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Effect of Patriarchy In Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives Of Baba Segi's Wives*

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Abstract

Patriarchy is a phenomenon that poses to shape the mind of people consciously or unconsciously. It has also defined how women are seen in the society, how they are perceived in the society, and how they intend to reshape the society to better their lot as depicted in Lola Shoneyin's The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives. Existing scholars' engagements on patriarchy and women's experiences have focused on the devastating nature and effect of patriarchy in the attempt to free women from the shackles of patriarchy. This study, therefore examines the effect of patriarchy on female members of the society with specific reference to the female revolts and agitation for the eradication of patriarchy. This is done to make the society more habitable and comfortable for women. The study adopts Feminism as the theoretical framework, the essence of feminism is to allow for the investigation of the ignominious practices and experiences of patriarchy in the primary text and it is also to undergird the analysis of the study. A novel that is categorically feministic in its thematic inclination is purposively selected: Lola Shoneyin's The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives. The novel is subjected to critical textual analysis in form and content. This study discovers that women have suffered psychologically and physically because of the dictates of patriarchy in their society. It is also discovered that the women are traumatized in the bid to secure their marriages as patriarchy condemns and stigmatizes women that opt out of marriage. However, it is significantly discovered that these piteous plights of women can be changed, they may decide to choose the type of marriage they want and they can as well quit from marriages that are unpalatable to them. Prominently, it is revealed in this study that women should arise and fight for their rights to be recognized in the comity of enlightened members of the society. The novelist proffered various options to the women on how to liberate themselves from the claws of patriarchy in marriages; this work provides different categories of men depending on the choice of the women not depending on the choice of men. The study also admonished women from seeing divorce as stigmatizing. The study concludes that women must be ready to acquire sound education and lucrative vocation and skills that will promote their existence in their various geographical locations.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Women, Revolts, Liberation, Society.

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Introduction

Patriarchy can be described as a social organization that promotes the supremacy of the father in a society, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of lineage and inheritance in the male line. The term has been defined as a system of male authority that oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions. Feminists have argued that in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes, whether it is feudal, capitalist, or socialist, a sex-gender system and a system of economic discrimination operate simultaneously. It is observed in the literature that the establishment and practice of male dominance over women and children, is a historic process formed by men and women, with the patriarchal family serving as a basic unit of organization. A Patriarch is considered the head of the household and within the family, he controls productive resources, labor force, and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority and legitimized by differences in gender and generation. (Asiyanbola, 2005)

Allanna quotes Okpe who submits that patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religious, cultural, industrial, and [1]financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men. Thus, any system that operates an order that accords men an undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal. (Allanna 2013)[23] Nixon quotes Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998 and states that, patriarchy is defined and recreated by feminists, in their quest to understand and analyze the origins and situation of the domination of women by men. As such it has been used by feminists to redefine patriarchy as "the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination" (Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998).[4]

This position of women in society to men and the subordination, oppression, and marginalization of women has attracted the attention of scholars, activists, feminists, and development workers for a very long time. The issues relating to what is also known as gender inequality have become very prominent in the last few decades. Ferrriera (2004) describes patriarchy as a system that is both oppressive and discriminatory.

Discourse on current research

Disha2018 in her paper 'The depiction of subjugation based on race and gender in *Joys of Motherhood* emphasizes that black women experience various forms of oppression simultaneously, as a complex interaction of race, gender, and class. Racism and patriarchy are not two separate institutions that intersect

[1]Abidemi, Asiyanbola, A"Patriarchy, male dominance, the Role and women empowerment in
Nigeria. " International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, Volume 25,2005,2.
[2]Allanana Makama, "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward", European Scientific Journal, 2013," Volume 9.
[3]Disha, Mondal, "The Depiction of Subjugation Based on race and Gender in *Joys of Motherhood*", Research Journal of English,2018, Volume 3, 53

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only in the lives of black women. They are interrelated, mutually supporting systems of domination and their relationship is essential to understanding the subordination of all women. This confirms that women are not only subjugated only on a gender basis. She further adds that in many African communities, gender and racial conflicts are crucial issues to address. The woman is given a second-class position whereas the man plays the role of the master and the bread earner.

