

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Mohamed Khider – Biskra
Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages
Department of English Language and
Literature



**Challenging Patriarchy: Feminism and Gender Dynamics in
Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010)**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Master Degree in
Literature and Civilization.

Submitted by:

DEBBAKH Aridj

Supervised by:

Ms. Selma Hezallah

Members of Jury

Dr. Kerboua Salim

Mr. Harhoura Kamel

June 2023

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled Challenging Patrarchy: Gender Dynamics in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*(2010) is submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Master Degree in Literature and Civilization, is a record of an original work done by me under the guidance of Ms. Selma Herzallah. Faculty of Letters and Languages the results embodied in this dissertation have not been submitted to any other University or institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

Dedication

I express gratitude toward Allah for the help he has offered me to compose this research.

I would like to dedicate this work proudly to my beloved mother, who has always been a source of support and encouragement.

To my guardian angel now and forever, my father I would not be here without you.

To the source of my joy, my sisters and brothers who mean so much to me. I love all of you.

To my dear grandmothers, who is still with me and who has passed on, I am forever grateful for the love and care you have bestowed upon me.

To my aunties and uncles, each with her and his name I really appreciate having you in my life.

To my beloved Hadjer and Arouba, thank you for believing in me when nobody else did.

My dearest Meriem, thank you for being here and for making my year

To my old and new friends, to the memories.

Last but not least to all women around the world, let the sky fall when it crumbles, we will stand tall face it all together, at the skyfall..

You will survive.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Ms. Selma Herzallah for her support, guidance and kindness. I also want to thank my teacher Chetti Kamel, Gutatia Sihem for the invaluable role they have played in my life as my teacher and mentor, particularly in guiding me towards the path of English literature. I also thank my fellow classmates and my friends at Mohammed Kheider University of Biskra for their support and good memories.

Abstract

The literary world has given birth to feminism, a movement spearheaded by both male and female authors who fought against the patriarchal system that oppressed and persecuted women for centuries. Unfair traditions and masculine practices restricted women from communicating their ideas, goals, issues and ambitions. African women, like their counterparts worldwide, have faced obstacles that limit their freedom. However, by demolishing these restrictions, they have fought for equal rights and a better life. This research is titled *Challenging Patriarchy: Gender Dynamics in Lola Shoneyin's The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives (2010)*, aims to delve into the novel from a feminist perspective, studying its depiction and subversion of gender roles and patriarchal norms in contemporary Nigeria. By Employing feminist literary theory and close reading, this study examines the representation of female characters and their relationships with the male protagonist, Baba Segi. This research intends to follow a descriptive and analytical research paradigm and a qualitative research method. Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing discourse on feminist analysis in African literature, emphasizing the significance of centering marginalized voices. By examine the representations of the three uneducated wives as submissive and non-assertive, compared to the fourth wife who is considered a symbol of challenging the patriarchal system. Also, the researcher has chosen feminist analysis in which Baba's Segi character is intended to be investigated by describing his portrayal as the patriarchal system itself, as well as his relationship with his wives that is intended to be investigated through feminist lenses to make this novel a feminist literary work. The study digs into the differences between the representations of the female and male characters through a feminist perspective.

Keywords: Feminism, oppression, patriarchy, abuse, gender dynamics.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	5
1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 Theoretical Framework	5
1.2 Definition of Feminism.....	5
1.2.1 The Feminism waves	6
1.2.2 Main Goals and Views of Feminism	8
1.2.3 Feminism in Literature.....	9
1.2.4 Main figures of Feminism.....	9
1.3 Literature review	10
1.3.1 Review of <i>The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>	10
1.3.2 Literature Reviews of the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives	11
1.4 Definition of Patriarchy.....	11
1.5 The Origins of Patriarchy	12
1.6 Feminism in African literature.....	13
1.7 Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity.....	15
1.8 Conclusion.....	16
Chapter Two: A Study of <i>the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives (2010)</i>	17

2.0 Introduction	17
2.1 About the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives	17
2.2 Feminism in <i>The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>	19
2.3 Masculinity care in <i>the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>	21
2.5 Women Empowerment in <i>The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>	23
2.6 The Impact of Education in <i>The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>	26
2.7 Conclusion.....	27
Chapter Three: Gender Representations in <i>the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i> by.....	28
<i>Lola Shoneyin (2010): Feminist Perspective</i>	28
3.0 Introduction	28
3.1 The Representations of Female Characters	28
3.2 Gender Roles vs Three Wives	31
3.4 Challenging Patriarchy	35
3.5 The Representation of Baba Segi in <i>The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>	37
3.6 Conclusion.....	39
General Conclusion.....	40
Works Cited.....	43
ملخص.....	47
: الكلمات المفتاحية	47
Résumé.....	48

General Introduction

In 2010, Lola Shoneyin, an African poet, made her appearance as a fiction writer with her novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. This novel gives insight into the lives of Baba Segi's modern Nigerian family including his multiple wives who share dark secrets. The novel depicts the struggles with abuse and complex gender dynamics. A feminist analysis of this book examines how it navigates issues such as gender differences, polygamy in Africa and how women have been vocal about their struggles with mental health, concerns and issues.

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives is set in Nigerian society and depicts a polygamous household. The three uneducated wives, Iya Segi, Iya Top, and Iya Femi, manage the household and their seven children. Iya Segi, the wife, is the one who controls the rest of the family, including Baba Segi himself. Iya Top, the second wife, is non-confrontational, whereas Iya Femi, manages the household and their seven children. While Iya Femi is pleased when others suffer. The story begins when Baba Segi decides to take a fourth wife, Bolande, a young educated woman who graduated from a University. Her arrival causes struggles and problems, with Baba Segi who is the main character, a rich, uneducated, and dominant man who decided to add another wife to his family, causing anger among the other wives.

Therefore, in attempting to unveil the cultural, political and realities of African societies, numerous writers adopted a feminist approach to representations that have made a noticeable change in portraying the traditional role of women; modern writers are trying to educate their societies about the strength that women hold. Most of them present the challenges and the issues against women and make their voices count. This work is viewed by a Nigerian feminist writer who has been making changes as a poet and fiction writer. In this

light, this thesis attempts to examine the main characters of the novel from a feminist approach.

The main question of this research is: how does the portrayal of the main characters in this novel contribute to its classification as a feminist literary work? In order to answer the main question of this study, the researcher intends to divide it into main and sub-questions and attempts to answer them:

1. To what extent does the novel represent a feminist critique of polygamy and unequal power dynamics within polygamous marriages in Nigeria?
2. How does Lola Shoneyin use the narrative structure and point of view to voice marginalized female characters in the novel, particularly in relation to their experiences of domestic violence and abuse?
3. How does the novel represent the agency and empowerment of women in the face of systemic gender inequality and oppression?
4. How are oppression and abuse defined by the feminists?
5. How did the narrator portray women issues in the novel?

Therefore, this work points to explore the novel through a feminist lens, examining how it depicts and challenges gender roles, and patriarchal norms in contemporary Nigerian society. Through a close reading of the text and drawing on feminist literary theory, the study will analyze the representations of the female characters and their relationships with the male protagonist, Baba Segi. It will also explore the ways in which the novel engages with themes such as sexuality, motherhood, and women's agency, and how these themes intersect with larger social and political issues. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation on feminist discourse in African literature and highlight the importance of centering marginalized analysis.

This research intends to follow a descriptive and analytical research paradigm and a qualitative research method. Data shall be collected through a bibliographical approach, wherein sources are classified as primary and secondary. It includes a number of dissertations, scholarly articles and website articles. The data analysis intends to be descriptive and interpretive by applying Feminist approach principles when dealing with the portrayal of characters.

The first chapter provides the literature review and theoretical background in which feminism with its main goals, beliefs and figures are going to be presented. It consists of two main sections: Theoretical Framework, which discusses the groundwork of Feminism, feminist goals and feminism as a theory in literature, and Literature Background, which reviews the novel. The first section introduces the theory that shall be used in the analytical chapters, which is feminist approach, with their prominent figures, concepts, and principles. However the second section presents the novel.

The second chapter attempts to study the most important themes in the novel along with issues that face women's social position. The chapter also is devoted to taking a short look through the men's perspective. The objective is to identify and analyze women's encounters with abuse, womanhood, and oppression. The researcher's arguments shall be backed by the feminist strategies implemented. The importance of this investigation is an attempt to provide the readers and the current body of literature with a thorough description and analysis of the themes, and more specifically women's issues.. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to shed light on women's issues and positions that affected their development and empowerment.

