The Secret Lives of Polygamous Wives: African Feminist Consciousness and Writing in Selected Nigerian Polygamous Narratives

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Plagiarism Declaration

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Abstract

This dissertation considers three novels by Nigerian women writers, which grapple with patriarchy within the context of polygamous marriage. These novels are *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) by Lola Shoneyin, *Stay with Me* (2017) by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) by Buchi Emecheta. This dissertation examines the ways in which Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta demonstrate African feminist theory and consciousness in writing women characters in these novels. These authors not only expose patriarchal systems but also write women characters in ways that distance them from past, static, and stereotypical representations by male writers of African literature. This recasting of women characters gives the women characters a sense of agency, room for potential friendships and releases them from the pressures of being blamed for infertility. Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta expose how patriarchal rule in these novels manifests in more than one way. Traditionally, this rule comes from the man or husband; however, it is also enacted by the other wives in the marriages represented, as well as the mothers of patriarchs. Since African feminism concerns the liberation of women, it is vital that polygamous marriage narratives such as these are investigated as these kinds of marriages are often considered patriarchal.

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Chapter I: Introduction

"God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?"

— Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*

"*iyale – first wife.* It was a verdict that marked me as not woman enough for my husband."

— Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, *Stay With Me*

"I must think of the words that I will say to her. Perhaps it is too early. And the other wives would call me a traitor."

— Lola Shoneyin, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

In an interview with Wana Udobang, Lola Shoneyin mentions that by writing *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, she wanted the voices of the wives to come through and be the strongest voices heard (Udobang). She elaborates that the opportunity for the elevation of these women's voices does not arise often and that women who remain in polygamous marriages do not want to voice their personal views because an exposure of matrimonial secrets may impact the entire family negatively (Udobang). African feminism creates a space where women's oppression can be critically discussed, therefore attempting to dismantle systems of oppression such as patriarchy. For the purpose of this dissertation, I intend to locate my discussion within the framework of African feminism. Lola Shoneyin, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ and Buchi Emecheta all make use of this feminist space to project the voices of their women characters and the marginalisation such characters may be facing. Drawing on the definitions of Akinbobola, Maathai, Atanga and Steady, I define African feminism as a paradigm that is deeply concerned with the intricate dimensions of

sexual, class, cultural, and racial oppression in relation to the African woman. The aim of African feminism lies in the pursuit of emancipation from these intersecting layers of oppression, simultaneously advocating for an inclusive feminist discourse that prioritises women as autonomous human beings rather than relegating them to sexual or submissive roles. This framework of African feminism is notably concerned with the realities of these women and accounts for the diversity of these women's histories and cultures with an awareness of the impacts of colonisation on these dimensions.

This dissertation will examine the ways in which Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta demonstrate African feminist theory and consciousness in their writing of women characters in their novels depicting polygamy. The three authors not only go out of their way to expose patriarchal systems and pressures within polygamous marriages in Nigeria, but also construct their women characters in ways that distance them from past representations of African womanhood by male writers of African literature. In this way, they give their women characters a sense of agency and room for potential friendships, and release them of the pressure of being blamed for infertility as women usually are in Nigerian cultures.

The primary texts considered for this dissertation are three novels written by these authors, who were born and raised in Nigeria, and whose novels grapple with patriarchy through exploring polygamous marriages. These novels are *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) by Lola Shoneyin, *Stay with Me* (2017) by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) by Buchi Emecheta. Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta show that patriarchal rule in these novels

manifests in more than one way. Traditionally, the patriarchal principles come from the man or husband; however, it is also enacted by the other wives in the marriage, as well as the mothers of the patriarch. Since African feminism concerns the fight for the rights of women and their liberation, it is vital that polygamous marriage narratives such as these are investigated, as these kinds of marriages are often considered patriarchal and it is very evident that patriarchs of different forms marginalise the women characters in these novels. The selected texts enable me to study Nigerian polygamous narratives and the different kinds of oppression that the women characters face, in addition to the different kinds of patriarchal oppressors that interact with these women characters. Furthermore, these texts allow me to explore different generations of Nigerian women's writing and the ways in which their writing responds to such oppressions.

Set between 1934 and the 1950s, between the village Ibuza and the city of Lagos in Nigeria, *The Joys of Motherhood* explores the story of Nnu Ego and her journey of motherhood in her polygamous marriage. Nnu Ego marries Amatokwu, a man of her own choosing, and cannot become pregnant due to her *chi* (spirit) preventing this. Amatokwu takes another wife who soon becomes pregnant and Nnu Ego's marriage ends. Nnu Ego later marries Nnaife and moves to Lagos. She does not respect Nnaife but accepts him as her husband when she becomes pregnant as she believes that this is the only thing that will make her a woman. Soon after, Nnaife's brother passes away in Ibuza and Nnaife inherits all of his brother's wives. Adaku arrives as Nnaife's new wife and this sets off rivalry between the two women. Despite this, the women bond at certain moments and go on strike against Nnaife as they are not given enough money to run the household. After an incident with Nnu Ego, Adaku decides that she will move away with her daughters and make her own comfortable life. Nnaife returns to Ibuza where he impregnates Adankwo, his

brother's wife, and returns to their home with another bride. Nnu Ego's sons, Oshia and Adim, decide to further their educations overseas. The novel ends with Nnu Ego returning to Ibuza where she dies several years later, alone by the roadside. Emecheta is a foundational postcolonial African feminist writer who has won a number of literary awards over the years.