In male-dominated societies, men are ranked at the top followed by women and children to make the pyramid complete. Individuals rank on top and share the same traits which their male descent biologically and socially inherit. This status is associated with a role giving the total right to men to subjugate others. This kind of rule is named patriarchy which is simply defined as the rule of men in society. It, therefore, provides some stereotypes which imply oppression of the subjects considered as being inferior. (Koumagnon, 2018)[5]

In addition, Najeeb states that Women in most societies are usually subjugated and unequally treated. They are described as imperfect and impure in several contexts. All these utter abuses and maltreatments are due to wrong, and often false, perception and interpretations of religious beliefs. Religion has been exploited to serve patriarchal purposes for showing male superiority over females. (Najeeb, 2018)[6]

Most societies in the modern day are patriarchal, where men are more likely than women to hold positions of social, economic, and political power. Therefore, it is tempting to assume that this is a natural phenomenon, perhaps because men are stronger than women. (Anil, Kate .2018) [7]Just like the Chimpanzee family, in human societies: in places where women move to live with their husband's family, men tend to have more power and privilege. He then describes a patriarchal system as a social system where men are in authority over women in all aspects of society, the idea of patriarchy is not as practiced as it once was decades ago.

He describes further that patriarchy includes male dominance, this is a situation whereby the male members of the society make all decisions in both the society and in the family unit, hold all positions of power and authority, and are considered superior. Patriarchy again has to do with male identification; this is concerned with qualities of control, strength, forcefulness, rationality, strong work ethic, and competitiveness. All these contribute to what the male gender is known for in a patriarchal system.

Gender Discrimination and Feminism in Nigeria

Oso in his article 'Patriarchy in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*' quotes Ogunyemi (1988)as he describes

[5]Najeeb Washal, "The Representation of Gender Violence in Chimamamda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus", International Journal of English and Literature in Humanities, Volume 6,2018,115-144.

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Nigerian literature, and by extension, African literature as: 'phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns naturally aimed at predominantly at the male audience.'(Oso. 2005)[8]

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender, but customary and religious laws continue to restrict women's rights, as Nigeria is a federal republic, each state has the authority to draft its own legislation. However, any law which is contradictory to Federal Law or the Constitution can be challenged in a Federal Court and cannot subsist. The combination of the federation and a tripartite system of civil, customary, and religious law makes it very difficult to harmonize legislation and remove discriminatory measures.

Moreover, certain states in the North follow Islamic (Sharia) law, although not exclusively, and only in instances where Muslims make use of Islamic courts. Adherence to Islamic law reinforces customs that are unfavorable to women, including those relating to freedom of movement, marriage and inheritance. As of 2006, the Abolition of all forms of discrimination against Women in Nigeria and Other Related Matters Bill was under consideration; it is unclear whether this has been promulgated into law. Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of discrimination against women in 1985. Many of our societies, despite great leaps and strides of the global community which have rightly buried such conceptions of the second-fiddle place of the woman, have not succeeded in rising from this perception. They still see women from the prism of the commodity of use.

Today, there are still societies that see a woman as subservient to men, in mental and biological capacity, this is why despite glaring monumental achievements of women around the globe and the phenomenal rise of the role women play in the world, gender sensitivity or perception of women having mental equality to man has remained unappreciated (Abara, 2012). Abara concludes that despite social, religious and cultural inhibitions on the way of women's ability to flourish alongside her male counterpart, the woman had since the Beijing conference of 1995 rising to a position of reckoning in global affairs. The 1995 Beijing conference redrew the map of women's participation in the affairs of their different communities. However, it noted that in Nigeria today, there is now a great leap from the perception of the place of the woman, which was very low some decades back.

Through the exclusion of women in decision-making roles in our national life, we lose and waste a vast human resource that if well garnered could help situate Nigeria and Africa properly and beneficially in world global systems. The exemplary contributions of one of the Nigerian illustrious daughters, former Managing Director of World Bank and Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economic Team of Nigeria, Dr. Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, among others are positive lights in the tunnel that sooner than later, Nigeria is looking

[8]Oso Olushola. (2018). "Patriarchy in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood and Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come", Department of English. Mountain Top University,volume 1,1-2.

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in the direction of implementing national and international human rights provisions and laws aimed at eliminating all forms of gender discrimination.(Abara, 2012)

Patriarchy and Society

Obasooto (2019) quoted by Sefinatu describes patriarchy as a system that is both oppressive and discriminatory. A patriarchal society is, therefore, one which strengthens the "masculine-feminine dichotomy" by favoring and perpetuating male domination; and as such, in all areas of society, structures are manipulated to maintain and foster this domination of women by men. In such a system, men are regarded as the authority within the areas of the father to son, and descent is reckoned in the male line. (Obasooto, 2014)[9] Fatma (2017) in 'The Women Issue in Flora Nwapa's *Women are Different* showcases Ayodele as the only man in the novel, who takes responsibility for his family and he is the role model for the other men to learn their ideal masculine roles. Unfortunately, he does not live long and everything is left on Agnes' shoulders again. She rents a two-bedroom flat in Yaba and begins to teach Mathematics and English Language in a school. Within a year, she joins the civil service at Enugu and is appointed as the "Woman Education Officer in the Ministry of Education". As time goes by, enterprising Agnes becomes wealthy and this is expressed in the following sentence:

> "Agnes now had a car which of course went with the job. She had to get a driver for a short while before she learned to drive. Another privilege was being invited to cocktail parties given by ministers" (Nwapa 1992: 64). [10]

Agnes learns how to drive a car, which is supposed to be a man's job. Thus, Agnes breaks the patriarchal rules and becomes an independent woman in postcolonial Nigeria. (Tobalase, 2016) Thiney and Priyanka in 'Masculinity versus Femininity': An Analysis of Woman at Point Zero explains that issues of suppression of women, female self-alienation, and struggle between masculinity, femininity, and regaining of Saadawi depicts the oppression of women through the leading protagonist Firdaus and her struggle in out shadowing the masculine domination. Saadawi presents a women's life which is by events outside of her control leading the character to be aware of her deplorable plight and trying to rise above her experiences into a way of knowing herself and the world. Feminism is a vivid element in Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. The novel presents a patriarchal society. The title of the novel, *Woman at Point Zero* speaks volumes about the abysmal state of the woman. Nawal El shows how men exert their power and control over women asserting their supremacy. The protagonist Firdaus is a voiceless soul caught in a whirlpool of violence and abuse. Her life is darkened from her infancy to the life of adulthood as she is the victim of male atrocities. Her dejected life whirls

[9]Obasooto Daniel, "Sexism between the Male and the Female Gender: An Exposition of Sexism Between The Male and Female Gender: An Exposition of Who The Oppressor Is", Journal of Mathematical Sciences(University of Tokyo), Volume18, 1&2,189-209
[10]Kalpakli Fatma, "The Women Issue In Flora Nwapa'sWomen Are Different", Selcuk Universitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitusun Dergisi, Volume 37, 2017,188-194

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her around and abandons her at the face value of point zero pronouncing her state of insignificance amid a male-dominated world.

The men bringing the downfall of women can be seen through their assertion of supremacy and viewing women as inferior objects to be abused for sexual pleasure. It is evident through the exploitation of Firdaus by her uncle, her husband, and other men whom she encountered. The women are expected to remain in a state of servitude. The destructive effect of embracing masculinity can be seen in the inhuman character of the father who had lost sight of being caring and compassionate in his veneration for his absolute manhood. He was completely devoid of human compassion placing him on a pedestal and asserting his sense of supremacy expecting obedience. The narration of the washing of her father's leg by her lifeless mother and Firdaus being taught by her father to wash his leg reveals the utmost display of supremacy of males over women. The preference for the male child over the female child is highlighted through Firdaus's father who was indifferent to the death of a female child but violent when the male child died venting out his anger by beating her mother. (Thiney and Priyanka, 2018)[11]

The Writer: Lola Shoneyin

Lola Shoneyin is a reputable Nigerian poet and novelist who had her breakthrough locally and internationally into the Literary world with her debut novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* She won the Pen award in America as well as the Ken Saro-Wiwa Award for prose in Nigeria. She was also on the long list for the Orange Prize in the UK for her debut novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* in 2010. Her intention for writing the novel was to look at how perceptions are changing as Nigerians and as Africans. According to her, the most important thing about writing the novel for her was, "the humanity, how a family deals with really serious, life-shattering challenges". Shoneyin had been inspired by impacting and building self-identity. One of her successful projects, Ake Arts and Book Festival, was inspired by the need to have African creative dialogue and engage the African audience, and the urgent need to provide a viable platform for this to happen. From her debut novel which discusses polygamy in Nigeria to her work with the festival, to Book Buzz Foundation, and most recently Ouidah Books, Shoneyin is a woman who is set in defining the standards for literacy in Nigeria. Her ventures are all aimed at improving critical thinking, the formation of informed opinions, and starting discourse.

Synopsis of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

The novel opens with Bolanle's childlessness, the fourth wife of Ishola Alao (aka Baba Segi), and goes on to give an expose of the character Baba Segi and his traditional beliefs. Bolanle, in the course of the novel, is abused by her senior wives. Their aim of frustrating her is for her to leave their husband's house since she had become his favorite since her marriage to Baba Segi. The three

[11]Thiney, W.Priyanka S., "Masculinity versus Femininity: An Analysis of Women at Point Zero written by Nawal El Saadawi", International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development(IJTSRD),volume2:3,2018

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wives are happy together with their seven children before Bolanle is taken in. To make the situation worse, Bolanle is educated while none of them is. Meanwhile, Bolanle stays peacefully in the house even while she is being bullied for her childlessness, education, and poise.

