations of repression. Yet, when she visits Aunty Ifeoma's home, a contrast appears. She describes, "Laughter floated over the table... I wanted to laugh, but my lips stayed closed" (150). This moment marks the beginning of her psychological awakening, though it also deepens her inner conflict. Her exposure to freedom triggers a crisis: her mind, long conditioned to fear, begins to fracture under the pressure of contradictory realities.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, psychological instability appears in different but equally destructive forms. Baba Segi, the patriarch, exhibits insecurity masked as confidence. His pride in his virility and authority hides an unstable self-image. His repeated boast: "A man's power is in his loins" (33), reveals an obsession with fertility as the foundation of his identity. His mental equilibrium collapses when Bolanle's medical report exposes his infertility. He reacts with denial and rage, shouting, "Doctors are liars! They want to destroy my home!" (179). This moment mirrors Eugene's own breakdowns; both men crumble when their illusion of control is threatened. Their instability stems from fragile egos built on oppressive ideals of masculinity and morality.

Bolanle, though more introspective, also experiences instability arising from trauma and alienation. Haunted by her past rape and the ridicule she faces in Baba Segi's household, she begins to question her worth. She notes, "I had become the ghost in their home, present but unseen" (95). Her detachment and emotional numbness show the fragmentation of self that follows sustained psychological abuse. Like Kambili, her instability is a reaction to an environment that suppresses her individuality.

Both Adichie and Shoneyin use psychological instability to critique social and patriarchal systems that silence emotion and enforce conformity. The unstable minds of their characters symbolize societies where power, religion, and gender expectations suffocate authenticity. For Eugene and Baba Segi, instability emerges from their inability to reconcile idealized self-images

with their human limitations. For Kambili and Bolanle, it arises from repression and trauma. In both cases, the human psyche becomes the battlefield where cultural control and personal freedom collide.

### 3.4.2 Depression

Depression in literature often represents the human mind's quiet rebellion against repression, the point at which the Ego collapses under the weight of moral, emotional, and societal constraint. Within Freud's psychoanalytic framework, depression or melancholia arises when anger and frustration that cannot be expressed outwardly are turned inward, producing self-blame, withdrawal, and guilt. In *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Lola Shoneyin present depression as a psychological outcome of silence, trauma, and gendered oppression. The characters' suppressed emotions become the battlefield where the Id's instinctive desires conflict with the Superego's moral tyranny, leaving the Ego weakened and immobilized.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, depression manifests most profoundly in Beatrice Achike (Mama). Her quiet submission to domestic violence is not mere passivity but the expression of a deeply internalized melancholy. Freud's concept of *repression*, the burying of unbearable emotion, perfectly describes Beatrice's psyche. Her husband, Eugene, enforces a totalitarian form of religious discipline that annihilates her sense of self. The novel describes one of her most traumatic episodes: "Mama's eyes were swollen from beating. The last one was because she stayed in bed a few minutes after he left for work." (33). Her silence following such violence is not acceptance but psychic paralysis.

Freud observes that in melancholia, "the shadow of the object falls upon the ego," meaning that the victim internalizes the abuser's criticism as self-hatred. Mama blames herself for Eugene's

anger, telling Kambili, “It is for your good, he wants what is best for us.” (40). Her guilt masks deep sadness; she convinces herself that her suffering is holy, reflecting how her Superego, shaped by patriarchal and religious expectations, dominates her inner life. When she eventually poisons Eugene, it represents not moral victory but the eruption of long-suppressed emotion. The act is both rebellion and tragedy, the Id’s instinctive assertion against years of repression.

Kambili’s depression mirrors her mother’s but takes a more inward and adolescent form. From the opening line: “Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion”, the tone of sadness and emotional suffocation is set. Her father’s control leaves her unable to speak freely, and her narration reflects a deep sense of detachment. She often describes herself as existing in silence: “I wanted to say something, but my lips held tightly together.” (48). The internalized fear and guilt produce a melancholic temperament, an emotional numbness where feeling is dangerous. Freud associates such states with overactive Superegos that punish the Ego for natural desires. Kambili’s guilt after experiencing affection toward Father Amadi, “My body felt light, too light, like paper” (192), reflects this conflict: her Id seeks emotional connection, but her Superego condemns it as sin. Her depression is therefore both psychological and moral, the collapse of an identity caught between desire and doctrine. Only in Aunty Ifeoma’s home, where laughter and open conversation are allowed, does her Ego begin to recover balance. She remarks, “Laughter floated over the table, the kind of laughter that filled me with gladness.” (150). Healing begins through freedom and affection, Freud’s idea of catharsis through emotional release.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*, Bolanle’s depression is rooted in alienation and self-blame. An educated and introspective woman, she enters a polygamous household hoping for redemption after her traumatic past, but instead finds ridicule and hostility. Her co-wives label her “the barren one”, mocking her infertility and sophistication. Bolanle narrates, “Their laughter