Set between the years 1984-1999, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is a novel exploring the story of four women in a polygamous marriage in modern day Nigeria and their husband, Baba Segi. Baba Segi is the head of the family and is often described as overweight and strict in his expectations. His first wife is Iya Segi, *Iya* meaning 'mother of' in Yoruba, whom Baba Segi marries in 1984 and with whom he has two children. Iya Segi holds the importance of being the first wife and reminds everyone that she is the one who runs the household. Baba Segi's second wife, Iya Tope, married in 1989, is submissive and is often dominated by Iya Segi and another wife, Iya Femi. Iya Femi, married in 1994, is Baba Segi's third wife, and has two children. She is often depicted as materialistic and teams up with Iya Segi to control and dominate the other wives. Bolanhle, the only wife without the title *Iya* as she does not have any children, is Baba Segi's fourth wife, married in 1999. When Bolanhle arrives at Baba Segi's household, Baba Segi tries his best to impregnate her as quickly as possible. When this fails completely, his friend suggests that they visit a hospital to get Bolanhle tested as, according to the friend, this can only be her fault. Later, it is discovered that all the children in this novel have different fathers, none of whom are fathered by Baba Segi himself. It is found that Baba Segi is the one who is infertile and due to Bolanhle not having any other sexual relationships, she is unable to become pregnant. Bolanhle ends up leaving the household after a series of events when she is strong enough to begin dealing with her trauma. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* was well-received and was longlisted in

2011 for the Orange Prize for fiction and later went on to win the ANA/Ken Saro-Wiwa Prose Prize and the Josephine Miles Literary Award, both in 2011.

Set in 1985-1987 and 2008 in Nigeria, *Stay With Me* is a novel exploring a marriage that turns into a polygamous one. The novel chronicles the story of Yejide and Akin and their trouble conceiving a child. Akin's family becomes impatient with their childlessness and Akin's mother, without the knowledge of Yejide, arranges for Akin to take a second wife. Akin marries Funmi without consulting Yejide and his parents bring her to Yejide's home. Yejide once again tries to become pregnant and consults a *dibia* (traditional healer). She undergoes traditional rituals in order to become pregnant before Funmi does and this results in a phantom pregnancy. Later, Akin's brother, Dotun, comes to stay in their house and Yejide falls pregnant with his child, giving birth to Olamide. During the naming ceremony of Olamide, Funmi is found dead at the bottom of the staircase and soon after that, Olamide passes away too. In Yejide's third pregnancy it is revealed that Akin set up Dotun to impregnate her as Akin knew that he was infertile. Akin confesses to the reader that he pushed Funmi down the stairs and this is what had killed her. Yejide does not believe that this child will survive and puts little to no effort in this pregnancy and the care of this child. Soon after, she leaves her household and moves to another city. The novel is wrapped up with Yejide returning for a funeral in Akin's family some years later and being reunited with Akin and her now surviving child, Rotimi. *Stay with Me* was shortlisted for the Baileys Prize for Women's fiction, the Wellcome Book Prize, and later went on to win the 9mobile Prize for Literature in 2019.

There are a number of reasons for the selection of these particular texts. These novels all feature a polygamous marriage where the women characters struggle as individuals, as well as within their households. Furthermore, each of these women writers attempt to write in ways that focus on their women characters interacting in these patriarchal spaces. While I am aware that Shoneyin's and Adébáyọ̀'s novels are depicted within the Yoruba culture and Emecheta's within the Igbo culture, there are still many commonalities between the two cultures, especially in the ways in which the homes function. I am interested in how the different generations of these African feminist writers write stories of similar themes differently (I will discuss this further in chapter two), and how these themes of agency, motherhood, infertility, and platonic relationships with women run across each of the novels I have selected.

There are other women authors who have tackled polygamy in their writing, such as Mariama Bâ in *So Long a Letter* and Ama Ata Aidoo in *Changes: a Love Story*, and are significant in the discussion of African feminism and polygamy. I have, however, chosen not to include them in this study as my focus is on Nigerian Anglophone literature, while novels such as Bâ's and Aidoo's are set in Senegal and Ghana respectively. Furthermore, Bâ's work resides within Francophone literature and my intention was to avoid the use of translations altogether. The selection of novels set in Nigeria allows me to study writers who depict the pressures of polygamy on people in similar cultures and the impact of people and culture on gender dynamics. These selected writers write women characters who reflect these experiences. Through this, I am also granted the opportunity to study a single setting where the impacts of colonialism are similar and where the women writers have the same experience of putting literature out into the world.

Through examining the selected novels, I hope to show how Nigerian women writing Nigerian women characters demonstrate how agency functions, how gender dynamics are influenced by society and patriarchal function, and how womens' relationships with each other are impacted all within the context of polygamy in Nigeria. Until Flora Nwapa wrote *Efuru* in 1966, most of the representations of Nigerian women in Anglophone literature were written by African men. These representations placed women in subordinate roles and portrayed women as being docile (I explore this further in chapter two). *Efuru* sparked a change in the ways in which Nigerian women were portrayed in African literary canons in English, thus, enabling writers like Emecheta, Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ to come forth and write about other women and their places within society. In an early essay on the role of women writers in Africa, Ogundipe-Leslie writes that, "One of the commitments of the female writer should be to the correction of these false images of the woman in Africa" (Ogundipe-Leslie 8). Exploring these particular novels of Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta and the ways in which they have written their women characters, keeping in mind feminist theory and consciousness, is significant in taking a stand against how women were portrayed in the past.

