

**RADICAL FEMINISM AND EMASCULATED PATRIARCHY
IN LOLA SHONEYIN'S *THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA
SEGI'S WIVES***

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ABSTRACT

Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) is interpreted as a radical feminist discourse, where Lola Shoneyin presents an emasculated or powerless patriarchy. This paper, utilising the sociological and radical feminist approaches to literary criticism, looks at how Shoneyin projects the reaction of the African woman in the face of depravity, corruption, sexploitation, and oppression by demystifying masculinity and patriarchy. Shoneyin's special use of the scatological narrative technique succinctly describes how the woman is subjugated by patriarchy and how she uses her physical and mental capacities to circumvent it. This paper is discursive and shows how Shoneyin effectively uses the pathetic situation of the woman in the text to saliently describe the subtle but forceful ongoing role reversal between the genders in Nigeria. The paper concludes that gender politics is enforced by patriarchy and is sustained by the politics of economic subjugation of the female, and that the best way to transform things for the African woman is through positively aggressive changes.

KEYWORDS: Radical-feminism, Emasculated Patriarchy, Scatological Narrative, and Polygamy.

INTRODUCTION

Lola Shoneyin's writing is in a class of its own. She startles her readers with the kind of themes she delves into, especially with her scatological language. She belongs to the "New writers", whose feminist concerns differ from their foremothers in Africa (Eze 2015). *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* uses specific diction, reflecting feminine empathy as a social and liberatory virtue, and canvases sympathy for the female characters. A critic, like Chielozona Eze, believes that Shoneyin

achieves a re-examination of African feminism, where language is used as a deciding factor, and she shows how the language of contemporary feminist writing is metamorphosing and taking a scatological tangent. Another scholar, Keziah Pam (2012), condemns Shoneyin for her “pornographic outlook”. However, many feminist writers tend to use an explicit, sexually descriptive, and graphically violent language to portray the mental, physical, and social dictatorship against the woman. They often argue that sex and violence are intricately interwoven, like war and displacement; that in a world dominated by patriarchy, the two are two sides of the same coin. For these writers, sexual pleasure and sexual violence form both language and strategy with which to explore and contest the treatment of women (Norridge 2012).

Recent feminist works such as Nwosu (2001), Kan (2008), Baingana (2008), Chikwava (2009), Unigwe (2009), Kwakye (2010), Adichie (2013), and Azuike (2019) present a refreshing view of the modern African woman. According to the authors, the modern African woman is not “docile or unthinking” as portrayed in older African fictive works. She is creative, assertive, productive, and proactive, and willing to subvert patriarchy and upturn the masculine universe by being in areas and places that were traditionally the exclusive purview of men. This is how we meet Shoneyin’s female characters in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*.

Opposing patriarchy is the main reason for radical feminism. It is a form of grassroots activism as well as intellectual activism; it challenges an issue like female disempowerment or poverty, which calls for a re-ordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts and equality, fairness, and justice are promoted. It seeks to abolish patriarchy by also challenging existing social norms and institutions. This includes challenging the notion of traditional gender roles, opposing the sexual objectification of women, and raising public awareness about such issues as rape, violence against women, sexuality, and reproductive rights, amongst others. To begin to do so, one must realise that the current social situations, indeed, disadvantage women tremendously.

Shoneyin presents the African woman in a sexist society that relegates womanhood to mere gender roles. Her narrative is not a moralistic tale (in the sense of the traditional meaning of morality of right and wrong); therefore, it will come across too many as disappointing. But it is a tale of the survival of the fittest in a patriarchal society. Shoneyin exposes the persistent inequality between men and women in Nigerian society, which contributes to the general disempowerment of women and their resultant lack of progress. This graphically affects the quality of life that the female experiences in the text under study. Shoneyin demonstrates a marked deviation from pioneer feminist writers in Nigeria, like Flora Nwapa, Buchi

Emecheta, and Zainab Alkali, who project themes that highlight the problems of being a woman in Nigeria and Africa, without radically challenging the status quo. With her fiction, Shoneyin plants her feet in the footsteps of radical feminist writers like Bessie Head and Nawal El-Saadawi, because the work not only espouses similar thematic concerns, but, using a heightened tone, she amplifies both Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) and Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1983).