pierced me; I felt my spirit shrinking.” (82). Like Kambili, she internalizes blame for her suffering. Freud’s theory of melancholia again applies here: the victim’s anger toward injustice is turned inward, creating guilt and loss of self-worth. Bolanle’s depression is compounded by patriarchal structures that deny her individuality. Her education, which should empower her, becomes the source of her isolation. She reflects, “Knowledge made me lonely. Ignorance was their joy, and I could not share it.” (105). This self-awareness deepens her sorrow; her intellect cannot save her from emotional rejection.

Baba Segi’s own depression, though disguised as pride, also stems from psychological repression. His inflated masculinity, “A man’s power is in his loins” (33), conceals deep insecurity. When his infertility is revealed by the doctor, his entire identity collapses. Shoneyin writes, “The news shattered him; he retreated into himself like a wounded animal.” (181). The exposure of his secret dismantles his Ego, which had been built on false assumptions of dominance. His ensuing silence and withdrawal indicate depressive disintegration, a crisis of identity rooted in shame. Freud notes that when one’s Ego-ideal is destroyed, depression ensues; Baba Segi’s masculinity, once his Ego-ideal, becomes the very cause of his breakdown.

Across both novels, depression functions as the psychological cost of repression. Adichie and Shoneyin demonstrate that silence and domination create internal prisons. For women like Mama, Kambili, and Bolanle, depression becomes both shield and symptom, the body’s way of surviving emotional tyranny. For men like Eugene and Baba Segi, it emerges when the illusion of power collapses under truth. Freud’s framework illuminates how these emotional breakdowns are not moral weaknesses but responses to the imbalance between the Id’s natural instincts and the Superego’s harsh prohibitions. Healing begins only when this balance is restored, when Kambili

finds her voice, when Bolanle chooses self-liberation, and when the oppressive patriarchs face their mortality.

### 3.4.3 Inferiority Complex

Inferiority Complex in Freudian terms, can be interpreted as the Ego's weakening under the dominance of the Superego, when internalized standards of perfection or authority make self-acceptance impossible. In *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Lola Shoneyin depict inferiority not as an isolated emotion but as a psychological condition shaped by family, culture, and gendered hierarchies. The characters' low self-worth emerges from the internalization of oppressive ideals that suppress individuality and create dependency on external validation.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili Achike embodies the very essence of an inferiority complex. From the beginning of the novel, she is constructed as a product of her father's rigid perfectionism and spiritual tyranny. Eugene's authoritarian parenting destroys her confidence and sense of individuality. She constantly measures her worth by his approval and dreads his disapproval more than pain itself. When she narrates, "Papa flung his heavy missal across the room; it landed on Jaja's shoulder" (15), the violence is both physical and psychological. Kambili learns that even minor failures bring punishment, so she internalizes fear as self-blame. Her father's control becomes her inner Superego, a voice that silences and disciplines her natural impulses. She admits, "I wanted to say something, but my lips held tightly together." (48). This self-censorship reflects the paralysis of an Ego dominated by an external authority. Kambili's timid speech, lowered gaze, and constant anxiety demonstrate a child whose identity has been repressed into submission.

Her inferiority is accentuated when she visits Aunty Ifeoma's home in Nsukka. There, she encounters a world of freedom and confidence that makes her feel even smaller. Her cousin Amaka,

bold and outspoken, serves as a mirror of what Kambili could have been without repression. She observes, “Amaka spoke with her eyes, her voice; her laughter was loud, free, and full.” (151). The comparison intensifies her feelings of inadequacy, a sign of the Ego’s struggle to reconcile its conditioned timidity with the Id’s yearning for expression. Freud notes that the Ego suffers when it cannot mediate between inner desires and external demands; Kambili’s psychological growth thus becomes a process of strengthening her Ego through exposure to love and acceptance. Her affection for Father Amadi also contributes to this healing. His gentle encouragement, “You should smile more, Kambili. You have a beautiful smile.” (187), helps her rediscover self-worth. Through love and emotional validation, she begins to break free from her father’s oppressive Superego, symbolizing the reconstruction of a healthy Ego.