Furthermore, in examining these Nigerian women characters and the space they occupy within the Nigerian traditional culture and community, as well as their homes, we see that Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta attempt to expose patriarchal pressures within polygamous marriages and how this can impact women's relationships with each other, which can then also lead to tragic events such as death in the case of Funmi or the daughter of Iya Segi. In my research around polygamous narratives and women's experiences within these narratives, I have further found that there is very limited literary work done around these narratives and the experience of women characters in these

settings. Therefore, by reading Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta's writing as layered with African feminist theory and consciousness, I intend to show how these writers write their women characters' experiences with agency, the pressures of infertility, and the friendships with each other all within polygamous marriages, which are often patriarchal. My research proves to be further significant because it builds on what Shoneyin mentions is her intention in writing *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*: allowing the voices of these women characters to be heard, and in turn, the voices of other women who share similar experiences with these characters.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, each showing how Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta write their women characters with feminist theory and consciousness in mind to critique polygamy. Chapter One serves to introduce the thesis, outline it's main arguments, and situate my study within Anglophone African literary traditions as a study of feminist, postcolonial literature on polygamy. This chapter further sets out the significance and rationale of my project. Chapter Two examines the literature around concepts such as Western feminism, African feminism, African writing and story-telling, and the three generations of Nigerian women writers. Furthermore, it explores the concept of polygamy and how other scholars have analysed this concept with regards to my three selected texts. In Chapter Three, I argue that Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta depict their women characters as people who seek their own freedoms, therefore granting them a sense of agency and thus distancing the representation of Nigerian women from earlier representations by African men. Chapter Four explores the representation of patriarchy in these novels whilst also drawing on Flora Nwapa's 1966 novel *Efuru*. This chapter further displays how Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ exercise their feminist consciousness in subverting the common literary trope of women being blamed for

infertility. Chapter Five investigates homosocial relationships between the women characters in these novels and the ways in which patriarchy hinders women from forming comforting relationships of solidarity and friendship. This chapter further shows how some characters resist patriarchy, therefore showing potential solidarity and breaking down of patriarchal hierarchies. The concluding chapter summarises my argument, highlighting what I have found in this study with regards to the three novels being studied, and further expands on why such a study is significant.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta's novels all contain layers of African feminist theory that are vital to dissect for my study. In order to begin studying these novels, it is important to investigate and draw on the relevant bodies of feminist literature and literary criticism. This literature review aims to do the work of drawing on particular fields in order to lay the foundation for my argment. I will first begin by exploring Western feminism's definition and origins as well as define important terms such as 'patriarchy' and 'Other'. Thereafter, I will explore African feminism, the debates around its formation and the reasons why it is more suitable in the discussion of African women than Western feminism. I will then proceed to examine African writing and demonstrate how African story-telling shifted from oral practices to written practices. Lastly, I will explore the three generations of Nigerian women writers as well as the concept of polygamy.

Western feminism

Feminist knowledge production and literary criticism use feminist perspectives to offer literary criticism. It therefore uses feminist theory and feminist politics to engage in its critique of literature. bell hooks attempts to simplify the definition of feminism in that she defines it as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks 1). hooks mentions that this definition does not put men as the enemy; rather, it names sexism as the problem and "implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult" (1).

Feminist literary criticism uses feminist ideological discourse in order to study the structure and language of the literature that is placed under this microscope (Guo). Many classic feminist theorists and writers began the conversation around equality, all of whom had a significant contribution to the field. Some of these classic feminist theorists are considered to be those who were involved in second-wave feminism, such as, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Mary Ellman, Elaine Showalter, to name a few.

The feminist 'wave' model, originating in the United States of America (USA), provides a great deal of information around the movements of feminism across time. The first wave of feminism took place between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in the United States. Many rights were denied to white women, namely, the right to inheritance, voting, initiating divorce, owning property, furthering education, attending court or serving on the jury (Lorber). Meanwhile, Black women in the USA were enslaved, regarded as chattel, and not as human beings. Thereafter, the second Euro-American wave began with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) (Lorber). Although Beauvoir's book was popular, the organised movement of the second wave only occurred around the late 1960s through the critique of Western society by younger people (Lorber). In the USA, it is argued that Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1952) started the US second wave of feminism.

The second wave expanded on the denied rights by adding nationality, race, class, and religion to it (Lorber). The third wave began during the late 1990s when younger people began to reject radical feminism and its idea that women can only be oppressed by men (Lorber). Third-wave

feminism accused women of oppressing women by hiding behind racism, colourism, and even classism (Lorber). This feminist movement is regarded as the beginning of the modern feminist movement and over the years, the concept of equality has developed into different feminist schools, namely, radical feminism, socialist feminism, liberal feminism, African feminism, post-modern feminism, Black feminism, and psychoanalytical feminism. Black women feminists were concerned with how white women who dominated feminist discourse and articulated feminist theory had no understanding of white supremacy as racial politics nor their political status within a sexist, capitalist and racist state (hooks). This pushed forward Black feminist thought, which specialises in the formulation and rearticulation of the distinctive and self defined standpoint of African American women (Collins).

'Patriarchy' and 'the Other' are two key terms used in feminist literary criticism. The word 'patriarch' is derived from the Greek words: 'patira', meaning family, and 'archy', meaning rule (Guo). Patriarchy is therefore known as the "social system in which men are the principal authority figures who are the central to social organisation, control of property, occupying leading roles of moral authority, political leadership and where male family members hold authority over women and children in household" (Guo 454). Throughout history, patriarchy has founded itself and is governed through the social, political, legal and economic regions of different societies. It further promotes the rule of men and the subordination of women. 'The Other' refers to those individuals who are alienated and who are under the control of other individuals or their surroundings (Guo). Therefore, women were seen as inherently weak and under the control of men and become the Other to men as well as the patriarchal society. De Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, notes that Western society was completely patriarchal and that the woman in this society was to be viewed as the

second sex, or the 'Other' by men (de Beavoir). Millett further mentions in *Sexual Politics* (1970) that "patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set themselves as the human form, the subject and the referent to which the female is 'other' or 'alien'" (Millett 25). Lorber mentions that while all of these feminist writers progressed in the West, Africa was not acknowledged in the West (Lorber). Therefore, the Western authors who wrote and the activists who fought for the rights of women in these parts of the world did not have an African audience in mind (Lorber). Due to this, I intend to depart from Western feminism and approach a more African feminist reading.