The novel revolves around the four women and Baba Segi himself. In the course of reading the text, the reader becomes aware of the turns and twists in the plot as there are other revelations. While investigating the reason for Bolanle's barrenness, Baba Segi shoves her to the hospital to have her barrenness cured. In the process of 'curing' Bolanle's barrenness, it is discovered that Baba Segi himself has health complications and cannot father a child. To prove that he is man enough and can father a child, Iya Segi is invited to the hospital. At this point, she had no choice but to confess her infidelity and also how she had lured the other women to toil a similar route in other to solve their barrenness problems, at the early stage of their marriages. This action exposes and greatly traumatizes Baba Segi while Bolanle gets liberated from her long-life fears. Thus, the traumatizer, Baba Segi, becomes traumatized.

Liberations or Struggles Against Patriarchy in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives Of Baba Segi's Wives*

The revolt or struggles against men's domination at home and by extension, the society is the focus of this study. Special reference and analysis is drawn from Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* Baba Segi's friend (Teacher) who lives in the middle of a brothel from the opening chapter of the novel is introduced, here, prostitutes are introduced as women who lived for other women's men.'Women who 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' (2). [12] The functions that these women carry out are a mixture of slaving for the men and loving them. The women are used by the men that patronize them for emotional, domestic, and sexual satisfaction. The author showcases that these prostitutes are indirect slaves for the wives of their customers as they engage in wifely duties by cooking, having sex, nursing, and keeping the men's company. Therefore, their lives depict irrelevance as they are only used temporarily and dumped for their female counterparts who are the real wives of these men.

The above depicts the preference given to the wives at home over the mistresses at 'Ayikara' by society. The mistresses are seen as 'side chicks' while the real wives are seen as the 'main chic'. Baba Segi is introduced in the early part of the novel as a worried man who is confused about the infertility of his wife. He goes to seek advice from his friend, Teacher, who stays at Ayikara. Ayikara is a home for prostitutes; he is warned against Ayikara, he had moved to Ibadan when he was still a very young man. 'Baba Segi was first warned about Ayikara when he was a young apprentice but cautioner was female and unconvincing'. (3). [13]

[12]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010
[13]Shoneyin Lola, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010.

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The narrator showcases how women are discriminated against, what Ayikara is known for, and the irrelevance given to the women's voices.Ayikara is where the women who are into the business of prostitution live, where they have fun, and where they carry out their business. The women are being shamed because the hustle and work like men. Ordinarily, they would have been more appreciated if they got married and stay as housewives than trying to make money and remain independent.

Baba Segi believes that he would have any woman he wanted so far he has been blessed with money. His first meeting with Bolanle showcases this, 'Now that you and your friend have finished university, are you going to marry a man who will look after you? He asked (6). He goes on to affirm this by neglecting the advice of his friends, 'True enough, manly did not hide their resentment. They told him he was a fool to marry a graduate…Baba Segi laughed in their faces until eventually, they came to terms with their own inadequacies' (7). Baba Segi shows traits of not being intimidated, unlike his friend. He, therefore, proves his superiority over them. He also explores male superiority by mentioning how he is supposed to take care of the woman. Furthermore, Baba Segi gives preferential treatment to his wives that have borne him children. He deprives Bolanle of some privileges and refers to her as "armchair". 'Only Baba Segi armchair faced the TV directly (except Bolanle who hadn't earned her right to an armchair) kept their seats angle their husband insisted on' (11) [14]

Bolanle still gets an edge over the other wives probably because she is educated and more civilized than the other wives. Shoneyin depicts the discrimination against a barren woman. Bolanle is constantly made to feel incomplete as a woman and left out since she has not borne any child. Not only do the other wives and Baba Segi discriminate against Bolanle, but they have also all given Taju a go-ahead to disrespect her as well. Baba Segi is rude to her in front of Taju and Taju contributes to the insult given to Bolanle by her husband. 'Get in', he ordered, barely giving her enough room to press through

> 'Next to Mr. Taju? 'If you don't want to sit next to me, you can sit in the back. Only the wind is uncomfortably cool at this time of the morning, Taju retorted. Baba Segi looked at Taju and grinned. Bolanle might have been going to the hospital dressed like a graduate, but his driver could still put her in her place.(27)

Iya Tope had a share of the disregard from the day she became Baba Segi's wife. Right from the day, Baba Segi goes to pick Iya Tope from her father's house as his wife 'Taju threw my belongings in the back: Two plastic bags and two tubers of yam'. (82) Shoneyin gives a vivid description of how much a woman can be disrespected and be put in 'her place' by any kind of man not minding her rank or social class. Bolanle is not only disrespected by her husband in front of his driver, he goes as far as embarrassing her in public. Baba Segi proclaims that something is wrong with his wife's womb in front of a stranger while they visit the hospital together. He drags her like his property. Thereafter, Bolanle is been

[14]1Shoneyin Lola, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010.