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives is a novel of twenty-four chapters. Using alternating narration: from the omniscient to the first and third person narrators, the chapters vary in time, from before meeting Ishola Alao, referred to as Baba Segi, to the present. Each chapter is told from a different point of view, through which the reader pieces together the whole story. Given a background on how each woman finds herself with Baba Segi, the author captures the flavour of a paternalistic society, masterfully disentangling four distinct stories, only to subtly expose what is common among them. Despite the violent subject matter, Shoneyin integrates modern elements with a traditional African culture. The book is unputdownable and a tragi-comedy, with enough comic relief to keep one going. The stories are spiced with myth, parables, and folklore, leading to the gradual revealing of each character's secret; thus, the reader is privy to their emotions, ambitions, and worldview, which make the characters fully developed and dimensional in a few pages. This well-researched and well-developed novel is infused with many controversial issues like rape, abortion, murder, homosexuality, and infidelity; it is a bold and graphic depiction of polygamy. The rich humour and excellent wordplay in the novel manage to overshadow the issues at which conservative readers might take umbrage. The book is built around dynamic characters and events.

Typical of works that adopt the scatological technique of writing, sex is openly discussed; it contains strong adult language, laced with obscenity and violence. The plot of the story is original; the fiction has very little verbosity. It becomes effortless to hear the voices of the characters; the writing is clear and evokes emotions as well as believable reactions from the characters. With well-constructed sentences, powerful imagery, and code-switching, the story is told in a dramatic language. The narration juxtaposes time and space, serving as the backbone of suspense that pervades the entire piece. The work blends fiction with fact and employs irony and sarcasm, making the work satirical and earthy. The scenes are vivid, and the language warm and lively. The scatological imageries are very lucid. Her poetic

language depicts luxury, indulgence, and precision. She uses a lot of Yoruba idiomatic expressions in direct literal translation.

The fiction, set in Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria, is about the complex and intricate internal dynamics of Ishola Alao's family; his four wives and seven children. The fat Iya Segi, who harbours the latent feeling of homosexuality and an astute entrepreneurial skill, is the first wife and the 'mother of the house'. She is domineering and the unofficial power of the family. The meek and submissive Iya Tope is the second wife, a woman whose compassion is silenced by fear. She is forced to marry Baba Segi by her father, as compensation for a failed cassava harvest. Iya Tope has learned to be humble and adopt silence in the face of wrongdoing. Vindictive Iya Femi is the third wife; she endured physical and sexual abuse as a maid in the house of 'Grandma' after the gruesome death of her parents. These sufferings create a desire for vengeance that seems to blight her existence. The fourth wife is the almost mysterious Bolanle. She is driven by a complex self-loathing because of a teenage rape, to seek refuge in this polygamous household. She stands out in the family as a university graduate amid an illiterate husband and co-wives.

The husband, Ishola Alao, is a rich chauvinist who is supremely proud of his virility. Of all his wives, Bolanle is the only woman he has chosen by himself, while the other three have been thrust on him by circumstances. Perhaps this explains why jealousy rages amongst the older wives from the first day Bolanle steps into the house. Despite all the ill feelings borne towards her for being more educated and polished than they are, Bolanle bears their jealousy with quietness and acts with grace towards them; she treats their children with kindness, too. However, their envy and fear are not propelled by the mere fact of her presence in the house, but a realisation that their deep-seated secret will be exposed by Bolanle. The wives, therefore, resort to pushing her out. In the bid to get rid of Bolanle, they execute all sorts of diabolical plans against her, which eventually lead to Segi's death. Nevertheless, all that the husband wants from Bolanle is a child. On the advice of Alao's friend, the Teacher, Bolanle is taken to the hospital to find out why she has not gotten pregnant despite sleeping with her husband. This becomes the catalyst for the exposure of betrayals and lies in the Alao household.