African feminisms

Buchi Emecheta, in "Feminism with a small 'f'" (1988) writes,

> Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f". (Emecheta 175)

When African women's novels in English were more popularised in the 1960s, the main goal was to eliminate the misrepresentations of African women and womanhood that were dominant in the existing African literature at the time (Mekgwe). The year 1966 is highly significant in African literary history for in that year, Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* had become the first novel by an African woman to be published in English, followed by Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (Stratton). Through their writing, African feminist writers and activists aimed to demonstrate that they were important to the context of Africa and that they did not aim to just imitate Western feminists and their

feminism (Mekgwe). African feminist writers attempted to move away from the "female stereotypes in African literature" (Ogundipe-Leslie 6). These stereotypes include, "the 'sweet mother', the all accepting creature of fecundity and self sacrifice…often conflated with Mother Africa", "the figure of beauty [that is] related to the stereotype of the woman as the passionate and sensual lover", and "the 'sophisticated city girl and the rural woman…contrasted in order to dramaticize the conflict of modernity and traditionalism" (Ogundipe-Leslie 6).

African feminist theory is focused on how African women on the African continent and diaspora interact with the many layers of oppression (Akinbobola). This movement was established as a result of patriarchy, slavery, and colonialism and has therefore experienced difficulty in its relationship with Western or Eurocentric feminism (Akinbobola). Western feminism paved the way for feminism in its writing, however, it is also important to consider that African thought has, until recently, been spread through the action of orality. Most African feminist thought has gone unrecorded as the notion of writing had not been the primary means of expression for a long time (Gunner, Ann and Scheub). Kolawole mentions that "African women did not learn about self-assertion from the West" (Kolawole 10), therefore, feminism can be traced back to pre-colonial times and is thus non-Eurocentric (Dosekun). Bakare-Yusuf explores how there are differing views on the degree that pre-colonial African societies were in effect patriarchal or whether they were merely characterised by gender complementarity (Bakare-Yusuf). However, it is commonly agreed upon that African women had more autonomy and authority than those women of the West, as well as that they resisted their subjugation and limitations around freedom (Dosekun). It is also recorded that African women in history and culture have been powerful figures, such as priestesses and queens, therefore, the women in Africa were "feminists before feminism" and were engaged

in self-determinism and agency (Dosekun 49). Andrade notes that when African, Nigerian literature is historically contextualised, Nwapa's writing of *Efuru* and the second wave of feminism in the United States coincides (Andrade). This contradicts the idea that the global liberation of women and the concept of feminism stems from the West (Andrade).

In order to read *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me*, and *The Joys of Motherhood*, a more suitable form of feminist literary criticism is required than the one that Western feminism offers. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Under Western Eyes* questions the manner in which Western feminism can be applied to women of the Global South (Mohanty). She argues that theories that are authored in the West tend to view developing nations as immature in a political sense as well as not developed enough (Mohanty). Mohanty argues that Western theories view and present as universal while hiding their own Western biases and concerns (Mohanty). Therefore, in order to read Shoneyin's Bolanhle, Adébáyọ̀'s Yejide and Emecheta's Nnu Ego, as well as the other women characters in these novels that they interact with, we require a more suited feminism, which is African feminism.

In Africa, Western feminism has remained questioned and viewed as being unsuited to represent African values (Atanga). It has therefore been viewed as a movement against marriage values, family and childbearing, as well as being against men (Stuhlhofer). Western feminism has been found to fall short of addressing significant issues of class, gender and race that impacts the African woman (hooks). African feminism pays attention to the diversity and histories of African women

who have faced colonialism (Maathai) and is concerned about the realities and the challenges that these women face on the daily (Atanga). African feminism can then be defined as a feminism that:

> Combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual, beings. It can be defined as that ideology which encompasses freedom from oppression based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual, and class biases. It is more inclusive than other forms of feminist ideologies and is largely a product of polarizations and conflicts that represent some of the worst and chronic forms of human suffering. (Steady 4)

Filomina Chioma Steady in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* further mentions that African feminism is concerned with the liberty of all people who are African (Steady). African feminism also engages with traditional African cultures without unfairly criticising them and acknowledges that culture impacts the lives of women (Steady). It can also be seen that the geographical location in which a woman finds herself influences her perception of feminism (Stuhlhofer). North African women may find themselves identifying more with Arab cultures while white South African women would identify more with Western feminism than African feminism (Stuhlhofer). Therefore, culture is inherently important in understanding feminism. Steady contends that for African feminism to thrive, it must be integrated with the engagement of the opposite sex. By incorporating men into its movement, it distinguishes itself from Western feminism in yet another significant aspect (Steady).