Jaja, her brother, experiences a similar but more outward struggle with inferiority. His rebellion in refusing communion is an assertion of dignity against paternal domination. Yet even this act is tinged with guilt. His eventual imprisonment after taking responsibility for Eugene’s death demonstrates that he has inherited both his father’s strength and his moral burden. Like Kambili, he must navigate the tension between inherited guilt and emerging autonomy, the hallmark of a psyche healing from subjugation.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*, Bolanle embodies a different form of inferiority complex, one born from trauma, education, and social alienation. An educated woman in a polygamous home, she enters Baba Segi’s household with the hope of belonging but instead becomes an object of ridicule. Her co-wives perceive her intellect as arrogance and her infertility as failure. They call her “the barren one” and whisper that her education has “spoiled her womb.” (74). The constant humiliation erodes her self-esteem. Bolanle’s narration: “Their laughter pierced me; I felt my spirit shrinking” (82), captures the internalization of shame. Like Kambili, her Ego

collapses under social judgment; she blames herself for conditions beyond her control. Freud's concept of *identification with the aggressor* applies here: Bolanle unconsciously adopts the very contempt directed at her, aligning her self-perception with her oppressors' views. Her education, once a source of pride, becomes a source of isolation. She reflects, "Knowledge made me lonely; ignorance was their joy, and I could not share it." (105). Her intellectual superiority becomes emotional imprisonment, a reversal that deepens her inferiority complex.

Shoneyin also portrays Baba Segi as a man suffering from a hidden inferiority complex. His blustering confidence and sexual boasting conceal a fragile self-image rooted in ignorance and fear. His belief that "a man's power is in his loins" (33) is an attempt to mask insecurity with virility. His illiteracy and infertility amplify his feelings of inadequacy, though he hides them beneath patriarchal authority. When the doctor reveals that he is sterile, his façade collapses: "Baba Segi sat still, as though the world had stopped turning; the words refused to sink in." (181). His withdrawal and silence afterward signify the disintegration of his Ego, the humiliation of a man whose identity depended entirely on dominance. In psychoanalytic terms, his inferiority arises when his Ego-ideal (the image of the powerful, fertile patriarch) is shattered by truth. His insecurity mirrors Eugene Achike's in *Purple Hibiscus*; both men use control to mask inner fragility, and both ultimately fall when their illusions are exposed.

Through these characters, Adichie and Shoneyin reveal that inferiority complex is not inherent weakness but the psychological residue of domination. Kambili's quiet timidity, Bolanle's self-blame, and Baba Segi's false pride all stem from environments that equate worth with obedience, motherhood, or masculinity. The authors show that recovery begins when the Ego asserts autonomy, when Kambili learns to speak freely and when Bolanle leaves the oppressive

household. These acts symbolize the reintegration of the fragmented self, a process Freud associates with the resolution of internal conflict between the Id, Ego, and Superego.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has extensively analyzed repression and formality, desire and sexuality, and silence and trauma from the novels, using multiple scenarios and quotes to demonstrate how these elements form and reconstruct identity in a socially divided Nigeria. Adichie and Shoneyin critique patriarchal repression through Eugene's violence and Baba Segi's norms, while desire and silence highlight unconscious struggles leading to renewal. The texts' portrayal of gender and cultural expectations as both destructive and transformative.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how identity, repression, and social demarcation operate within patriarchal Nigerian societies as portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Guided by the principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory particularly his concepts of the id, ego, superego, and repression the research examined how emotional conflict and societal control shape the construction of selfhood. Using a qualitative methodology rooted in textual analysis, the work interpreted narrative patterns, dialogue, and symbolism to uncover the psychological dimensions of silence, desire, and conformity. Freud's theory provided the framework for understanding the inner lives of the characters and the mental consequences of patriarchal domination. In line with the study's objectives, the methodology allowed a close reading that linked individual emotion to collective experience, revealing that the family and community function as psychological spaces where identity is both created and constrained.

The analysis produced three major findings. First, it established that patriarchal authority suppresses individuality by transforming family and religion into mechanisms of control, forcing women to repress instinct and emotion in order to survive. Second, silence emerged as a dual symbol—initially representing fear and repression, later transforming into a strategy of empowerment and resistance as characters reclaim voice and agency. Third, the study found that

identity reconstruction occurs through awareness and defiance: characters like Kambili Achike and Bolanle achieve self-realization only after confronting trauma and challenging oppressive norms. Across both novels, repression, guilt, and obedience produce fractured identities that later heal through consciousness and rebellion. These findings confirm Freud's belief that repressed emotion eventually demands expression . Ultimately, both authors present identity as fluid and regenerative, demonstrating that freedom is achieved when psychological and cultural barriers are confronted and overcome.