The third chapter is concerned with the gender representations of female characters and their relationships with the main male character. Adopting feminist approach, the study

intends to investigate the roles of main characters through the representation of Baba Segi and his four wives. Additionally, the researcher attempts to describe and analyze how patriarchal societies affect the family, with. The purpose of investigating gender dynamics is to have a more rounded and better understanding of gender roles, which has been marginalized in literature as well as academia.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter in the research paper is to emphasize on the theoretical framework and literature review. The researcher aims to explore the concept of Feminism in literature by defining and explaining its approach in relation to the issues and goals of the study. Additionally, this section of the paper undertakes a critical analysis of Lola Shoneyin's novel, "*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" published in 2010. The main aim is to furnish the readers with a comprehensive understanding of feminism and its relation to the novel, which will serve as a foundation for the researcher's subsequent analysis of the characters conducted by the researcher.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research focuses on introducing feminism and its waves, highlighting its main figures, goals, and views, as well as exploring the concept of feminism in literature. This research represents the different waves and periods of feminist activism, each with its own distinct goals and approaches. By examining the contributions of key figures in feminist theory and practice, this research aims to shed light on the evolution of feminist thought and its impact on literature and society.

1.2 Definition of Feminism

As a political, social and ideological movement, feminism came to establish common political, social and economic goals, and achieve equality of genders. Thus, its aim was to create a safe environment for women where opportunities are equally disseminated and chances are reasonably divided, to achieve justice (Lewis).

The term feminism has been derived from the Latin word 'femina,' which means 'woman'. It was related to women's issues, especially their equality in comparison to men.

Toril Moi stated that the words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels demonstrating support for the aims of the new Woman's development which emerged in the late 1960s. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir argues that the terms, masculine and feminine are utilized symmetrically only as a matter of form on the lawful papers (Raina3372).

The world cannot give an exact definition to feminism. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, it is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men, and the struggle to achieve this aim. On the other hand, Cambridge Dictionary defines it as the belief that women should have the same power, rights and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state. The term has different definitions, yet feminists share the same goals and views. Lisa Tuttle stated that "the advocacy of women's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes' ', is the feminist theory (107). Tuttle's position is shared by Charles Nnolim. Both feminist writers and critics, according to him, have "worked successfully for the right of women" .The aforementioned criteria show that the liberation of women and the desire for gender equality are the primary concerns in feminist texts (qtd. in Lansari and Yanina11).

1.2.1 The Feminism waves

The voice of feminism remains a one that promotes change. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it emerged as a reaction to the exclusion from different social and political perspectives. It is a movement that advocates for women's empowerment and rights. Over time, the movement has diversified. The western movement is typically classified into four waves. Cultural critics divide the history of modern feminism into four parts, which they call "waves." Despite the wave metaphor's prevalence in feminist theory, it is often considered problematic and contested in feminist literature. Its structure is frequently often considered historically misleading and politically useless (Malinowska 3).

According to Sarah Pruitt, feminism remains a critical voice for change. Critics of the “wave” concept argue that it oversimplifies a complex history by suggesting that only one distinct type of feminism exists at any given time. In reality, each movement includes smaller, overlapping subgroups that are in conflict with one another. While the wave concept is certainly imperfect, it remains a helpful tool in outlining and understanding the history of feminism in the United States.

The first wave of feminism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, primarily in the United States. Its focus was on suffrage, but rather than seeking equal rights with men, women sought respect as human beings. Issues pertaining to education and employment captured their attention. In the first wave of feminism activists fought for women’s voting rights leading to a significant achievement in American history when women finally secured that right via the 19th Amendment in 1920. However, after this accomplishment, the feminist movement experienced stagnancy until the 1960s (qtd. in Ben Abderrezak 33).

The second wave of feminism took place from the 1960s to 1980s. This wave witnessed a cultural change towards advancing women's rights mainly on the issues related to gender equality; it was characterized by a commitment towards advancing gender equality efforts and emphases placed on fighting against workplace discrimination and promoting individual agency that relate to sexuality. It was also characterized by protests and various forms of activism. The second wave of feminism was spearheaded by diverse range of key figures like Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir. The feminist movement gained significant attention and spread to different parts of the world (Pruitt).

Third wave aimed to address gaps that were not covered by previous waves. Its focus is mainly on issues such as sexual harassment, gender based violence, intersectionality and reproductive rights. This wave shed light on creating diversity and acknowledging the

experiences and issues faced by women who are considered different culturally, racially and sexually. The third wave of feminism has sustained its political goals but has become more inclusive in terms of race and sexuality (quoted in Ben Abderrezak 35).

Finally, the fourth wave of feminism is considered the new form of feminism that is difficult to define, but it has emerged due to the rise of social media. The MeToo movement, which started in 2017 after allegations against Harvey Weinstein, is an example of the fourth wave of feminism. Feminists did not only seek to hold powerful men accountable for their actions but also aim to change the systems. They also believe in the importance of including people of different sexual orientations races classes and genders in the movement (Pruitt).

1.2.2 Main Goals and Views of Feminism

For feminists, they believe that women's position in society has been restricted by both male dominations and traditions. Women have been given a secondary status compared to men. That led to a modern society that is considered a result of the masculine power domination which has been given to men since the beginning of the human cavitations (Raina 3373).

Furthermore, every civilization's history demonstrates how women have always been in a position of subordination, unable to reclaim their own identities unless they revisit history, investigate it, and ultimately reestablish them via their own experiences and discoveries. Women must identify themselves against the male-informed ideas and beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation in order to develop their own unique identities. For feminists these beliefs create an environment in which women are oppressed, abused and unequal to men. The system portrayed women as sexual objects. More than that, they are forced to live and accept the male dominated society. For that, feminists called for a refusal. They start their resistance to regain women's position in society without oppressing men; rather they seek to achieve equality and occasions just like men. Feminists, from the first

beginning, called for the same goals, starting from the right to vote till the inclusivity of all identities (Raina 3373).

1.2.3 Feminism in Literature

Feminist's literature attempts to change the view of women's status by addressing topics like gender equality, sexism, violence and abuse. Themes like choice, equal opportunities, male superiority and female inferiority are highly relevant to feminist writing, particularly to present the relationships between men and women. In literature, feminism is related to the concept of feminist literary criticism, namely literary studies that direct the focus of analysis on women. It emerged as a part of the feminist movement. The theory studies how gender, sexuality and power are portrayed in literary works. It also examines how female characters are depicted in literature.

Literary criticism does not imply criticism by female critics or criticism of women or female authors. Rather, it simply refers to critics who view literature with special awareness of the ways in which gender is related to culture, literature and life. Literary criticism has brought attention to previously marginalized voices and texts. It also drew attention to the role of literature in feminist activism and the role of literature with women issues (Arizah 512).

1.2.4 Main figures of Feminism

The emergence of the liberation movement has its groups and leaders, who were given the name of feminists. It did not arise from nowhere. The very first step was the result of pleas for equal chances and rights between both genders. These influential figures are countless.

Firstly, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was an English writer and feminist philosopher who spoke out for gender equality. Her 1792 work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* questioned Rousseau's ideas of female inferiority and acquired a prominent status in feminist literature. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters'*(1787), *The Female Reader*

(1789), and *A Historical and Moral View of the Origins and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) are her other important works (Adriana).

Furthermore, Luce Irigaray, was born in Belgium on May 3, 1930, and is one of the most famous feminist figures. By rejecting Freud and Lacan's opinion those women are real creatures, symbolic beings and imaginary creatures for men. Irigaray himself focused his attention on schizophrenia, which was considered a personal language or dialect focused on symbolic order (Arizah 511).

Also, Audre lorde was an African American feminist and activist who dedicated her life and career to the issues of gender and sexuality. Her effect on the development of intersectional feminism was significant (Lewis).

Lastly, one of the most influential feminist writers is Virginia Woolf. Jane Goldman in her article described Virginia Woolf as the founder of modern feminist literary criticism. The early feminist writer made her famous essay *A Room of One's Own* which is celebrated till nowadays. Woolf, who is considered as one of the feminist's writings leaders, has been appreciated for her works that reflect feminism.

1.3 Literature review

1.3.1 Review of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

In 2010, Lola Shoneyin, an African poet, made her debut as a fiction writer with her novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The novel digs into the lives of Baba Segi's wives, a modern Nigerian family, and their secrets. It depicts the abuse, struggles, and complex world of a polygamous household.

The novel has been interpreted from a feminist perspective as it examines the struggle of African women, polygamy, sexuality, mental health and gender differences in African societies men are typically depicted as independently powerful and assertive while women are seen as passively victims and non assertive. Shoneyin has been praised for her writing skills.

Humor and tragedy are combined in order to dig into the reality of a polygamous household. The author was also praised for her ability to address topics like abuse and gender rules. The novel is considered a powerful voice that sheds light into the Nigerian society and culture as well as the women complexities in patriarchal societies.

1.3.2 Literature Reviews of the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives

The book has received critical acclaim for its exploration of gender rules, polygamy and patriarchy. Lola Shoneyin's style of writing attracts readers to enjoy her humorous words that shed light on serious topics.