In the past, several African scholars were reluctant to use the word "feminism" as they found it to be associated with colonisation and racism, as well as the idea that men and lesbianism are hated (Ogunyemi). Due to this, it was found that it would be easier for African women to simply not make use of it in order to "avoid the distractions attendant with the name" (Ogunyemi 116). Thereafter, in trying to coin their own term, Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Alice Walker found that 'Womanism' would be a better fit (Ogunyemi). Ogunyemi initially theorised womanism for the global Black community, however, she later found a distinction and noticed that just as Western feminism, African-American womanism looks past the circumstances of African women (Dosekun). Hudson-Weems claimed "Africana-Womanism" is more aligned with the African woman and sees the word 'Africana' as a designation for the ancestral community (Hudson-Weems 22). Amina Mama, however, has mentioned that "changing the terminology doesn't solve the problem of [Western] global domination…[of] northern-based white women's relative power to define" (Mama and Salo 60). African feminists further argued that instead of renouncing 'feminism', it would be even better for African women to redefine it and to take control of it (Dosekun). Mama mentions: "I choose to stick with the original term [and] insist that my own reality inform my application of it" (Mama and Salo 61).

Ifi Amadiume, in the preface of *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, writes about how African women and African women scholars have progressed so much since the 1970s and its period of conflict around who defines feminism and all that concerns feminism (Amadiume). She writes that it is important for us not to be indifferent researchers and that African, as well as other third world women still have to play the role of exposing the incongruity in the societies in which they live (Amadiume). It is also vital to record personal social histories with the intention of challenging

discrimination against women and aim more positively for egalitarian societies that includes women (Amadiume). Furthermore, Amadiume highlights that there is a great need for more information and material that concerns women and that is collected and elaborated on by African and other third world women themselves (Amadiume). This work would then result in theories and methodologies that are suitable for research around women and their lives (Amadiume).

In the last four decades, numerous novels authored by African women have and are being published. Through this, we see that women are writing feminist fiction, and are therefore elevating the African feminist narrative. By intending to read *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me,* and *The Joys of Motherhood* as fundamental novels of African feminism, it is important to review the secondary literature that exists around these novels in relation to African feminism. Hayatu Bajeh's paper, "A Psychofeminist Reading of Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" (2020), offers a sociological approach that uses psychofeminism to view the psychological impacts of negative experiences on the women characters in these novels (Bajeh). Bajeh finds that the effects of patriarchy on the psyche of the women characters are what impact their decision-making, and concludes that patriarchal structures move beyond just the roles women play in society; rather, it affects the quality of their lives (Bajeh). While the findings of this study may be appropriate for my body of work, I find that the sociological approach differs from my literary approach.

In the exploration of Shoneyin's novel from an African feminist perspective, an intriguing secondary text is Sule Egya's paper titled, "The Gendered and Commodified Female Body in

Contemporary Nigerian Fiction" (2018). This paper explores how the female body is represented in fictional narratives and focuses on how the body is commodified and sexualised (Egya). This article further concludes that the female body is a victim of patriarchal power and hints towards inferiorisation, despite the author offering hope in their writing (Egya). This article speaks very closely to my intended argument, therefore, I aim to build on these points and highlight that the gendered and commodified body is a concept that links and runs through each of my selected novels, which also discuss the woman's body as use for commodification and merely as a tool for childbearing.

I have found a very small archive around Adébáyọ̀'s *Stay With Me* since it is a fairly recent text. Giffana Azizah's paper on "The Representation of Women Dominating Women in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*" (2019) offers the argument that Yejide's childless condition is what seems to make her subordinate in the patriarchal society that she lives (Azizah). They further argue that it is patriarchal culture that forces women to dominate other women in order to please and conform to male domination (Azizah). I further intend to build upon this idea as each novel that I analyse features abuse amongst co-wives, which is brought about by patriarchal dominance and the idea that pleasing a husband places one in his favour rather than in the path of his abuse.

Since Emecheta's novel was published over forty years ago, there is an array of literature surrounding it. Olusegun Jegede's paper, "A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" (2019), offers the use of feminist critical discourse theory to explore ideological issues such as inequality, gender, wife inheritance, sex roles, male dominance

and gender-based violence. This study finds that feminism seeks to empower women in order to promote equality between men and women rather than serving as an anti-idea that goes against men, culture and religion (Jegede). Furthermore, Bosede Afolayan's chapter on "Patriarchy, feminism and the African woman's quest for happiness in Aidoo's *Changes* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" (2020) offers a reading of the woman's quest for happiness, whether it be as a mother or as a career woman in the African context. It explores what it may mean for an African woman to be happy and whether the characters go on to achieve this happiness (Afolayan). Each of these texts expose the workings of patriarchy and the negative impacts that this system has on women. I intend to expand on this knowledge in this dissertation by adding a further, less explored avenue of African feminist thought that may be prompted by polygamous settings.

African writing and the three generations of Nigerian women writers

I locate my study within a much larger frame of African women's literary production that predates writing and publishing in English. I view the novels studied here as part of a literary canon which includes pre- and post-colonial oral literature, and oral modes of storytelling. Pre-colonial African societies used oral forms of expression to express myths, proverbs, folktales, and songs. This became a tradition and allowed people to carry tales from one generation to the next without forgetting. Women dominated this art of oral tradition and became performers and knowledge producers, whilst playing a fundamental role in panegyrical poetry, elegiac poetry, as well as dirges, songs, lullabies and love poems (Nnaemeka). Since these performances were central in spiritual rituals, women were visible in all ceremonies and showed their importance in both the physical and spiritual world (Nnaemeka). In the stories told through orality, women occupied the role of mothers and this was approached in a positive manner (Zampese).