DISCUSSION

Writings by African women arrived on the literary scene much later than their male counterparts. Cultural impediments to the education of women, coupled with the Western sexism of the colonial system, kept girls out of the earliest missionary

schools. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) was Anglophone Africa's first female novel, while Therese Kuoh-Moukoury's *Rencontres Essentielles* (1969) was the first novel to be published by a Francophone woman. Women's writings arose out of the desire to introduce a female perspective to the socio-political vision of Africa portrayed by male writers and to address issues relative to female subjectivity to expose cultural impediments. Female African writers have treated a wide range of themes: position and role of women as mothers and daughters within the institution of marriage, especially polygamy, the encumbrance attendant on traditional role prescriptions for women, and gender inequality are examples.

Shoneyin provides a detailed documentation of the multiple productive and reproductive roles that women in various parts of Africa perform. Shoneyin carefully portrays the richness and complexities of the life of the African woman while also attending to her multiple roles and responsibilities as daughter, mother, wife, and sister. As such, her fiction provides a valuable counterpoint to the prevailing discourse on African women that centres on their marginalisation and victimhood. The women she describes are not the initial architects of their lives and livelihoods but are taking conscious and deliberate steps to right many wrongs, taking their destinies into their own hands. Reproductive rights are cardinal for women, and in the story, this involves freedom to make choices to give birth, have an abortion, use birth control, or even get sterilised. The tale shows reproductive rights as a basic human right, expanding it to include much more. For Shoneyin, the right to reproductive freedom must include not only women's right to choose childbirth or abortion, but also her right to make those choices freely, without pressure from men, be they husbands, doctors, governmental, or religious authorities. The author depicts it as a key issue for African women, since without it, the other freedoms they appear to have, such as the right to education, jobs, and equal pay, may prove illusory.

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives is showcased as a powerful, mature, and absorbing work, especially the author's treatment of womanhood. The use of language exhibits precision in capturing and transfiguring minute details of individual lives and social experience. It explores and celebrates women's lives and experiences with candour, grit, wit, and insight, making this multi-protagonist novel highly satirical. Throughout the story, one sees the fragility of the relationships of the wives and their desperate attempts to protect the picture-perfect mask they choose to wear. Shoneyin projects these women as representing an idea, an idea of hope for the African woman. This idea makes the story, which could have been hackneyed, become elevated by the voices of the character-narrators to something higher, more like a psychoanalytic study of the women. Shoneyin's women have very different backgrounds with different personality traits.

All the principal characters in the story are seriously flawed in one way or the other; this is why the tale is so engrossing. These weaknesses are shown to be the impact of patriarchy on these women. To understand any one of them, one needs to first understand them all. They represent the African woman, and to understand the whole, one must grasp the parts. Iya Segi represents administration, commerce, and industry; Iya Tope represents simplicity, passion, and domesticity, while Iya Femi represents feminine wits, craftiness, vengeance, and resoluteness. Bolanle represents the educated, authoritative voice of reason and society. The characters are projected as ordinary people, on different paths, but trying to survive all the same. While one can commiserate with Baba Segi, there is not enough time to spend with him; the book gives the female characters amplified voices. It is a radical book about women; therefore, the male characters are deliberately emasculated.

The woman in traditional Africa has been the backbone of production. Many writers have echoed this in different ways, like Phaniel Egejuru in *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* (1993), who shows how the cassava, an archetype of femininity, sustains the people and ensures the survival of the community. Shoneyin shows the woman excelling in production and taking over, relegating the man to the background, achieving in the process what the man is unable to do. Iya Segi's mother and her friend, Mama Alaro, dwarf the achievements of men in the book. Both lead a successful life without a man by their sides, raising children as single parents, in vocations that were traditionally an exclusive masculine preserve. Highlighting these women and Iya Segi, who at the age of eighteen was told:

‘... you cannot buy land and build your own house. The village men will say you are ridiculing them, doing what they can’t!