The New York Times book review accolades the novel stating that Shoneyin writes with great flair and amazing characterization and praised the writing skills of the author as accomplished and confident. On the other hand, publishers weekly praised the author's ability to balance tragedy and humor to address issues like abuse and violence. Also, the Guardian gave the book positive review, stating that Shoneyin's poetic writing style made the novel an engrossing tale. Furthermore, the Financial Times described the novel as a memorable novel that focuses on the lives of Nigerian women. Most of these reviews highlight the author's ability to express the serious issues with a humorous style of writing as well as the power that this book holds in exploring the Nigerian society and the various issues.

1.4 Definition of Patriarchy

Relationships, institutions and individuals are built in a hierarchical way, which creates power imbalances that we can feel. The power dynamics between men and women, for instance, manifests an awareness of inequality. However it is difficult to develop a theoretical argument as to how men's privilege leads to different forms of subordinations of women (qtd. in Dixit 81).

Feminists understand and conceptualize women's encounters of persecution as being caused by a patriarchal system, instead of individual men who hold oppressive states of

mind due to personal reasons. Patriarchy could be a term that makes us comprehend the reality of our circumstance and recognizes that women's oppression isn't exclusively caused by "terrible" men, but rather it may be a result of a bigger system of male dominance that subordinates women (qtd. in Dixit 87).

Although male dominance is a core aspect of patriarchy, it can manifest differently in different societies, historical eras, and relationships. There are number of factors that influence the nature of patriarchy, factor such class, religion, sexual preferences and gender identities. Understanding intersectionality acknowledges the influence of these factors. Through intersectionality, patriarchy is redefined in a way that accounts for these diverse and complex social structures (qtd. in Dixit 87).

The term "patriarchy" is derived from the Latin words "pater," meaning father, and "arch," meaning rule, giving it the meaning of "the rule of the father .Interestingly, the term was not coined by a feminist scholar but rather by a nineteenth-century anthropologist who proposed it in a reaction to the idea of primitive "matriarchy" .these anthropologists claimed that matriarchy represent an unorganized framework which patriarchal structures may give a more organized alternative. The term "patriarchy" is most commonly used to depict a family structure in which men hold the larger part of the control and decision-making authority, often coming about within the subordination of women (qtd in Dixit 87).

1.5 The Origins of Patriarchy

The origins of the term 'patriarchy' can be followed back to Friedrich Blessed (1820-1895), who characterized it as male mastery over women and the world-historical defeat of the female sex. He can be considered as the primary women's activist to present the term. However, Bell Hock features a different view on the concept of patriarchy. According to her, Patriarchy could be a complex social framework that assigns the next status to men frequently at the cost of females who are seen as powerless. It promotes the belief that men

are inherently superior and they have the right to run the show over others and maintain their dominance through various shapes of psychological manipulation and violence. This system can impact how parents can see and treat their children, frequently based on their gender. For instance, if two siblings are born with a year separating them in age, patriarchal beliefs may lead their parents to assign different roles and expectations to them based on their gender. Such patriarchal beliefs are often rooted in religious teachings and cultural traditions (1).

Gerda Lerner, an American historian and Women's Studies professor, situated the origins of patriarchy in history. Her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), clarifies that the development of patriarchy was not a single occasion, but rather the result of the joint endeavors of both men and women. Lerner sets that the starting division of labor between men and women arose from the requirements of Neolithic hunter-gatherer societies. Women were responsible for mothering and economic activities, while men focused solely on hunting. However, with the rise of agriculture and other related activities, labor became central to the production process, necessitating a larger workforce. This was a crucial turning point when children became economic assets, and reproduction needed to be controlled. Lerner also highlights that the subordination of women in history was affected by their capture by different tribes. The position of women became more complex with the creation of further wealth and the state. Overall, Lerner's work emphasizes that patriarchy's creation was a gradual and multifaceted process that affected both men and women. The emergence of different economic systems and societal structures had a significant impact on the subjugation of women throughout history (qtd. in Dixit 88).

1.6 Feminism in African literature

The feminist movement brought about a remarkable change in the literary world by introducing women's activist fiction and nonfiction, which sparked a newfound interest in

women's writing. In addition, the movement prompted a reevaluation of women's historical and academic contributions because of the belief that women's lives and achievements had not been given sufficient attention. Early feminist literary scholarship focused on uncovering and bringing attention to texts written by women that had previously been overlooked or forgotten (Choukri Bouziani 30).

African literature, which was previously characterized by a phallogocentric perspective dominated by male writers and critics, primarily featuring male characters and issues, has undergone a significant transformation with the rise of feminist-conscious writers (qtd. in Nutsukpo 90). African women writers worldwide are drawing attention to the collective development of women, rather than focusing solely on individual men. They are using their literary works to highlight the gender issues that negatively impact the lives of women, and are encouraging women to fight against passivity, silence, and subordination in order to gain respect, a voice, and opportunities for advancement. Through literature, they are educating society about the importance of treating women as equal partners and not relegating them to the margins of society (Nutsukpo 90).

Nutsukpo also states that Through the use of literature, African women writers are playing a crucial role in shaping society's perceptions of women. They are using their literary works to challenge the traditional societal standards that have truly consigned women to the borders of society and have prevented their advance. By sharing, these writers are encouraging society as a whole to view women in a modern light and to recognize them as equal partners in progress. Through their works, African women writers are raising awareness around the significance of respecting women's rights and ensuring that their voices are heard (90).

They are encouraging women to break free from passivity, silence, and subordination, and to actively battle for their rights and opportunities for advancement. Furthermore, these

writers are using their literary works to educate society at large about the value of treating women equally as partners in all spheres of life. By promoting gender equality through literature, African women writers are contributing to the broader social and financial improvement of the nations and the whole world. Their works serve as an effective tool for inspiring change, challenging conventional gender roles and stereotypes, and empowering women to require a dynamic part in forming their own futures (90).

1.7 Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity

Allen states that Judith Butler's theory poses the traditional view of gender as a fixed, innate characteristic that is predetermined by biological factors. Instead, she argues that gender is a social and cultural construct, formed by societal norms, expectations, and conventions. According to Butler gender is not something that one is born with or inherently possesses, but rather a construct that is performed and created through repeated behaviors and manifestations.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender is performative, meaning that it is constructed and maintained through repeated acts that are intended to express and reinforce gender identity. These acts can include dress, speech patterns, body language, and other forms of expression. Through these acts, individuals create and project a gender identity that aligns with societal expectations and norms (Allen).

Importantly, Butler stated that these performative acts do not express an inner truth or essence of gender, but rather create gender itself. In other words, the performance of gender produces the very identity it claims to reveal. Thus, it must be noted that gender is not something that exists independently of these performative acts; rather, it is a product of actions (Allen).

Overall, Butler's theory of gender performativity contests the traditional notions of gender as an immutable, biological trait, and instead focuses on the role of social and cultural

influences in shaping and constructing gender identity. By understanding gender as a performative act, Butler's theory opens up new possibilities for understanding and challenging gender norms and expectations (Allen).

Butler believes that separating biological sex from social gender is not helpful because our understanding of our bodies is shaped by the social world we are born into. We cannot know ourselves outside of the social meanings assigned to our bodies. Butler's work suggests that self-knowledge is always incomplete and influenced by social forces (Szorenyi).

1.8 Conclusion

The first part of this chapter explains the theory behind the research. The researcher describes the feminist theory and explains how they will be used in the study. The researcher then provides a review of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segis Wives (2010)* and revised works. This background helps the reader to understand the theory's history before moving on to a detailed analysis of the characters portrayal and representations in Lola's novel.

Chapter Two: A Study of *the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010)

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to studying the most important themes in the novel along with issues that face women's social position. The chapter also is devoted to taking a short look through the men's perspective. The objective is to identify and analyze women's experiences with abuse, womanhood, and oppression. The researcher's arguments shall be backed by the feminist strategies implementations. The significance of this investigation is an attempt to provide the readers and the current body of literature with a thorough description and analysis of the struggles, and more specifically women's issues. The reason is, as discussed in the first chapter, that the researcher found a lack in the current literature concerning the study of Lola Shoneyin literary work. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to shed light on women's issues and positions that affected their development and empowerment.

2.1 About the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives

Lola Shoneyin is a writer from Nigeria who uses a pen name. Her real name is Titilola Atinuke Alexandrah. The author is married to Olakun Soyinka, who is the son of the winner of the Nobel Prize Wole Soyinka. Shoneyin is renowned for her support women's rights in a patriarchal society that favors men. She made her debut as a novel writer with *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, which was published in 2010 by Cassava Republic. She is currently living in Lagos and runs the Aké Arts and Book Festival. She is a contributor to newspapers such as the Guardian and The Times, she also takes the position of Director at the Book Buzz Foundation which is located in Nigeria. She has won many literary awards and is well known for her writing accomplishments. The book was first launched with "The Serpent's Tail" as a title, in the United Kingdom in May 2010 (Nguwasen and Ifeoma 68).

The novel titled *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) dramatically portrays how gender conflicts can lead to problems in a family with multiple wives. Mr. Aloa, who is known as Baba Segi in the novel, sees his wives and children as a symbol of his virility. The family, portrayed as a polygamous one, everything was smoothly going well until Bolanle, an educated woman, joined as the fourth wife and changed the dynamics.