Colonialism not only impacted the livelihoods of African people as they knew it, but also changed the literature and the way in which stories were passed down. When colonial power violently colonised the people of Africa, different cultures, customs, languages and traditions blended too, creating hybridity. This occurred due to the fact that British values were violently forced on people in these areas that were already rich in culture and history (Bhabha). The introduction of new worldviews in African oral cultures changed beliefs and customs and formed new ones with the help of literature (Zampese). As a result, Postcolonial literatures emerged as a weapon to use in writing back to the colonialists, adeptly utilising the colonial language and making use of it to combat the forces of colonialism. Colonial literature produced a completely flawed portrayal of men and women in literature, as well as the relationship between Europeans and African people. Therefore, when emerging African men authors began writing back, their beliefs and values were also flawed (Arndt). Their writing back aimed only to change the portrayal of African men, leaving African women to remain as is. When the African woman was discussed, she was presented as dependent, docile, mute and always placed in subordinate roles. The process of excluding women from history and putting them in the position of the subaltern was created by colonialism but was continued by emerging African men writers in postcolonial literatures (Zampese). The portrayal of African women in these ways did not change until the 1960s when African women began to be published in English for the first time. Even after African women began to write, they were still not given the same attention as their male counterparts.

At the time when African men began writing in English, they were easily assimilated to a nationalist paradigm and the inclusion of women in the culture and politics was non-existent

(Andrade). There was a perception that women were disconnected from nationalism, leading to a general assumption that they held no interest in politics. Women's writing emerging in this time was a political success in itself as women had not been educated to the levels that men were and women's writing was published significantly later than men's, as well in significantly smaller quantities (Andrade). Furthermore, when women began to publish in English, their writing was always dismissed and thought to be apolitical, therefore not interested in anti-colonial nationalist themes (Andrade). Contrary to the ideology that women were not interested in politics, there had been many moments in Nigerian history before this point in time where women surrounded themselves with political or nationalist thought and practiced it. The most well-known of the rebellions is the 1929 Igbo Women's War or Aba Women's Riot, also known as Ogu Umunwaanyi. Although women were seen to be apolitical, they rebelled against the colonial system and were still not recognised by men.

The first generation of postcolonial Nigerian women writers published in English began with Flora Nwapa. *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa was published in 1966 as the twenty-sixth novel in the Heinemann African Writer's Series but was the first novel published by a woman in this series (Akinpelu). Nwapa's novel pays attention to subverting the representation of women characters by men writers at the time. She aims to portray the woman as someone who should be economically independent and should not have to rely on any man to continue her life (Zampese). In an interview with Marie Umeh, Nwapa mentions:

> When I do write about women in Nigeria, in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are many women who are very, very positive in their thinking, who are very, very independent, and very, very industrious…The male writers have

> disappointed us a great deal by not painting the female character as they should paint them. I have to say that there's been a kind of an ideological change. I think male writers are now presenting women as they are. They are not only mothers; they are not only palm collectors; they are not only traders; but they are also wealthy people. Women can stand on their own. (Umeh and Nwapa)

The novels of Flora Nwapa and the plays written by Zulu Sofola are said to mark the beginning of the first generation of Nigerian women's writing (Shittu). This literature attempted to convert the image of African women as represented by colonialists and African men writers and address the power of the African woman, as well as motherhood, marriage, economic and emotional marginalisation (Shittu).

The second generation of Nigerian women writers were much more saturated than the first. These writers include, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Osonye Tess Onwueme, Omolara Ogundipe, Ifi Amadiume, Ifeoma Okoye, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, Stella Dia Oyedepo, Esther Bali, Remi Adedeji, Teresa Meniru, Helen Ovibiagele, Folashayo Ogunrinde, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, and Bunmi Oyinsan among others (Akinpelu; Shittu). These writers tackled social, political and economic issues and were more concerned with the deconstruction of Nigerian women's stereotypes and the fight against oppression and abuse that women suffered from (Shittu). Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* falls within this generation of writing.

It is said that the mid-1990s began the third generation of Nigerian women writers and they began writing in the period of economic and structural disjunctions that made up military rule (Shittu).

Granting that the authors of the third generation are much younger, this generation refers more to textual descriptions of women, cultures and/or religion since many of the writers in this generation live outside their country and operate between their country and Europe or the United States. These writers include Seffi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, Lola Shoneyin, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, Chika Unigwe, Tolu Adewale Gabriel, Sade Adeniran, Rosemary Esehagu, Tracie Chimah Utoh, Unoma Azuah, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Sarah Ladipo Manyika, Abidemi Sanusi, and Irene Salami among others (Shittu). Both Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Adébáyọ̀'s *Stay with Me* fall within this generation of writing.

Polygamy

Zeitzen (2018) identifies various forms of marriages where one spouse is married to multiple people. Polygamy is defined as a "marriage between one person and two or more spouses simultaneously" (Zeitzen 1). This breaks down into two further categories, namely polygyny, where a man is married to more than one woman and polyandry, where a woman is married to more than one man (Zeitzen 1). For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the term polygamy as it is the term used in the primary texts that I engage with as well as all the literature in reference.

In order to analyse Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta's novels, which all feature polygamous marriages, there should be some understanding of the literature around polygamy. Polygamy, the act of a man marrying multiple women, has been seen as a traditional, religious and cultural custom over generations and remains extensive throughout the world. According to Coult and Habenstein (1965), over seventy percent of societies around the world permit men to have many wives (Coult

and Habenstein). In 2020, Stephanie Kramer explored how "Polygamy is rare around the world and mostly confined to a few regions" for Pew Research Centre (Kramer). She discovered that currently it is only about 2% of the world's population that resides in polygamous households and most of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa where 11% of the population has more than one spouse (Kramer).