‘But it is just a house, Mama!

‘And they will tear it down and burn it, daughter!’ (97- 98).

The quotation above reveals a patriarchal culture of ineptitude and how it is used to subjugate and limit the woman. The women in the narrative are not leeches, out to use the man's money for lace and gold, nor are they lazy, content to sit idling away, just because they are married. Iya Segi, like her mother, is a shrewd businesswoman. After losing her life-savings to her “future husband”, she starts a business in the house, selling sweets, to eventually owning “eight cement shops in Ibadan alone.” and now her “...wealth swells by the day.” (104) Iya Femi is a hardworking maid with dreams of marrying the madam's son. Bolanle's mother articulates the image of the modern African woman in these words:

I am not bringing my children up to be beggars... I want you and that glutton sister of yours to own houses and cars. I am bringing you up to be able-bodied

women who will fight for prosperity and win. No one enjoys success if they do not work hard for it (93).

Iya Segi's mother also puts it this way: "Only a foolish woman leans heavily on a man's promises" (97).

Africa is largely a patriarchal society; this has had a negative impact on women. Inequality of the sexes is high in African societies, not only because of issues such as female genital mutilation, sexual abuse, and violence against women or unequal access to land or education, but also because women are systemically disempowered in their private lives. Basic things such as being able to aspire to any career of her choice, the right to own land, and access to finance are all areas that require breaking down barriers. This informs Shoneyin's anger in the text and was also the constraint of Iya Segi in her younger days. While she makes a concerted effort to follow her money (that she loses to Baba Segi, in the name of marriage), she says, "as my money grows, my path to freedom becomes clearer." She believes "Baba Segi will breathe his last one day, and my money will return to me. I will pile it on top of the money that I have now ... I will leave this city and return to the village ... and build a four-storey building" (104-105).

Iya Femi was forcefully disinherited as a child by her uncle and literally sold into slavery. In the process, she becomes a woman on a mission; a mission of vengeance against patriarchy, which truncates her life and future. She runs from Grandma's house into Baba Segi's, where she begins to plot her rise to prominence and the recovery of that which she lost in childhood. She makes Tunde, Grandma's son to father her children, since "a girl cannot inherit her father's house" (121). She sets about creating a different inheritance. Her choice of Tunde is calculated to get back at Grandma and at wealth, to secure the future of her children. She never intends to stay with Baba Segi all her life; she sets ablaze her disinherited house to show anger towards patriarchy.

While El-Saadawi's (1975) Firdaus walks away from marriage in *Woman at Point Zero* to own her body and destiny, as a protest against patriarchy, Shoneyin's characters stay in the unequal union but take power away from the man, emasculating him. Shoneyin portrays men as tools used to achieve an end and nothing more. This is a bold feature of the male characters in the book. Iya Segi's mom says: "The penis between their legs is all they are useful for ... if not that women needed their seed for children, it would be better to sit on a finger of green plantain" (97).

With this, Shoneyin's aim to dismantle patriarchy, rather than adjusting the system, is clear. Therefore, Iya Segi mused: "If my husband did not have seed, then what harm could it do to seek it elsewhere? ... So, I found seed and planted it in my

belly” (215). Radical feminism opposes patriarchy and oppression, not men. To equate radical feminism with man-hating is to assume that patriarchy and men are philosophically inseparable. While Baba Segi wants the women to look like “Old Oyo goddesses” (42), a reflection of traditionalism and the old ways, the women are futuristic. Shoneyin seems to support a moral trajectory that classifies “Seed planting” to organ donation and the medical practice of transplantation.