Despite being gentle and kind, Bolanle is denied and marginalized by her uneducated co-wives. The three wives kept their husband's inability to conceive a secret for themselves. The possibility of their secrets being exposed made them anxious and afraid as the arrival of a knowledgeable and fresh wife to their household was on the horizon. Stemming from this, the three wives opt to hide their secrets from Bolanle. She suffers from the outcomes of being barren in African society, whether her infertility is real or imagined. The mistreatment of Bolanle by her co-wives reaches its peak in the novel. In addition to rejecting and abusing her, they accuse her of falsely that she attempts to kill their spouse with rat poison. This accusation is considered a result of their jealousy of Bolanle's intelligence and education. Their plans fail as the wife's first daughter died when she accidentally ingests the poison.

Despite being a stressful event, Baba Segi did not expel Bolanle from the family. The novel sheds light on the problems faced by women in a patriarchal and polygamous society where jealousy sometimes gives rise to cruelty towards other women. Bolanle's pursuit of both education and ambition for new and different life renders her vulnerable to the animosity of the other wives, who see her as a challenge in the household. As a result, it leads to the tragedy of the family members (Nguwasen and Ifeoma 68).

Finally, the first wife Bolanle finds herself compelled to disclose the reality despite their infidelity in their marriage. She claims that none of the other three wives had been able to conceive, and all of their children were a result of the affairs they had to be mothers. Baba Segi who had previously believed that every child residing in his household is biologically

related to him, decides to keep the children as well as his wives with restrictions. On the other hand, Bolanle decides to leave the polygamous household (Nguwasen and Ifeoma 68).

The novel delves into themes like the dynamics between genders, envy, and the outcomes of hiding secrets. It also highlights the issues faced by women in a polygamous marriage and its reality as well as the difficulties encountered by women in such relationships (Nguwasen and Ifeoma 68).

2.2 Feminism in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

Lola's Shoneyin novel deals with women's struggles and issues in a patriarchal African society. According to Nguwasen and Ifeoma the author of this novel declared proudly that she is a feminist in an interview in the Punch which is a Nigerian Newspaper, on June 21, 2010 (66). The work is considered a feminist novel. Different aspects can be analyzed from a feminist perspective. Women's oppression, abuse, and rape are highly mentioned in the novel and through the character's development in the story.

Nguwasen and Ifeoma claimed that rape is one of the most highlighted issues in the story that can be found in Bolanle and Iya Femi's story. Both characters are considered victims of rape. Bolanle was raped when she was fifteen years old by a strange guy who offered her a ride on a rainy day. On the other hand, Iya Femi was raped by Tunde while she was serving a household. Victims of rape often encounter struggles in asking for help from legal and mental health systems. Other survivors choose to not talk about their experiences openly because they feel that they are being judged, for that, they do not ask for help. To Shoneyin, society can be a better place if rape was illegal and not just a sexual act. She strongly supported this idea because women and girls are struggling with various difficulties and they feel the pain of being mouth covered and silently suffer because this act is committed by people who believed in male domination. The author portrays rape vividly to expose the hidden effects of this crime against women in patriarchal societies. She draws

attention to this crime to urgently fix it through Bolanle and Iya Femi's rape stories (70).

Secondly, Nguwasen and Ifeoma stated that inheriting women in a patriarchal society is highly mentioned in the novel. The lack of inheritance is considered another form of oppression for women. This practice does not allow women to have rights in sharing property as a member of the family. According to some Nigerian experts in gender studies, women are asserted to male authority and they should not claim rights as men. Instead, women are forced on how to be a good wife to her husband and a good mother to her children, while men are not taught how to be good husband or a good father; instead, they focuses more on the authority given to him by society as a superior member of both society and family. This act is portrayed in the story of Iya Femi. After losing both of her parents, her uncle gave her as a house girl to another family. Her uncle addresses her stating that girls have no right to inherit their parent's houses after they die. Shoneyin depicted this practice in her novel as a common practice that should be fought (72-73).

Additionally, Shoneyin tackles in her novel the issue of forced marriage. Nguwasen and Ifeoma claimed that the representation of male supremacy is depicted in the novel. This domination can be found in the story of Tope's father and Femi's Uncle. Acts like forced marriage, polygamy, and oppression can be found in patriarchal societies as being promoted culturally and socially. Shoenyin in her novel criticizes this act of forcing young women into marriage. In this regard, forced marriage is strongly uncovered in the novel to shed light on the abuse and oppression against young women (72).

Furthermore, the author highlighted the issue of polygamy in her novel. The story is generally about a polygamous household. Nguwasen and Ifeoma stated that in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, polygamy is portrayed as a source of women's abuse, oppression, and objectification. The second wife of Baba Segi Iya Tope is constrained into marriage as compensation for failed crops, in which she is treated as an object and concerning her

inferiority. On the other hand, Bolanle, who is considered traumatized from her rape experience, considers herself unworthy. That drives her to marry a polygamous man as a solution to her issue. For her, being one of his wives fortifies her sense of inferiority. Mr. Alao continues to add more wives to his family, unknowingly of his infertility and his wives' treachery. The novel shed light on the issue of many women in their marriages due to their failure to conceive, despite not having the problem of infertility but rather their husband; Shoneyin recommends that women should seek freedom themselves from abuse and such issues stemming from a polygamous marriage, even if it means using illegal implies. Overall, Lola's work depicts the issue of polygamy as a system that sustains the exteriorization, objectification, and abuse of women. The novel sheds light on the issues encountered by women who cannot give birth to children, focusing on that women should liberate themselves from such oppressive circumstances, even with dissident methods (73).

2.3 Masculinity care in *the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

Onyekachi claimed that feminism is an attempt to challenge and break the male domination structures that exist within patriarchal societies. These structures have given men the privilege of controlling women, an extent of inequalities. However, in an attempt to achieve the goals of feminism, few feminists have communicated a belief that men are inherently and irredeemably evil. This perspective suggests that the root of this problem is men's cause of all of the problems that women confront, which they cannot be trusted or relied upon to act within the best interface of women. Several issues can be associated with this problematic argument. Initially, it fails to consider the potential intricacies and multifaceted aspects of the complexity of human behavior. Also, it is unjust and unfair to classify an entire gender as evil and blame all of them for being completely devoid of positive attributes. Finally, the latter argument may break the goals of feminism as they may lose male supporters and uphold damaging stereotypes of men. Furthermore, it is important to say that despite

having real issues related to patriarchy, not all men are the same. To achieve the goals of feminism, feminists must acknowledge the variety of outlooks of both genders and work on gaining alliance and support from both genders. In the novel, Baba Segi shows his patriarchal care through his power and control. This idea can be portrayed through the marriage of Baba Segi and Iya Femi in which she tries to change her social class through marriage with Baba Segi who is considered wealthy. This portrayal of marriage can be seen from different perspectives. One can see it as a form of male care and a way that allow women to gain agency, while other can see it as a way of perpetuating negative gender stereotypes and patriarchal systems (71,75).

2.4 Traditional Role of Women in *the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

Gift T. Baloy stated that in some African societies mainly in the south ones, women are not given the same respect and equality as men in marriage. In some cases, women are unjustifiably faulted for infertility problems, while men cannot be the reason for such issues. All of this is considered a cause of the patriarchal systems, in which men are considered more worthy than women. In some cases, medical tests appear that woman is not the cause of infertility but still she may be blamed (2).

Gift T. Baloyi unequivocal that *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* vividly shows the painful experience that women go through concerning infertility issues. The novel illustrates the way societies deal with these issues and how they dehumanize women who cannot have children. This problem can be found in Bolanle's story. Shoneyin shed light on the pressure from her society due to her inability to procreate. She suffers to fit in the cultural surroundings while being challenged by social expectations. The novel challenges this idea, the belief that women's worth is only related to their fertility. It focuses on the need for a society that is more inclusive, wherein women are acknowledged and valued not solely on their fertility. These issues infer that women's status is often diminished to her social status,

not only this, even within the context of marriage; it is dependent on the condition of their fertility. Until she can give birth to children, she may not be as respected and acknowledged as a significant member of the family (4).

In addition, he declared that as a result, the three wives are addressed by Iya while Bolanle is addressed by her name. Iya which means mother of, creates power dynamics concerning the women's lives. Shoneyin shows in her books that women are disempowered and their value as human beings is endowed with rights and dignity is undermined. The term Iya becomes a significant label when it comes to the freedom of women in contemporary society. If a woman does not become Iya she will not be respected, acknowledged and she will suffer greatly in the patriarchal society (4).