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questioned by a nurse who wants to register her but Baba Segi never allows her to give her own personal data. He cuts her before she mutters any word as she is asked: 'Sir, is there a reason why she cannot answer herself? Is she deaf? The questions were directed at Baba Segi but the nurse looked past him at Bolanle. 'I am her husband'. (33) Here, Shoneyin depicts the statement that women are only seen and not heard by society. Since Bolanle had her husband beside her, it was an abomination for her to express herself, her husband takes charge of everything such as her speech, whom she talks to, and who looks at her. However, the only thing that Baba Segi is comfortable for her to say is to talk about her barrenness to the Nurse who attends to her, since that is the only thing that matters to Baba Segi. 'Bolanle knew what Baba Segi wanted to hear from her. 'I am barren' (33)

Her opinion is never important, she as well acts accordingly. Nearly all the questions that are asked Bolanle respond aggressively by her husband. And how long have do you normally menstruate for, How many days I mean?... Baba Segi couldn't hold back. Do you know that you are talking to another man's wife? All these questions you are asking re meaningless. She is barren…' (36) Proclaiming her barrenness at every opportunity she has is what matters to Baba Segi at every point in time. Sequel to Baba Segi and Bolanle's first visit to the hospital, a second appointment is called by a specialist who has attended to Bolanle's case. He requests to see Bolanle's husband and with much delight, Baba Segi visits the hospital since he is acknowledged as the husband. 'so it is the specialist who wants to see me? He asked. 'Yes, Bolanle said. 'Now, that is a man who has sense in his head. He understands that a woman must have a master that she submits to. Unlike that imbecile we saw the other day, he clearly understands the significance of a husband! (187)

Shoneyin portrays how much Baba Segi appreciates being acknowledged as a husband and a master. This ultimately is the societal representation of male-dominating women in an African society where a man brags about his numerous wives. Shoneyin portrays theunsavory treatment given to any woman who is not able to give birth in a typical Nigerian society as barbaric, unpalatable, and inhuman. Bolanle's barrenness gives her husband frequent opportunities to unleash his verbal abuses on her; he speaks to her as if her life is meaningless without a child. Meanwhile, the only thing that matters to Baba Segi is childbearing. Bolanle never argued with him or protested against the verbal abuse that rained on her daily.

> 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 complete! Do you want to remain a barren maggot? I covered my ears with my hands. (43)[15]

This vividly describes the form and nature of dejection and the abuse that these women are subjected to by society. Women are only allowed to accept whatever they are called. Bolanle always feels the heat when her husband insults her but

[15]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010

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she never expresses herself for it is regarded as an abomination and insubordination for a woman to react or express her feelings especially when she is 'barren'. Bolanle, just like every other barren Nigerian woman is not allowed to express their feelings.

> 'I left the hospital grounds wondering if modern medicine was making a mockery of my childlessness. I didn't feel the sense of relief I should have. If there was nothing wrong with me, why was my belly not rounded and tout? Dr.Dibia must have missed something! The doctor at the ultrasound center must have missed something. (172)

A typical Nigerian society never fails to attribute the cause of childlessness to the woman /wife. Whereas, there are men who have infertility problems just like women. Bolanle blames herself because the society automatically blames her, and since her opinion is never needed, she disregards medical health and agrees with what society says. Bolanle who was once raped has memories of her rape incident when her husband sleeps with her in anger and only focuses on getting her pregnant.

> 'He emptied his testicles as deep into my womb as possible. it was as if he wanted to make it clear, with every thrust, that he didn't make light of his husbandly duties. He wanted to fuck me pregnant. If there was ever a moment when the memory of being raped became fresh in my mind, that was it (44)

The author passionately addresses how important childbearing is for a polygamist, his supposed barren wife has a post-trauma stress disorder from the rape incident that she has due to the aggression that her husband portrays. Shoneyin depicts a form of sexual abuse from a husband to a wife here. The author is of the view that a woman must be accorded respect when sexual intercourse is involved between couples. Shoneyin depicts that sex must be with consent and not a forceful idea or a child hunting expedition. The text also cautions that a wife must not be relegated to a slavish being. Baba Segi orders his wife like a subservient and slave.'IyaSegi !IyaSegi…I am here ,my lord' 'This house is in a mess. Clean it!' 'right away ,my Lord'(62). Utmost regard is expected to be given to the man of the house, respect and total obedience is also important.