Polyandry, another form of polygamy where a woman is permitted to have more than one husband, can be traced back to Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and India, and has been common over many generations just as polygamy has (Thobejane and Flora). Polygamy is practised in traditional cultures as well as certain religions such as Islam and Hinduism. Muslims believe in the Qur'an, which supports the marriage of a man to multiple women (Thobejane and Flora). However, "polyandry, which entails a [woman] having many husbands, is strictly forbidden in [the Qur'an]" (Thobejane and Flora 1061).

It has been argued that the practice of polygamy is economically advantageous in cases where more people are earning an income and bringing money into the home (Thobejane and Flora). Many women in Kyrgyzstan offered that they would marry a man who is already married if there was a possibility that he would care for them and their children (Thobejane and Flora). However, it has also been found that negative consequences are also the result of polygamous marriages as there is a great amount of economic stress where the wives have not been able to offer adequate care for the children as well as these children not being given a good education due to poverty (Thobejane and Flora). This burden is then passed on to extended family members, who cannot

help due to their own economic problems in similar situations (Thobejane and Flora). Njoh (2006) further mentions that despite the negative consequences of polygamous marriages, African individuals continue to marry in polygamous contexts in order to resist a Western view (Njoh).

The above literature makes clear that the consequences of polygamy that the protagonists face in each of the selected novels for this project are not unique. There has been some significant secondary literature produced regarding feminist ideology. With regards to the subjugation of women, Chioma Emelone's paper on "Marriage and Procreation in Africa: The portrayal in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" (2020) argues that Shoneyin criticises this society that subjugates, oppresses and deprives women. The author further adopts a feminist approach in viewing these polygamous marriages and concludes that these marriages are contracted in patriarchal ways (Emelone). Just as with *Stay With Me*, the literature around *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is limited. Bwai and Pwajok, in their paper "Idealism versus realism: The complexities of polygamy in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" (2021), establish that the vision that those who want to practice polygamy are rather idyllic compared to reality and that above all, polygamy causes more harm than good (Bwai and Pwajok). To this end, I have found that Ben Mohammed and Matmar, in their paper "Traditions, polygamy and Education in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" (2016), argue towards reading Emecheta's novel with Walker's theory of Womanism. They argue that polygamy follows the authority of men and subjugates women (Ben Mohammed and Matmar).

In Ayele Almeida's paper, "To Be Happy Under My own Terms: Rethinking Polygamy in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" (2020), they offer that even though polygamy has a negative rating among women who are educated and writing about it, Shoneyin's novel presents this marriage as an interaction with the Self[1] (Almeida). They explore how, through the negative consequences, a woman has the right to happiness and may explore it through a polygamous marriage as well (Almeida). Amolo, in their paper "Co-wife Bonding in Sue Nyathi's the Polygamist and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" (2017), explores the portrayal of co-wife bonding and the impact of these relationships on the marriage. They conclude that the junior wives often feel inadequate, leading them to rivalry among themselves (Amolo). Furthermore, the authors expand on the idea that co-wives form mutual bonds of friendship. To add to this, Ndabayakhe and Addison, in "Polygamy in African fiction" (2008), offer that polygamous marriages are indicted as wholly incompatible with the hope of women's happiness and expression of Self. In my dissertation, I intend to build on each of these arguments rather than explore new ways to view polygamous marriages. I further intend to examine the ways in which patriarchal pressures in polygamous settings hinder women from forming homosocial relationships such as friendhips with co-wives, therefore, preventing them from living freely due to violence and marginalisation.

This dissertation will make use of African feminism to explore the context of polygamy in these narratives and the situations that these women characters find themselves in. It will highlight how these writers demonstrate African feminist consciousness by using African feminist theory in order

[1] In writing the word 'Self' with an uppercase 'S' throughout this dissertation, I refer to Carl Gustav Jung's concept of the Self as "the totality of the psyche" (Henderson 128) or a human being's feeling of wholeness.

to write their women characters and their narratives. Building upon the insights gained in this literature review, I now begin my discussion on how Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta write their women characters with agency.

Chapter III: Agentic Polygamous Wives

Filomina Chioma Steady, in "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective", mentions that the point of African feminism is to include all types of oppression, such as "racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions" (Steady 4) where "women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings" (4). She notes that African feminism can be seen as an ideology, which concerns "freedom from oppression based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual and class biases" (4). *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me* and *The Joys of Motherhood* all depict various forms of these oppressions. The presence of sexual oppression, economic oppression and cultural oppression is evident in these novels. These women characters endure sexual abuse from their husbands (this includes the pressures put on the women to bear children, as well as non-consensual sex), they fight economic struggles that exist from their pasts and presents, are bound by cultural and societal norms that are ruled by patriarchy, and are told how their lives should be lived, as well as the ways in which they should be submissive to their husbands. They are thus socially and sexually controlled.

African feminism considers cultural backgrounds and is inclusive of it, since culture is an important aspect that impacts the lives of African women (Steady). Similarly culture, or patriarchal ideas surrounding culture, in each of these novels impacts the lives of these women characters in setting unreasonable and sometimes inhumane standards for them. This includes being strictly submissive to the patriarch, being unable to have their own freedoms, and being a reproductive machine. In this chapter, I argue that when authors depict characters who actively seek their own freedoms, especially in patriarchal spaces like polygamous marriages, they grant them a sense of agency, thus trying to distance their representation of African women in African literature from the earlier representations of African women by androcentric African writers. I begin by exploring the concept of agency and the elements that make up agency as proposed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Thereafter, I investigate the representations of each of the wives across all three novels and their pasts in order to display a contrast between how they were in their pasts and how they moved to achieve agency in their own personal narratives later. I will then progress by showing how these authors create pathways for their characters to find or demonstrate a sense of agency, thus trying to distance the representation of African women from earlier representations written by African men who depicted African women as obedient and unambitious. Zulfiqar writes that "women writers utilise their novels to reclaim and reconfigure" (Zulfiqar 8) their identities from African men and culture. Through this, the authors demonstrate feminist theory and consciousness, which is defined by Okpokwasili as "understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in every day life [and] creat[ing] awareness in women of the ways [women] were victimised, exploited, and in worse case scenarios, oppressed" (Okpokwasili 37).