2.5 Women Empowerment in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

The novel addresses different themes related to rape, motherhood, womanhood, and social constructions in modern Nigerian society. The novel fundamentally centers the stories of Baba Segi's life with his four wives and how they manage to live in a patriarchal society. Shoneyin's work pasts beyond a basic examination of the transgression of societal boundaries rather it offers a deeper exploration of the personal journey of each character. Each of Baba Segi's wives has her own unique story and challenges of being a mother and wife. As the plot unfurls, the reader can notice how the women's experiences lead them toward more prominent self-awareness and empowerment. In general, the work is a thought-provoking novel that digs into the difficult issues facing women. Through each story of the four wives, Shoneyin gives louder voices to women through their stories. She enlightens how women can discover their paths to self-discovery and empowerment within the confront of societal expectations (Badmus 105- 106).

Furthermore, in her novel Shoneyin employs the character of Babe Segi who is a polygamous Muslim man to represent the patriarchal Yoruba culture. Through the points of

view of the four wives, the author investigates how women are considered oppressed and subordinated within this social system. By employing a first-person narrator for each wife, she gives them each a voice to tell their stories and sheds light on the shameful acts they encounter. For that, the author aims to challenge the establishment of a patriarchal structure from inside and uncovered its harmful impacts on women (Badmus 106).

To begin with, Iya Femi who was orphaned at a young age was sold by her uncle to a wealthy family without her assent. She desperately yearns for an escape from her situation. Upon discovering Baba Segi's affluence, she asks him to help her to marry her as a way to escape her miserable life through Baba Segi's driver Taju. Iya Femi's story highlights the challenges of women who are caught by their circumstances, where a marriage appears just as if it were an escape from their issues. This story prompts readers to reflect on cultural practices that deny women their inheritance rights based exclusively on their gender (Badmus 106).

Additionally, Iya Tope is facing the pressure of getting married similarly to Iya Femi. Due to the drought destroying her family's crops, her father who used to work for Baba Segi as a farmer, chooses to settle his debts by giving her as a form of payment to Baba Segi. In contrast to the other wives, Baba Segi's first wife, Iya Segi, is considered financially independent. It is, in truth, she is the one who assists her husband in launching his businesses. During her youthful years, she works hard and perseverance similar to that of a man, resulting in her accumulates a significant amount of wealth, which allows her to maintain her position within the household of Baba Segi (Badmus 106).

Finally, Bolanle's choice to enter into a marriage that allows multiple wives, alongside Baba Segi, was primarily driven by her need for shelter and self-discovery, similar to the other wives. Due to her hard childhood and the trauma she experienced from being raped and having an abortion. Bolanle seeks a sense of security and fulfillment. Through the

polygamous marriage, she finds herself in a new environment that allows her to forget about her past and discover a new start. Contrary to the other wives, she was educated and independent, and her decision to marry Baba Segi was not influenced by social and economic pressures. Despite having the choice of obtaining a career and financial stability, she chose to enter a polygamous household indicating that her decision is based solely on her desires. She intentionally challenges the typical gender roles and the gender dynamics in polygamous marriages by entering into one. She exercised her rights to make a well-considered decision that afforded her stability and security with firmness and independence of thoughts, and the chance to explore her in a manner that suited her personal needs (Badmus 107).

Her experience with rape and abortion makes her seek a shelter that will allow her to heal. She found it in a polygamous household (qtd. In Badmus 108). Her decision to confide in her mother about her traumatic experience with sexual abuse is a critical moment in the novel. It sheds light on the predominance concerning the experiences of sexual abuse towards women in Nigeria, which is usually met with silence and denial. Bolanle's courage in uncovering her abuser and confronting her mother about the abuse exposed her determination to break the silence surrounding this sensitive topic. Unfortunately, sexual abuse is considered a big issue in Nigerian society with a big number of victims. Despite this, there is often the problem of silence which allows it to continue. However, different novelists shed light on this problem in their literary works to address the mental effect of sexual abuse on victims. By openly sharing their experiences, Bolanle and the other wives illustrate the importance of speaking about this topic. By breaking the silence, they encourage other women to do the same and make a society where sexual abuse is not endured and victims are healed. The Nigerian society depicted in the novel is sexist, for that woman is often seen as disadvantaged. Despite not being an inability, the female body and its stereotypes and experiences serve as an obstacle to women's freedom and independence. Women are usually subjected to social

expectations of womanhood which limit their choices and agency. The same expectations limit women's ability to live on their terms, making them stuck to the traditional gender rules and expectations. The social pressures can lead to a sense of powerless because women are expected to prioritize their rules as mothers and women instead of their own goals and desires making it difficult for them to have a full life (Badmus 108).

2.6 The Impact of Education in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

The novel highlights education as a powerful means that help women challenge the patriarchal systems and the social norms that limit and oppress them. Bolanle, one of the wives of Baba Segi, is portrayed as a well-educated woman who uses her education as a means of power and opposes the patriarchal society that aims to control her. Bolanle's independence and autonomy have granted her a unique degree of self-awareness and freedom that is not available to the other wives. With her ability to both read and write, she knowledgeably surpasses the limitation imposed by a polygamous household. Her education had provided her with a self-worth and confidence that is lacking in the other three wives. She possesses the ability to contest Baba Segi's dominance and assert herself in a manner that sets her apart. Furthermore, Bolanle's education enables her to perceive the inequalities and inequities in the household and society. Her knowledge makes her aware of the abuse and the patriarchal system that oppresses women, and she can effectively voice her personal views on the issues. Through her education, she becomes a role model for the other wives as well as their kids, by inspiring and encouraging them to challenge their roles and strive for self-development. Essentially, Bolanle's education is portrayed as a tool by which women can fight the patriarchy and social norms. Through her knowledge, she is empowered to resist the dominant limits of her society by challenging the status quo (qtd. in Badamus108).

Badmus stated that the potential of Nigerian women to confront power dynamics with their male counterparts is exemplified by Bolanle's education in the novel, which shed light on

the importance of both education and scientific thinking in developing women. Bolanle's arrival as a graduated woman makes a turning point in the novel, as she decides to take a medical test to diagnose Baba Segi's infertility which leads to reviling the household's secrets. This decision differs from the first wife's dependence on traditional beliefs. Nonetheless, the medical findings expose the shocking reality that Baba Segi lacks fertility and is not the biological father of his children. At this point, Baba Segi has been the leader of the household and has used his role as a father to sustain his authority over the wives. However, by revealing the secret of his infertility this power dynamic is turned upside down and his position as a leader of the family is called for uncertainty (qtd. Badmus 108).

Additionally, Bolanle's education and healthcare knowledge poses a threat to the conventional beliefs and norms that have preserved dynamic powers within the family. By challenging the beliefs of the family members, she demonstrates the power of education and scientific thinking in disrupting gender roles and patriarchal systems. The revelation of Baba Segi's sterility represents a significant point of disturbance and change in the novel, shedding light on the power of education and scientific thinking to challenge the traditional beliefs and customs that promote hegemonic patriarchal structures (qtd. in Badmus108).

2.7 Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter sheds lights on the issues portrayed in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. It highlights on the problems that face women from a feminist point of view, gender inequality, and the empowerment of women in Nigeria society. The novel highlights the devastating impacts of patriarchal systems that limit women and their rights, including rights of inheritance and education, and the contained gender-based violence. This chapter represents the challenges of the traditional roles imposed on women, especially as mothers. However, despite facing various challenges, the novel conveys hopeful and empowering messages to women. Education enables women to take control of their lives.

**Chapter Three: Gender Representations in *the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by
Lola Shoneyin (2010): Feminist Perspective**

3.0 Introduction

In order to expose and challenge the social norms and stereotypical beliefs, this third chapter is devoted to the feminist examination of the main characters. The focus will be on their portrayal and representations in the novel as well as the gender dynamics. To accomplish this, the researcher has chosen feminist analysis. Baba's Segi character is intended to be investigated by describing his portrayal of the patrilateral system, as well as his relationship with his wives that is intended to be investigated through feminist lenses.

Additionally, this chapter is devoted to examining the representation of the female characters specially Baba's Segi four wives by highlighting their issues and struggles as women living in a polygamous household under the control of a patriarchal marriage and a dominant husband. The study shall be taken a look at the differences between the representations of the female characters through a feminist point of view of the four wives.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to contribute to the study of gender dynamics in literature specifically in African literature. Through feminist investigation, it delves into the complexities of gender dynamics in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* within polygamous societies. By engaging in critical analysis, it gives deeper insights into the author's portrayal of both male and female genders.

3.1 The Representations of Female Characters

Women's representations in African literature continue to be a subject of dynamic intrigue in literary criticism. Many scholars shed light on problematic portrayals of women in male authors' works, yet there is a growing number of male writers who are deliberately working to depict women from a more gender-sensitive point of view. These

writers aim to depict women in positive roles and focus their agency within their societies (Omar 87).

Additionally, male critics are progressively engaging with female creative spaces while being careful of their position and the experiences offered by their female colleagues. These collaborative efforts between male and female writers as well as critics are significantly contributing in the advancement of African literature (Omar 87).