> Iya Tope cries that her hand itches for work and Baba Segi results to remind her of her duty as a housewife.
> My Lord, my hand itch for work'. Work? Are your hands not full with the children you are taking care of...if I permit you to do these things, will a man be able to sleep in his own house? (74)[16]

The narrator here confirms what a typical husband expects his wife to do as her duty is in the home. She is not expected to involve herself in any kind of job, as

[16]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010

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she is to solely rely on her husband for everything. It also reveals that the approval of the husband is required before any decision can be taken by the wife. Shoneyin consistently showcases how the male child is given the topmost reference and is more celebrated than the females.

> 'Iya Femi, the new wife soon gave birth to a son and there was much celebration. The new mother clapped her knees together when she strutted about as if her womb was a gold mine. That was to be expected but it was Baba Segi's words that made my ears ache. He spoke as if Femi was a jewel as if he was the first child to the family: 'A daughter can never be like a son,' he said. 'Only a son can become a true heir' (88)

Enough credit is usually given to a woman that gives birth to a male child. She is referred to as 'strong' and the child is worship like a mini-god. It is believed that the male child makes more impact and is referred to as heir since he takes charge of their father's property and the home when the father of the household passes on. In an attempt to free the women from the shackles of patriarchy, the author presents Mama Segi as a character that is capable of being independent against survival of a man.

> 'Your father left me for a beautiful woman. I told him I was pregnant but didn't want to hear it. He sliced me like Okra and left. He pursued another woman's hole and died inside it,'…' Men are nothing. They are fools. The penis between their legs is all they are useful for. And even then, if not that women needed their seed to children, it would be better to sit on a finger of green plantain. Listen to my words. Only a foolish woman leans heavily on a man's promises, 'she said (97)

Shoneyin recounts who IyaSegi's father is and reveals how cruel IyaSegi had become, hence, she utters words just like the men do. IyaSegi's mother marries her without her consent; she believes that IyaSegi could not make her own life better when a man can take the position of her breadwinner.

> 'it's all gone,' she said…I have given it to the man who will be your husband. He will need to look after you.'…The world has no patients for spinsters, it spits them out.Is this all so I can bear children? It is every woman's life purpose to bear children'(101)

Iya Segi's mother becomes cruel and suddenly wants to send her into marriage all for childbearing. Baba Segi also showcase his happiness of getting married to IyaSegi known to her, he is super happy knowing that he has a wife that will be his cook.'I am pleased you are here with me if only to fatten me up a little,' he said (103) He states the above as if making meals alone for him to get fatter is the only job that she can execute successfully.

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The Subjugation of Women

Bolanle recalls her scene of rape where she had been taken advantage of by a stranger due to her being naïve. Shoneyin brings this to her memory while she tries to do a medical test that will determine her fertility.

> 'He moved closer to me and with great accuracy, he struck both my shoulder with his knuckles. My arms feel limp to my sides and I dropped to my knees from the pain. He grabbed a handful of my hair, dragged me into his bedroom and threw me on the bed. He climbed on top of me but I clamped my legs together and pleaded for him to stop. My resistance annoyed him and he pulled a pillow over my face. I was sure I was going to die because I couldn't breathe. (114- 115)[17]

Bolanle tells her mother of her previous rape incident but her mother refuses to believe her. Since Bolanle is brought up by a disciplinarian who believes she has appropriately raised her. It is believed that if a woman is raped, she is probably not well dressed or she has portrayed herself as a sex object. Bolanle explains that at the time when the rape occurred, she was just a naïve young girl who had no idea of what entering a stranger's car could cause her:

> 'No! She jerked her head from side to side. Her voice fizzled into whisper .You couldn't have been raped .No daughter of mine could have been raped. That is not the way I brought you up. (150)

Men who get involved in rape are individuals that choose to showcase their physical strength; they do this because they see the female counterpart as a sex object. This is how some African/Nigerian man automatically perceives women. Another character that suffers woman subjugation isIya Femi, the third wife of Baba Segi She is in a clique with Iya Segi, a clique of Baba Segi's wives who detest Bolanle, she tries all she can do to have Bolanle out of the house. She is the youngest wife before Baba Segi gets married to Bolanle, hence, the resentment towards Bolanle. She is cruel to Bolanle and even gives Baba Segi's driver more credit than a wife that Bolanle is. 'Let me open the door for you, Mr. Taju. Some people do not know that you are a *baale-ile,* head of your own home' (25-26).[18]