The author’s treatment of intense subjects that society keeps well under wraps, like lesbianism and impotence, is illuminating. Heterosexuality was an unchallenged patriarchal assumption. Homosexuality in African societies and literatures was stigmatised and portrayed as either an “un-African” activity or attributed to Western influences in Africa. Most African literature depicted homosexuality negatively (Dunton: 1989). Shoneyin did not treat homosexuality negatively or as a by-product of Africa’s contact with the West. The author seems to promote the idea that the ultimate freedom lies with one’s ability to come to terms with their own pleasures. She projects sex as a metaphor for freedom; her projection of the queer philosophy assumes that a woman does not need a man to be happy. Left for Iya Segi, she would have been happier with her money and the “Tomato girl” or with Yemisi, Bolanle’s friend. The author’s conveyance of the images of homosexuality through Iya Segi challenged African stereotypical views. She presents Iya Segi’s lesbian tendency as the rage of all women, condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society cares to allow. These needs and actions, over the years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, accepted ways of thinking, feelings, and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war. Iya Segi’s sexual preference was moulded by her mother’s incessant attack on patriarchy.

EMASCULATED PATRIARCHY

Shoneyin’s fiction deconstructs the symbolism of male supremacy and phallocentrism. As Bolanle observes, the man “came to terms with his emasculation a long time ago” (173). All the males in the fiction are somehow flawed; they are described by words like “men are so simple. They will believe anything.” (74) and “men are like yam. You cut them how you like” (75). While the narrative explores the figure of the penis and its connotation of machismo, the fiction demystifies the over-bloated masculine ego using the character of Baba Segi. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*, unlike previous polygamous accounts within the corpus of African literature, like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ba’s *So*

Long A letter (1981), does not paint Baba Segi as the stereotypically deceitful and selfish African polygamist, instead, it presents a different view on polygamous unions, further emphasised by the fact that all of Baba Segi's wives do not have any initial problem with being a member of a polygamous union, Bolanle says "I am here because I want to be here!" (61). However, Baba Segi echoes Achebe's character, Okonkwo, who, according to Joseph McLaren "May have created a universalised image of African males as wife beaters" (2010, 60).

The author reveals the inability of logic in the practice of patriarchy and its use of violence and brute force to resolve issues. This is why the author muffled the masculine voice, portraying men as weak in the text and driving many to tragic ends. Shoneyin may be accused of portraying men as bad as men portrayed women in earlier fiction, herself becoming guilty of the crime she seeks to correct. According to Achebe in "The Novelist as Teacher," "... It is like countering racism with anti-racist racism (2007,105). Men are portrayed negatively, thus: The Landlord in the text is not only a loose character, but he is also shown flirting with girls younger than his son, he is controlled by his wife; he dies in the hands of armed robbers. Alao, Baba Segi's father had died the death of fools, we are told, in a trap he set with his own hand. Bolanle's father could not weather the pressures of life; he became an alcoholic. Iya Segi's father "pursued another woman's hole and died inside it" (97). The Teacher is impotent, and the highly endowed Baba Segi is sterile; Taju's brother, the flirtatious Faruku, drove to his death. Tunde is an irresponsible "hedonist" who "wants to die both under and inside a woman who is not his wife" (136). The meat-seller is a male prostitute, while the croakers' seller in the market is a thief. The male characters in the novel do not show their female counterparts the regard and respect they deserve, driving characters like Iya Segi's and Bolanle's mothers to be bitter and resentful towards men. While Baba Segi's initial ambition for his son is to "grow big and strong [and] marry many wives" (10), Shoneyin's real lesson becomes clear in Baba Segi's advice to Akin; "When the time comes for you to marry, take one wife and one wife alone... listen to your wife's words...listen to the words she doesn't speak" (238).