The rise of feminism has led to a critical focus on the investigation of the way male writers depict women in literary works. The later critical approach challenges the patriarchal representations of women and focuses on the biases and limitations presented in these depictions. Over the past two decades, there has been a remarkable increase in written text by women critics and creative writers that address the representation of women in various forms and from diverse perspectives. While the concept of "image of women criticism" in feminist literary studies has advanced, the representation of women in both academic and fictional discourse remains a topic of interest and discussion. Within African literature, there has been a significant focus on the portrayal of women from male author's works. Critics have inspected writings that show a biased or limited perspective of womanhood, focusing on the need for more accurate and empowering representations (Omar 87).

The restricted presence of women in early Nigerian literature can be accredited to the patriarchal structure of conventional social norms and the impact of colonial-era values. In these societies, women are usually restricted to family tasks and subsistence farming, while men lead the fights for independence. As a result, early writes were concerned with the challenges confronted by men, ignoring the predicament of women who remained neglected and marginalized in their battle through life's struggles. Consequently, women were often portrayed in abstract terms or they were portrayed as mistresses to kings or mere ornaments in palaces (Razinat).

Furthermore, the social imbalance between men and women gave birth to feminism and womanism, which promote equality and point to put an end to social imbalance which maintained women in their social status quo. The choice of women characters in novels is purposely done based on how they respond to or accommodate to conventional gender roles relegated to them, aiming to investigate gender inequality, criticized by feminist and womanist scholars in traditional African societies, has been reversed in both women's and men's literature. Also, as an another important factor, these women characters are portrayed according to the social and cultural contexts of African settings, as well as contemporary context of African fictional literary works (Allagbe and Akinola 5).

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

Finally, the work offers critical lenses to gender inequality of women's portrayal and the oppressive structures that limit women's agency and empowerment. It prompts readers to reflect on the limitations imposed by social norms and traditions on women, while focusing on the resilience and resilience of the female characters in navigating their circumstances.

Through the different female representations in the novel, each story offers a deep insight into the ways in which women can be silenced, oppressed, and subjected to mental and

physical abuse. The various stories present a multifaceted analysis of female's experience. . Furthermore, this contribution of the novel to the existing discourse on gender inequality and the intricacies of negotiating gender roles in the Nigerian society are significant.

3.2 Gender Roles vs Three Wives

In African societies, conventional depictions often present men as embodying qualities of power, independence, assertiveness, and even violence, while their female partner are depicted as victims, passive, and lacking assertiveness. This s contrast in societal roles and expectations between genders reflects deeply ingrained socio-cultural standards. However, it is imperative to investigate this point in greater details, digging into the nuances of these portrayals and the underlying issues of gender dynamics in African societies (Zossoungbo 1).

The work challenges the simplistic depiction of housewives and powerless characters by digging into the depth of their experiences and stories, uncovering their vulnerabilities, and highlighting their inner strength. It presents a nuanced point of view that urge the reader to look beyond the initial impressions and recognize the struggles and hidden power within these female characters.

The novel gives investigations of the lives of the individuals and the battles of these women, shedding lights on their personal stories and desires. Their stories highlight the restrictions and limitations they face inside a patriarchal society but also uncover dreams, aspirations, and capacity for personal development.

Despite having personal journeys towards self- growth and development, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* depicts firstly the story of the three wives; Iya Segi, Iya Tope, and Iya Femi. The three uneducated wives live within a polygamous marriage. The novel presents them as who explore the challenges of their circumstances, while the luck of education is acknowledged, while the focus remains in their personal journeys and the dynamics of their relationships with their husband within a polygamous household.

The three wives are characterized first as typical and submissive housewives as they are ordinary married women who take care of the house, usually without having a paid employment. A housewife can be defined as a female individual who is mainly responsible for domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning and take care of children, while her partner is often responsible assumes the role of the financial provider by working outside the home (Zossoungbo 10). In Lola's work, female roles are limited initially to the role of housewife. Shonyein shed lights on this role in chapter one when Baba Segi warned his wife Iya Femi that she is not feeding his child Kole correctly.

Secondly, the female characters present themselves as housewives, finding pride and reason in their parts as moms and caretakers. They characterize their personalities based on their children, as exemplified by Shonyein in chapter one "proud to be defined by her first-born child" (Shonyein 8). The responsibilities of looking after children and a spouse are emphasized, as seen in expressions such as "I have two children and a husband to look after" (7) and "Your uncle has found you a household" (122). These passages propose that the essential center of these women's lives revolves around satisfying their household obligations (Zossoungbo 9).

Additionally, the character Iya Tope is depicted as having no other occupation other than taking care of the family. Her joy is found in "plaiting her daughter's hair" (Shonyein 71), which encourages her part as a housewife and caregiver. This suggests that her time and energy are mainly dedicated to the tasks associated with maintaining the household and caring for her family. In the other hand, Baba Segi himself dismisses the idea of work and emphasizes the significance of Iya Segi's role in taking care of the children, this trade strengthens the perception that the essential focus of women should be on their domestic roles as housewives rather than pursuing outside work or personal desires, which is stated in his words with Iya Segi in chapter eight when Iya Segi said that her hands itch for work and Baba segi

answered “Work? Are your hands not full with the children you are taking care of?” (Shonyein74). Furthermore, “It is every woman’s life purpose to bear children” (Shonyein 101), it explicitly states that the purpose of women in this narrative is restricted to becoming mothers or "bearing children." This statement indicates the traditional social expectation that a woman's worth is determined by her ability to reproduce and fulfill her maternal role (Zossoungbo 11).

Finally, the portrayal of women in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wive* generally revolves around their roles as housewives and caretakers. The female characters find pride, purpose, and identity in their roles as mothers and wives, with their lives primarily focused on fulfilling domestic duties and caring for their children. These representations show traditional gender roles and expectations within the context of the novel, where women's primary responsibilities lie within the household rather than pursuing external pursuits or career desires.

In order to give a clear image to the reality of African women Along with being housewives, Shenoyein portrayed the three wives as submissive and powerless women. They are often depicted as submissive and obedient, satisfying traditional gender roles within a patriarchal society. There are several passages in the novel highlight the submissive nature of the female characters and their willingness to comply with the expectations placed upon them especially the first three wives.

As illustrations of the submissive behavior of the wives towards Baba Segi, in pages number sixteen, forty-three and fifty-four. Several events show that the spouses aim to please their husband and follow his instructions blindly and without question. Their satisfaction is determined from reaming silent and not challenging Baba Segi's authority or choices. These passages as in “Segi was content when I said nothing” (16) and “I’d wanted so much to please him” (43) suggest a power dynamic where the wives prioritize Baba Segi's satisfaction over

their own individual desires or needs. When Baba Segi almost killed Bolanle by suffocating her for a wrong accusation, he asked for a help in which he was asked how she didn't fight back, the lack of resistance from one of the spouse suggests that she submits to abuse without battling back., this portrayal strengthens the idea of women detached and tolerating of their circumstances, of abuse or injustice. Bolanle shows a sense of submissiveness which is sated in page eight-eight, stating she does as she is told and never complains. She is depicted as a wife who obediently carries out tasks without complaint, suggesting that women are anticipated to fulfill their duties without questioning or expressing dissatisfaction (Zossoungbo 8).

Finally, Shoneyin depicts females as powerless characters mainly in the secret shared by the three wives. The fear of becoming divorced women in a patriarchal society drives them to engage in affairs and keep secrets untold and unshared, the theme of being powerless and the resulting actions taken by the wives adds complexity to their depictions. The three spouses within the novel discover themselves in a challenging circumstance where their status and security are tied to their marriage to Baba Segi. Divorce in patriarchal society can be stigmatizing and can result in the loss of social standing, financial support, and even custody of their children. These fears of social results and the vulnerability they face as potential divorced women contribute to their perceived powerlessness.

The act of keeping the secret shared between the spouses too reflects their lack of power as they are unable to straightforwardly confront Baba Segi or challenge the norms and expectations of their society. Instead, they are compelled to explore a fragile web of misdirection and concealment, further strengthening their lack of agency within their own lives. The choices they make, driven by fear and a want for self-preservation, serve as a reaction to their disempowered position. By depicting the wives's struggles and issues and their untraditional means of asserting agency, Shoneyin offers a nuanced exploration of the

complexities faced by women within traditional gender dynamics.

Overall, Shoneyin's depiction of powerless female characters within the secret shared by the three wives in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* invites readers to reflect on the impact of patriarchal norms and societal expectations on women's lives. It highlights the different ways in which women explore their limited agency and the lengths they may go to ensure themselves in a society where divorce can lead to encourage marginalization and powerlessness.

3.4 Challenging Patriarchy

It is important to recognize that these representations do not show the full reality of African women's experiences. They fail to acknowledge the diverse roles, strengths, and empowerment that women possess within their communities. Women regularly play critical roles in supporting social and social practices, protecting conventions, and contributing to the overall well-being of their families and societies.