Iya Femi speaks harshly to Bolanle who is found sleeping while Taju, the driver knocks on the door of the living room. Iya Femi here gives no regard to Bolanle and respects Taju over her all because he is a man. The women in the society are made to believe that the men are superior to women, this also exists in the subconscious of the female gender. No matter the class of the woman compared to the level of the man in society. Bolanle is a University graduate while Taju who never saw the four walls of a school is given more regard than the

[17]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010
[18]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010

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University graduate. Iya Femi, just like the other wives are kept in the house and is not allowed to work, they are being provided for by their husbands. They stay at home, cook, clean, take care of the children and wait for their husbands to provide every little thing. They are more of a liability to their husband.

> 'I remember the day she set her foot in this house because it was our sharing night-the night IyaSegi distributed the week's provisions. Iya Femi's head was hot…My daughter cannot sleep for dandruff. They scratch like lice-ridden dogs all night. Can you spare me one more scoop? (49)

Their anger is understandable as they are made to share things that are as little as hair cream and provisions. Since it is their husband that provides everything, they are not able to use things in the house as they like since they do not contribute to the upkeep of the household, they cannot even afford to buy pomade for themselves. Shoneyin reveals how the woman is expected to depend solely on her husband for the minute things in the home. Women, however, are not changing the narrative, they focus on a business or building a career of their choice, and therefore they do not get to rely on a man for a living. The novel appeals to women to be less independent of men for survival. In this way, the man or husband will accord them (women) their deserved respect.

In contrast to the position of subservience, Baba Segi's wives put themselves, the author artistically creates Taju, a rude driver but a hardworking man. He had served Baba Segi all his life in Ibadan. Shoneyin portrays him as a woman beater with no regard for his boss's wife. He is shown in his boss's house one day narrating how he beats his wife because their child sucked on a coin.

> He claimed that he'd beaten his wife senselessly for letting his only son suck on a coin. This happened about a week after a male senator slapped a female colleague. This slap had resonated through all the quiet meeting rooms on the street. it seems to have awakened a loosely fitted beast. Of course, the male senator blamed the devil for his actions and the two senators soon seemed to embrace on national television. The same could not be said for the man on the street. Men were slapping their women folks as if it had become a national sport. At every street corner, disgruntled wives swung suitcases onto their heads, hoping to be persuaded to return home. At the marketplace, the Igbo fabric merchants' tugged women roughly by the sleeve. Peeved taxi drivers prodded the head of mothers who bargained with them; young girls were assaulted and stripped naked in the street. Even in the labour ward baby girls were frowned upon by their fathers. Taju too was inspired to throw his best punch. (26)[19]

[19]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010

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Bolanle has once stopped by the Market to pick a few things and get fresh air from the moment she stepped out of the house. Baba Segi has instructed her to be home before family time and she complies. However, Bolanle comes into the house to a shocking scene.

> 'Where have you been?' 'it is not even six yet. I am here on time like I said I would be. The question I am asking is, where have you been? His voice was hollow, like the aftermath of a drumbeat. 'So I can't even leave the house now? It was a daring response in a flash, Baba Segi scrambled up the back of his seat and leapt into the air like a gorilla in flight. He landed bang in front of Bolanle and gripped her throat with both hands. He squeezed hard and shook her, pressing his thumbs on her windpipe…He let his arms drop to his sides. Bolanle collapsed. (58[20])

Any man from any social class i.e a division of society based on social and economic status, upper class, middle class, and lower class. A perfect example of men from these three classes is given above. They all have brutalized women physically. Shoneyin has critically analysed what a typical societal animal of a man can be. She engraved the kind of typical man that can be found on the street, in the market, and even in the high-ranking offices. She portrays what the body of a woman is seen as, a place where men can practice their physical skills and strength without minding how the women feel as well as the repercussion. The lack of formal education that characterized Baba Segi's wives before the arrival of Bolanle contributes immensely to the unperturbed attributes of the wives to the patriarchal system. This causes the strong aversion they have for Bolanle. They spoke badly about her and found every means of making her pack out of the house.

> Let Bolanle draw on every sparkle of youth! Let her use her fistful breast. Listen to me, this is not a world she knows. When she doesn't find what she came looking for, she will go back to wherever she came from .(49)

Their attitude negates female bonding-the sisterhood and genetic bond that brings women together whatever adversity they face in the struggle for freedom. Bolanle makes an effort to make peace as it seems like she divides the love that their husband has for them, she tries to quench the resentment they have in their heart towards her.