The marriage of Iya Segi to Ishola achieves a confiscation of patriarchal power. No male member of both families was consulted; the overall impact is that the marriage ceremony is the best and most lavish the town has ever witnessed. The "woman power" comes to the fore with the realisation that the groom is penniless, and the foundation for his later economic success was rooted in his bride and the decisions of the mothers. The women in the text exert subtle power and control. Shoneyin presents a powerless patriarchy by exploring the universal theme of action and reaction.

The chauvinistic actions of Ishola Alao are not a natural proclivity but are adopted from his environment and culture. To survive this sociology, the wives employ creative deception, a necessary evil that serves a 'mutual good'. As Iya Segi observes, "the choices we have to make in this world are hard and bitter" (51). As condemnable as some of their actions are, a proper assessment can only be achieved when Alao's and his wives' actions are viewed through the same prism. The trajectory that the woman takes allows her not to be lost in the maze of choices.

There is a scatological reference to Baba Segi's sexual encounters and constant bowel movement when things go awry. He represents the African male, and his behaviour becomes symbolic. Baba Segi is not portrayed as the most desirable of his species. The fact is, with his farting, burping, vomiting, urinating, excreting, and some other gross bodily habits, he sounds quite vile. He is corpulent, clumsy, and awkward. He is described as a "flatulent pig" (131). He is brutal and has no restraint in physically assaulting his wives. Although the patriarchal acquisition of "four wives" describes "libidinal feats" (4), the man is shown to be of low cranial capacity. Iya Tope accuses him of being "undiscerning" (48 and 87), and that Iya Segi "owned his mind and did with it as she pleased" (48). Men as portrayed by the author in the text are "simple" (74), "nothing" and "foolish" (97). If virility represents patriarchy, "man" in the text is made powerless. Baba Segi is sterile, and Teacher, the epitome of patriarchal wisdom in the book, is impotent. This powerlessness is further accentuated by suggesting that the African woman lays the foundational bricks for man's economic power.

The penis is generally the symbol of manhood, the archetype of his power. Shoneyin projects this power to be a cruel one. While the woman uses cunning power to bring in and nurture life, the male is depicted as a brute. His penis, which is representative of his rulership and position, carries the imagery of harsh equipment, the instrument of pain. Man's sexual organ is called baton, (50) and hammer (132), giving "lashings from his penis" (102) that brings, "pain in my belly which spreads through my back and up my neck to my ears." (103) Iya Tope complains "There were weeks I ache so much I could hardly sit" (83). For Bolanle, sex is never 'love making.' "There is no pleasure in the pleasing, no sweetness in the surrender...he just rams me into the mattress...he returns at midnight to hammer me like never before ... if there was a moment when the memory of being raped becomes fresh in my mind, that was it" (43-44). After Bolanle's first night with Baba Segi, the wives taunt her "you didn't expect to get that sort of thigh-thumping ... does your back ache?" (50) Iya Tope recaps "after a night with Baba Segi, the stomach is beaten into the chest by that baton that dangles between his legs" (50).

Shoneyin uses the scatological narrative technique to puncture the male's inflated ego that equates sexual prowess to the conquest of the female. Baba Segi brags "how Bolanle was as tight as a bottleneck, how he pounded her until she was cross-eyed; and how she took the length of his manhood on her back-splayed out and submissive." (4) The emasculation of the man becomes clear when reader realises that Baba Segi's 'huffing and puffing' and "pounding has proved futile" (4), though he has a humongous penis, "so big that two men could share it and still be endowed" (132), he was shooting blanks. The story ends that "Baba Segi's big testicles were empty and without seed" (242), making Baba Segi a satire of patriarchy and of masculinity.

Patriarchy is manifested in the text to gravitate towards a destructive proclivity towards the woman. Thomas, the rapist in the tale, has all the trappings of patriarchy: big car, big house, electric generator, air-conditioned house, the inklings and semblance of power; he uses it to scar Bolanle for life. That is his only contribution to the story, as he vanishes as quickly as he appears as a character, but his calamitous impact remains throughout the story. This gives an understanding of rape as an expression of patriarchal power, not a search for sex. Equally, the author gives an understanding of prostitution under patriarchy as the oppression of women, sexually and economically.