Moreover, it is important to recognize the ongoing efforts by feminist and womanist researchers, activists, and individuals within African societies to challenge and destroy these stereotypes. Their literary work attempts to develop women, challenge gender inequalities, and advance more comprehensive narratives that recognize the differences in the nature of women's experiences. Recently, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the need to redefine and expand traditional gender roles in African societies. Women are progressively declaring their rights and possessing positions of control and authority, and challenging social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities. These progressions are continuously reshaping the narrative surrounding women highlighting their agency, resilience, and contributions to society.

While traditional portrayals of often portray men as powerful, independent, assertive, and even violent, and women as victims, passive, and submissive, it is important to recognize

the complexity and diversity within these gender dynamics. There is a growing understanding in African societies, as well as a growing movement towards challenging and redefining traditional gender roles. By recognizing and increasing the agency and strengths of women African social orders can cultivate more comprehensive narratives that reflect the realities and aspirations of both men and women in the continent.

Shoneyin challenges the patriarchal thinking and society by her portrayal of Bolanle. The character represents as a powerful, confident and assertive woman. The statement "Bolanle was determined to deny him the pleasure of hurting her feelings"(Shoneyin 13) portrays Bolanle as a powerful and proactive character (Zossoungbo 12). It stated that Bolanle is determined to have her agency and protect herself emotionally from any harm inflicted by Baba Segi. By communicating her determination, Bolanle shows a sense of inner strength and resilience. She refuses to allow Baba Segi to have power over her emotions and seeks to protect her well-being. This indicates her dynamic decision making and her refusal to be detached of abuse.

Bolanle's determination to refuse Baba Segi the joy of hurting her feelings also implies her willingness to challenge social expectations and norms that may tolerate or even encourage mistreatment of women. She denies being a victim and asserts her right to be treated with respect and dignity. Overall, this explanation underscores Bolanle's strength and determination to protect her from emotional abuse, positioning her as an empowered female character that is willing to challenge oppressive dynamics within her marriage and society.

Bolanle is depicted as an assertive female character, in page twenty-two in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle states that she intends to bring the light to the darkness of the other three wives which depicts her as a confident and determined character. It reveals her strong commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of others, particularly the other spouses who may be confronting challenges or troubles. Bolanle's declaration that she

will not give up on the other wives sheds lights on her resilience and determination to bring about change. In spite of possibly comforting deterrents or resistance, she remains enduring in her conviction that she can make a change in their lives. This illustrates her proactive and self-assured nature. It shows that she is seeking to empower them and offer them a sense of hope in what may be perceived as a challenging or oppressive situation. The use of metaphor of "bringing light," she declares herself as a source of clarity, enlightenment, and positive change. This further highlights her active role in the narrative and her determination to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

In a broader context, this statement showcases Bolanle's assertiveness, resilience, and her commitment to being a symbol for positive change. It illustrates her proactive approach to addressing the challenges faced by the other wives and her belief in her ability to bring about transformation and empowerment.

3.5 The Representation of Baba Segi in The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives

Baba Segi as the main male character is depicted by Shoneyin as a polygamous man who is married to four wives and living in a traditional Nigerian household along with their children. He is portrayed as a traditional man who believes blindly in patriarchal ideas. His desire of having a large family led him to marry different women. Baba Segi's character is presented as authoritative and oppressive within his household. He holds the belief that his role as a man gives him the right to control and make choices for his spouses and family. as he considers himself the head of the family he expects full obedience and subservience from his wives.

Shoneyin presents him as a reflection of social expectations and gender roles within Nigerian culture. His behaviors and attitudes highlight the power dynamics, inequalities, and restrictions placed on women in a patriarchal society. Through Baba Segi, the novel investigates themes like gender dynamics, gender inequalities and the consequences of

societal norms on individual lives. Generally, Baba Segi's character represents a conventional patriarchal figure that is both influential and flawed. His portrayal in the novel shows more profound and deeper exploration of the complex dynamics of power, gender, and relationships within a polygamous marriage.

Shoneyin depicts him as a powerful and assertive character; in pages thirty-three and thirty-four of her novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (Zossoungbo 12). Baba Segi states that he is Bolanle's husband, assuming that he is the head of the family and assertive in stating his authority and control over his wives and their affairs. This statement shows that he knows his role as the head of the family, emphasizing his position of authority within the household. It depicts his belief that his role as a husband gives him the power to make decisions and exercise control over his wives.

In page thirty-three, Baba Segi has a conversation with Bolanle's doctor as he claims that she is barren, "Do you not know that you are talking to another man's wife? All these questions you are asking are meaningless. She is barren", it reflects his perception of women as objects that belong to their husbands, and it also suggests his belief in conventional gender roles and the importance he places on marital boundaries and fidelity. By addressing her doctor that they are talking with another man's spouse, Baba Segi is emphasizing the societal norms and expectations surrounding marriage and the notion of women being tied to their husbands. He declares the importance of this relationship dynamic and implies that the questions being asked are irrelevant or inappropriate because they disregard this fundamental aspect of the woman's status. This statement indicates Baba Segi's patriarchal mindset and his belief in the superiority of men within the context of marriage. It also sheds lights on his possessive nature and his intentions to protect what he perceives as his territory, in this case, his wife. Baba Segi's words convey a sense of entitlement and reinforce the notion that women are seen as property or possessions to be controlled and protected by their husbands.

In page thirty-four, Baba Segi orders Bolanle to write Mr. Ishola Alao instead of her mother's name, assuming that he is her next of kin not her mother. The statement demonstrates assertiveness when he instructs someone to write a letter identifying him as the next of kin for a particular individual. By stating his position as the next kin, Baba Segi shows his authority and asserting his dominance in matters of family and inheritance. His order for the Bolanle to stay in their father's house if she wanted their mother to be the next of kin indicates his belief in the traditional gender roles and the importance he places on his role as the male figurehead.

To sum up, Baba Segi's character represents a traditional patriarchal man who is both influential and flawed. His portrayal in the novel allows for a deeper investigation of the gender dynamics, powers, and relationships within a polygamous marriage and a patriarchal society.

3.6 Conclusion

Finally, the third chapter attempts to do a feminist examination of the main characters and the gender dynamics in the novel. It highlights on the portrayals of main female and male characters. Firstly, by examine the representations of the three uneducated wives as submissive and non-assertive, compared to the fourth wife who is considered a symbol of challenging the patriarchal system. Also, to accomplish this, the researcher has chosen feminist analysis in which Baba's Segi character is intended to be investigated by describing his portrayal as the patricidal system itself, as well as his relationship with his wives that is intended to be investigated through feminist lenses, by shedding lights on their issues and struggles as women living in a polygamous household and a patriarchal society. The study digs into the differences between the representations of the female and male characters through a feminist perspective.

General Conclusion

This research attempted to investigate the portrayal of main female and male characters in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, specifically their character representations in a polygamous household and their relationships, womanhood, abuse and how these themes intersect with larger social and political issues. It attempted to investigate the novel through a feminist lens, analyzing how it portrays and challenges gender roles and patriarchal norms in modern Nigerian society. The research attempted to investigate the representations of the female characters and their relationships with the male protagonist, Baba Segi. Generally, this research sought to contribute to the ongoing conversation on feminist discourse in African literature and highlight the importance of centering marginalized analysis

To sum up, the first chapter offered a basis for the theoretical framework and literature review of this research. In the first chapter, the researchers aimed to present the literature review and theoretical framework in which feminism with its main goals, beliefs and figures were presented. It consisted of two main sections: Theoretical Framework, which discusses the framework of Feminism, feminist goals and feminism as a theory in literature, and Literature Background, which reviewed the novel. The first section introduced the theory that was used in the analytical chapters, which is feminist approach, with their prominent figures, concepts, and principles. However the second section presents a literature review of the novel and reviewers.

In the second chapter, the researcher attempted to examine the most important themes in the novel, as well as the challenges faced by women in terms of their social position. It also briefly explored the male perspective. The aim of this chapter was to identify and analyze women's experiences of abuse, womanhood, and oppression, using feminist strategies as a basis for investigation. The research aimed to contribute to the existing literature by

providing a comprehensive description and analysis of the struggles faced by women, particularly in relation to their issues. The researcher noticed a lack of literature on the study of the novel concerning the study, which prompted this investigation. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter was to highlight o the issues and positions that impacted women's development and empowerment.

Finally, the third chapter attempted to show how the novel challenges social norms and stereotypes by using a feminist analysis of the main characters in the novel. The focus was on how they were depicted and represented, as well as the gender dynamics. The researcher chose feminist analysis to examine Baba Segi's character, his role in the patriarchal system and polygamous marriage, and his relationships with his wives. In addition, the research is devoted to examining the representation of the female characters specially Baba's Segi four wives by highlighting their issues and struggles as women living in a polygamous household under the control of a patriarchal marriage and a dominant husband. The study took a look at the differences between the representations of the female characters through a feminist perspective. Ultimately, this chapter aims to contribute to the study of gender dynamics in literature specifically in African literature. By engaging to critical analysis, it gave deeper insights into the author's portrayal of both male and female genders. The chapter aimed to study how gender dynamics are depicted in African literature, especially in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Using feminist investigation, it explored the issues of gender dynamics within polygamous societies. Through critical analysis, it provides a deeper understanding of how the author represents both male and female genders

Therefore, the present study is an attempt to contribute to the African literature. Overall, the results of this study might aid in rediscovering and understanding the representations of main characters in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, in addition, it

will support future researchers investigating retellings the themes of this novel as well as its main characters through feminist lenses, such as women empowerment, abuse, patriarchal systems, and many others. Additionally, the findings could be used to prove that there is a need for investigating, as it challenges and corrects falsely acclaimed patriarchal ideologies. However, this investigation focused on a Feminist Analyses, yet the area of research could be investigated from various standpoints.