> That night, IyaSegi came to my bedroom and told me she would destroy my useless life if I ever sat down to learn anything from Bolanle again .What could I do? On the right was a person who gave me provisions and held my life and the lives of my daughters in the middle of her palm. On my left was the wife who wanted to teach me to

[20]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010

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> read and write, the wife who wanted to teach me to read and write, the wife who did not yet know that she could also be crushed by IyaSegi powerful fist.(51)[21]

Shoneyin did not portray support; however, they were a representation of women bringing women down. Even the female folks did not make things better for their fellow woman.

> After a few months, the same IyaSegi who said we should watch Bolanle from a distance started to boil. She called me and Iya Femi to a meeting, saying that there were words to be spoken. These words were nothing but curses and insults: the bigger Bolanle puffed out her chest, the smaller IyaSegi became. IyaSegi told us she had changed her plan, that is was no longer enough to wait until Bolanle's barrenness made Baba Segi chase her out. IyaSegi said we had to join hands and force her out. Don't you see her highbrow and unconcerned eyes? She thinks we are beneath her .She wants our husband to cast us aside as illiterate ones,' she said , 'As a wife who has recently joined our household , it is her duty to submit herself to our wishes ,not to think she can teach us!(52)

Shoneyin in the extract above reveals how the female counterpart adds to the challenges that other females go through. They are supposed to be Bolanle's shield, however, they choose the path of wickedness and become wicked towards her. Iya Segi and the other wives connive to get Bolanle out of the house by all means. They have all sought a plan of planting Juju (charm) inside her room so that their husband can see it and believe that she intends to kill him . This plan fails, however they persist to make more effort to achieve their goal. There is rampant competition amongst the female gender of today as they seek ways to bring one another down. This is not what feminism preaches as they are supposed to be one another supports. This shows that if wisdom and care are not applied, the women's agitation to be free from patriarchy will be efforts in futility.

Conclusion

This work reveals how Shoneyin showcases the portrayal of patriarchy in the Yoruba setting of Nigeria. A society where it is believed that things like money, properties, farmland, cars, and other luxurious items belong to the male gender. The female gender is thereby left with marriage as their only relevant asset of society. The work also reveals that marriage is seen as an escape route for young women to get their freedom. However, the story changes sometimes, and their expectations are cut short. Women face various forms of oppression by their husbands, they are put under the pressure of bearing children, they are not able to express how they truly feel, they get to rely solely on their husbands and they are left with responsibilities of taking care of the home.

[21]Shoneyin Lol, "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (Third Edition), Abuja-London: Cassava Republic Press,2010

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The preference allocated to the male gender birthed arrogance, ego, and the necessity to oppress the female gender. This has also given way to unnecessary gender roles. The women are subject to brutalization such as rape, domestic slavery, domestic abuse, verbal abuse, and forceful marriage, thereafter they are made to submit totally to their husband's wishes.

This study also reveals that women are not only brutalized by men but also by other women. Nonetheless, the study reveals that women can liberate themselves from the patriarchal hegemony through sound education and a change of mindset like Bolanle in the text. The author, therefore, suggests that women should boost their confidence and get educated. Bolanle's education directly or indirectly paves the way out of an abusive marriage. Iya Segi's confidence which has been built from being independent at her younger age is a factor that helped her boost being confident and avoid being trampled upon. She knows she should survive without a husband as she could pick herself up even if her marriage fails. Iya Segi's independence through her business and Bolanle's education gave them an edge over the other women. It is therefore expedient to recommend that women should be encouraged to either get educated or get a trade as this will enhance their independence and their ability to curb subjugation from their male counterpart.

Relating this study to the title of the text, Shoneyin showcases another escape route for the women whereby it was discovered that none of Baba Segi's children are biologically his. The women indirectly subjugate the man without his knowledge. His first three wives gets pregnant for various men and gives birth to seven children who he had been taking care of. Not minding the pain that he feels after this revelation, Baba Segi decided to keep the children and wives on the condition that none of them is allowed to leave the house,this is just to retain his masculinity and his place as the patriarch in the home. These wives can be compared to Beatrice in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* where she slowly poisons her husband who abuses her in all kinds of ways till he dies.

In conclusion, this text indirectly liberate women and inform them of themagnitude of power that nature has placed in their hands,whether educated or not, it is now left to them to choose whether they want to remain subjugated or remain liberated.

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