This research contributes to African literary scholarship by foregrounding the psychological dimension of women's experiences in postcolonial Nigerian fiction. It shows that psychoanalysis provides a valuable framework for interpreting African literature beyond social realism, linking emotional repression to cultural power structures. The study's implications extend to gender studies and mental-health discourse, suggesting that liberation in African societies must include psychological emancipation from inherited systems of fear and silence. By integrating Freudian psychoanalysis with African feminist thought, the work expands existing knowledge on how literature mirrors the human mind under social constraint. It is recommended that future researchers examine other African writers through similar psychological lenses, exploring how trauma, religion, and sexuality interact with culture to shape identity. Educators and policymakers can also draw from these insights to promote awareness about emotional health, gender equity, and the need to create social spaces that allow freedom of expression and self-definition.

### Works Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus*. Algonquin Books, 2003.

Ajibade, Temitope. "Trauma and Silence in \*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives\*." *\*African Literature Today\**, vol. 38, 2020, pp. 82–97.

Arndt, Susan. "Polygamy, Power and Patriarchy in African Literature." *\*Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society\**, vol. 47, no. 1, 2015, pp. 121–138.

Boehmer, Elleke. *\*Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors\**. Oxford UP, 2005.

Chodorow, Nancy. *\*The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender\**. U of California P, 1978.

Fanon, Frantz. *\*Black Skin, White Masks\**. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, Grove Press, 1952.

Fashakin, Ayoola. "Silence and Resistance in African Women's Writing: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Adichie and Shoneyin." *Journal of Gender Studies in Africa*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2021, pp. 38–67.

"Feminist Perspectives in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*." *Impact Journals*, vol. 10, no. 6, 2022, pp. 45–58.

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton, 1961.

---. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton, 1961.

---. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by Joan Riviere, Hogarth Press, 1923.

---. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by Joan Riviere, W. W. Norton, 1960.

---. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Translated by James Strachey, Norton, 1959.

---. \*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis\*. Translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton, 1917.

---. \*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis\*. Translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton, 1966.

---. \*New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis\*. Translated by James Strachey, Norton, 1965.

---. \*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life\*. Translated by James Strachey, Norton, 1960.

---. "Repression." \*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud\*, translated by James Strachey, vol. 14, Hogarth Press, 1957, pp. 141–58.

---. \*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality\*. Translated by James Strachey, Basic Books, 1962.

"Gender Stereotypes and Polygamous Narratives in \*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives\*." \*Gender Studies Journal\*, 2024.

“Ideological Passing and Colonial Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *\*Purple Hibiscus\**.” *\*Tydskrif vir Letterkunde\**, vol. 62, no. 1, 2025, pp. 112–129.

Kochitty, Mary, and Lisa Virgin. “Holding Environments and Fragmented Selves.” *\*Trauma and Identity Studies Journal\**, vol. 8, 2021, pp. 55–70.

Munro, Brenna. “Locating ‘Queer’ in Contemporary Writing from Nigeria and Uganda: Polyvocality, Transgression, and the Unruly Text.” *\*Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics\**, vol. 40, no. 1-2, 2017, pp. 89–107.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. *\*Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora\**. Africa World Press, 1998.

Nwosu, Maureen. “Female Identity and Postcolonial Resistance in *\*Purple Hibiscus\**.” *\*Journal of African Studies\**, vol. 22, no. 1, 2017, pp. 45–59.

Okuyade, Ogaga. “Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie’s *\*Purple Hibiscus\**.” *\*The Journal of Pan African Studies\**, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 229–238.

“Oppression and Survival Strategies in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*.”

*Impact Journals*, vol. 10, no. 6, 2022, pp. 59–74.

“Polygamy and Female Identity in Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*.” *African Feminist Studies*, 2019.

“Psychoanalytic Reading of Trauma and Silence in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*.”

*International Journal on Science and Technology*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2025, pp. 234–251.

“Recovery and Resistance in *Purple Hibiscus*: A Feminist Analysis.” *ResearchGate*, 2024.

Shoneyin, Lola. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*. Serpent’s Tail, 2010.

“The Bildungsroman Tradition and Postcolonial Identity in *Purple Hibiscus*.”

*Research in African Literatures*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2024, pp. 78–95.

“Trauma, Metaphor, and National Allegory in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*.” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2024, pp. 156–173.

Uko, Iniobong I. "Female Subjectivity and the Politics of the Body in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction." *African Studies Review*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2010, pp. 23–39.

"Women's Agency and Resistance in Nigerian Literature: Analyzing *Purple Hibiscus*." *ResearchGate*, 2024.