Works Cited

- Allagbe, Akinola Monday and Alou, Yacoubou. "Men and Women Revisiting Women's Conventional Roles in Selected Contemporary African Novels." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 22, no. 9, 2021, p 68-78.
- Allen, Paige. "What is Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity?" Perlego Knowledge, 2023.[theconversation.com/judith-butler-their-philosophy-of-gender-explained-192166](https://www.theconversation.com/judith-butler-their-philosophy-of-gender-explained-192166)
- Arizah, Mila. "Feminism, Equality, Gender in Literature." *ResearchGate*, 2020, p 507-515.
[www.researchgate.net/publication/344186149_FEMINISM_EQUALITY_GENDER_I
N_LITERATURE](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344186149_FEMINISM_EQUALITY_GENDER_IN_LITERATURE)
- Badmus, AMINAT EMMA.;Nigerian women growing up: Purple hibiscus and the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives." *From the European South* 5 (2020), p 97-111.www.academia.edu/41370712/Nigerian_Women_Growing_Up_Purple_Hibiscus_and_The_Secret_Lives_of_Baba_Segis_Wives
- Baloyi, G.T. "An African Woman's Dilemma in The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives: A Bosadi Perspective on the Challenges and Pains of Infertility." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2019, article 1957, p1-8.
- Ben Abderrezak, Abdelnacer. "Approaches and Theories in Literary Criticism." Course handout, Mohammed Kheidher University of Biskra. 2021-2022
- Bouziani Choukri, Sonia. "The Influence of Feminism on African Literature." Master

Dissertation, Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra, 2015.

Cambridge English Dictionary. "Definition of Feminism." *Cambridge University Press*.
dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/feminism

Dixit, Aparna. "Patriarchy: A Critical Interpretation." *Wesleyan Journal of Research*, vol. 13, no. 27, ResearchGate, October 2020, p 87-92.

Lansari Hadjr and Yanina Keltoum. "The Portrayal of Women in Modern Feminist African Literature." University of Adrar Institutional Repository, University of Adrar, 2017.

Hooks, bell. "Understanding Patriarchy." *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. Putnam, 2002, p 1-5.

John, Adriana. "10 Most Famous Feminists in History." *Wonderslist*, , 8 Mar. 2019. www.wonderslist.com/10-most-famous-feminists-in-history/

Lewis, Jone Johnson. "Audre Lorde: Black Lesbian Feminist Poet, Essayist and Educator." *ThoughtCo*, 30 Dec. 2017.

Lewis, Jone Johnson. "The Core Ideas and Beliefs of Feminism." *ThoughtCo*, Aug. 2021.

Malinowska, Ania. "Waves of Feminism." *ResearchGate*, 2020, p 1-8.

Razinat, Muhammed "Female Representation in Nigerian Literature: An Essay." *African Writer*, 21 May 2007.

Nguwasen, Chia Martha, and Ifeoma Mabel Onyemelukwe. "A Feminist Reading of Lola

- Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*." *Journal of Gender and Social Issues*, vol. 19, no. 1, ResearchGate, 2022, p 17-28.
- Nutsukpo, Margaret Fafa. "Feminism in Africa and African Women's Writing." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2015.
- Omar Sougou, "Rethinking Androcentric Representations of Women in African Literature," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2010, p 87-97.
- Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. "Feminism." *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, Oxford University Press. www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/feminism
- Pruitt, Sarah. "Feminism: The Four Waves." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 10 Oct. 2018.
- Raina, Javeed Ahmad. "Feminism: An Overview." *Volume 04 Issue 13*. October 2017, p 3372-3376.
- Shoneyin, Lola. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives: A Novel*. William Morrow, 2010.
- Szorenyi, Anna. "Judith Butler: Their Philosophy of Gender Explained." *The Conversation*, 19 Oct. 2022.
- "*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives: A Novel*." *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 257, no. 2, 2010, p. 38.
- "*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin." *Financial Times*, 12 Nov. 2010, p. 15.
- "*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin." *The Guardian*, 5 Dec. 2010, p. 20.
- "*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin." *The New York Times Book Review*, 7 Nov. 2010, p. 27.
- Zossoungbo, Eugene. "Gender Representation in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by

Lola Shoneyin (2010): A Butlerian Perspective, 2019, p 1-22.

ملخص

اعطى العالم الأدبي ولادة للحركة النسوية، حركة قادتها كتاب وكاتبات من كلا الجنسين، لمحاربة النظام الذكوري الذي اضطهد النساء لقرون عديدة. تقيد هذه التقاليد الظالمة والممارسات الذكورية النساء عن التعبير عن أفكارهن وأهدافهن وقضاياهن وطموحاتهن، بل ان واجبتهم تكون عادة مقتصرة في مهام روتينية مثل الإنجاب وتنظيف المنزل وخدمة احتياجات الرجال. ولهذا واجهت النساء الأفارقة، مثل نظيرتهن في جميع أنحاء العالم، عقبات تحد من حريتهن. ومع ذلك، و من خلال هدم هذه القيود، حاربن من أجل المساواة و حياة أفضل، مما منحهم لقب "النسويات، حيث استهدفت الحركة الأولى تحرير النساء من القهر ومنحن مكاناً محترماً في المجتمع حيث يمكنهن استغلال الفرص. تناقش هذه الدراسة الرواية من منظور نسوي، وتدرس تصويرها واختلاف الأدوار الجنسية والمعايير الأبوية في نيجيريا المعاصرة. باستخدام النظرية الأدبية النسوية والقراءة الدقيقة، تفحص هذه الدراسة تمثيل الشخصيات النسائية وعلاقتهم مع البطل الذكوري، بابا سيجي. كما تستكشف هذه الدراسة التورط الروائي في قضايا مثل الجنسية والأمومة ووكالة النساء، وكيف تتقاطع هذه القضايا مع قضايا اجتماعية أوسع. في النهاية، تساهم هذه الأطروحة في الحوار المستمر حول التحليل النسوي في الأدب الأفريقي، مع التركيز على أهمية اصوات النساء المهمشة. في رواية "الحياة سرية لزوجات بابا سيجي"، يبرز تصوير الزوجات الأربع كيف تتلاقى القوة الذكورية والأبوية في المجتمع النيجيري وكيف يمكن لمقاومة النساء ووكالتهن تحدي التوقعات والأدوار الجنسية التقليدية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية، القهر ، الأبوية، الاعتداء ، ديناميكيات الجنس، تمكين المرأة، المتعدد

Résumé

Le monde littéraire a donné naissance au féminisme, un mouvement mené par des écrivains des deux sexes, pour lutter contre le système patriarcal qui avait opprimé les femmes pendant des siècles. Ces traditions injustes et pratiques patriarcales empêchent les femmes d'exprimer leurs idées, leurs objectifs, leurs problèmes et leurs ambitions, et leur devoir se limite généralement à des tâches routinières telles que la procréation, le nettoyage de la maison et la satisfaction des besoins des hommes. Les femmes africaines, comme leurs homologues du monde entier, ont été confrontées à des obstacles qui limitent leur liberté. Cependant, en brisant ces restrictions, elles se sont battues pour l'égalité et une vie meilleure, leur donnant le surnom de « féministes », car le premier mouvement visait à libérer les femmes de l'oppression et à leur donner une place respectable dans la société où elles pourraient exploiter les opportunités. Cette étude discute le roman d'un point de vue féministe, en examinant sa représentation, ses différents rôles sexuels et ses normes patriarcales dans le Nigeria contemporain. À l'aide de la théorie littéraire féministe et d'une lecture attentive, cette étude examine la représentation des personnages féminins et leurs relations avec le protagoniste masculin, Baba Segi. Cette étude explore également l'implication romanesque dans des questions telles que la sexualité, la maternité et l'agentivité des femmes, et comment ces questions recourent des questions sociales plus larges. Enfin, cette thèse contribue à un dialogue continu sur l'analyse féministe dans la littérature africaine, en mettant l'accent sur l'importance des voix des femmes marginalisées. Dans *the secret lives of Baba Seji's Wives*, la représentation des quatre épouses souligne comment le pouvoir patriarcal et patriarcal converge dans la société nigériane et comment la résistance et l'agence des femmes peuvent remettre en question les attentes et les rôles sexuels traditionnels.

Mots-clés : féminisme, oppression, paternalisme, agression, dynamique de genre, polygamie.