A close reading of Shoneyin reveals prostitution to be the cornerstone of patriarchal domination and sexual subjugation of women. In prostitution, women have sex with men they would never otherwise have sex with. The money acts as a form of force, like physical force does in rape. She uses the women of Ayikara in the text to affirm and reinforce the patriarchal definition of women as having the primary function to serve men sexually. This practice, which is based on a highly patriarchal construct of sexuality: that the sexual pleasure of a woman is irrelevant or that her only role during sex is to submit to the man's sexual demands and thrusts, appears as a form of male dominance which reduces a woman to a mere instrument of sexual pleasure for the man.

Shoneyin, through her characters, argues that sexual liberation for women cannot be achieved if women normalise unequal sexual practices where the man dominates the woman. While Bolanle equates Baba Segi's sex to rape, the other wives get sexual satisfaction outside the marriage. Men use the services of prostitutes because they enjoy the "power trip" they derive from the act and the control they have over the woman; they eroticise the domination, humiliation, and coercion of women, and reinforce sexual and cultural attitudes that are complicit in rape and sexual harassment.

Baba Segi's wives depict a usurpation of male power. Shoneyin's choice of register reflects empathy for the condition of the woman; she depicts polygamy as an inherently vulgar concept, where only the man is allowed to have and enjoy multiple sexual partners, while the woman is expected to be satisfied by the "ration" she is allotted. Iya Tope complains, "Bolanle's arrival would disrupt the sex ratio... now ... one of us would have only one night a week" (47-48). Bolanle analyses "2.33 nights with Baba Segi became 1.75 and his affection already thinly divided, now had to be spread amongst four instead of three wives" (21). Shoneyin, therefore, empowers her characters to improvise, to satisfy themselves sexually. This blanket support for radical feminism is a call for women to get what they need or want without waiting to be given it. The work deflates the argument that there may be some benefits to polygamy. Since the text portrays women as inherently creative, they would have found alternative lifestyles that would cater for their financial and emotional needs. The text also shows that to submit to patriarchal subjugation for economic reasons is lazy and defeatist.

CONCLUSION

Feminism is an advocacy for equal rights and equal opportunities for all. It empowers women in a deeply patriarchal society and challenges injustices perpetrated against them. The basic principle of the feminist theory and movement is that the right of the woman is a human right. It emphasises the fact that women are human, with human needs for self-actualisation, dignity, self-determination, and security, just as men. Radical Feminism is propounded in the text by Lola Shoneyin as being an absolute necessity for African societies if they wish to witness rapid changes for women. The female characters in the text thus reveal that the first objective for the Nigerian or African woman is the imperative of family building, which is crucial to nation building.

Going beyond the boundary of the patriarchal definition of marital faithfulness, Baba Segi's wives created a devious means to be faithful in finding a solution to their husband's sterility, protecting his image, and ingeniously building a family in his name. This achieves a revolutionary transformation of gender relations in favour of women, long oppressed by patriarchy. By the actions of Baba Segi's three wives, gender role is upturned in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The novel is a prime example of radical feminist writing in which traditional values that keep women in bondage are cast overboard, and startling novelties are celebrated in the name of female emancipation. The tragedy for the man in the text is that he is

oblivious to all that is happening right under his nose, which Shoneyin emphasises as a testimony to his foolishness.

The female characters in Shoneyin tend to showcase the strength and versatility of the African woman. The author also shows that females can equally hold their masculine counterparts' captives through their impudent tactics. As the author shows the plight of the woman, she also hints at the power of the woman to determine or control her sexuality. The work does not fail to cite the need for emancipation, not for the feminine folk alone, but also their masculine counterparts. The scatological language is a challenge to the oversimplification of the purported role of women in Africa, which states that they are only here to please men and to procreate.

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