What is Agency?

Barbara Boswell, in her paper on "Overcoming the 'daily bludgeoning by apartheid'" (2017) explores the rethinking of the agency of women writers in relation to feminism. She simplifies what agency may mean by saying that it concerns "the amount of will and choice an individual is able to display in relation to oppressive structures in a given society" (Boswell 416). Furthermore, Boswell draws on De Lauretis' argument by explaining that:

> The concepts of agency and feminist subjectivity operate within a framework of the 'paradox' of woman, in which the subject of feminist theorizing is never fixed or unitary, but should, instead, be conceived of as the 'eccentric subject' which is produced through displacement and marginality – a political standpoint which keeps feminist theorizing relevant through its decentering of normative womanhood. (Boswell 416)

From this, it can be understood that women and their identities are shaped by their experiences of marginalisation around categories of race, sexuality, class etc. Women can be recognised as active agents who are capable of challenging structures of power such as patriarchy. It is the recognition of this within feminism that allows feminism to be impactful in contesting gender inequality.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) find that the discussion about human agency can be linked all the way back to the Enlightenment when it was debated whether it was moral and norm-based action or instrumental rationality that was the best expression of freedom (Emirbayer and Mische). They then go on to define that human agency is:

> the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination

> and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (970)

This definition holds the three different constitutive elements of agency, which Emirbayer and Mische call the iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation elements (Emirbayer and Mische). From these three, the one I am most interested in for my definition of agency and the work of this chapter is that of the projectivity element.

The iterational element focuses on actors selectively reactivating past patterns of action and thought in a routine-like manner (habits), therefore allowing the social universes to maintain stability and help sustain interactions, institutions and identities over time (Emirbayer and Mische). The projective element focuses on actors' use of imagination for their future whereby the current structures of thought and action may be reconfigured in relation to the actors' fears, desires and hopes for the future (Emirbayer and Mische). Lastly, the practical-evaluative element concerns actors' capacity to make informative judgements amongst alternative options when responding to emerging circumstances, challenges, dilemmas and evolving situations (Emirbayer and Mische).

The projective element is the one that exists between the iterational and practical evaluative element. When interacting with the projective element of agency, it is important to let go of the attention on the past and focus on how agentic processes impact the future of the actor or agent (Emirbayer and Mische). It is important to note that actors respond to challenges and the uncertainties of the social aspects of their lives and distance themselves from habits (as in the iteration element), traditions and schemas that restrict their social identities (Emirbayer and Mische). I find that the women characters in these novels often maintain the projective element of

agency where their past experiences motivate them to place attention on the way they prefer their lives to be in the future.

Lois McNay (2016) explores agency as a form of resistance. They mention that an expected blueprint for emancipation does not exist when looking at agency as resistance (McNay). Furthermore, it is found that "the pathway to freedom cannot be prescribed in advance – by exhorting women to reject patriarchal notions of femininity – but rather emerges in a spontaneous and relatively unpredictable fashion in the multifarious ways in which individuals enact gendered and other cultural norms" (45). McNay discusses agency as resistance in relation to improving feminism by stating that:

> Resistance moves feminism beyond the adjudicative mode of some of its formulations of agency as autonomy toward more open-ended and experimental forms of politicized ethics. Freedom is not about stipulating the way individuals "ought" to live but rather encouraging them to interrogate the limits of what appears to be natural and inevitable in present forms of identity and attempting to go beyond them. Resistance is predicated on a subtle understanding of the workings of power and desire in which it is unrealistic to expect individuals to reject wholesale the very symbolic structures through which they understand themselves as active subjects. (45)

Even if these wives are not seen as transparently resistant, we can argue that there is resistance against the patriarchal system demonstrated by the authors when they give their characters qualities of agency. This leads to a feminist perspective and feminist consciousness emerging from how these novels are set up.

Drawing on Boswell, de Lauretis, Emirbayer and Mische's definitions of agency, I define agency as the extent of volition an individual may possess in confronting oppressive systems. Agency holds the imaginative capacity to envision alternative futures where existing frameworks of thought can be reshaped in response to an individual's hopes, fears and desires. Furthermore, when shifting this definition to women as agents specifically for this project, we can find that these individuals can be acknowledged as proactive participants who possess the capacity to question and challenge dominant power structures, such as patriarchy.

The women and their pasts

In order to see how the women characters in each of these novels are written as wives who are given agency within their marriages, it is important to explore their positions before their marriages in order to highlight how a change in agency occurs between their past lives and their married lives. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Iya Segi is Baba Segi's first wife and is regarded as the senior wife. Iya Segi expresses that she did not particularly have a harsh background. Iya Segi and her mother lived in a little village, in a "tiny two-bed house" (97). She explains that she "never knew [her] father" (96) but grew up well, eating all that her mother "rammed into [her] mouth" (96). Iya Segi also comes across as independent from a young age, demonstrating agency and following her mother's example by keeping "a stash of money under [her] mattress" (97). She desired her own house but was not allowed by her mother as her mother explained that "the village men will say [she is] ridiculing them, doing what they can't" (97).

From her early years, Iya Segi demonstrates much self-sufficiency and shows agency in her desire to own her own house and have her own wealth independent from needing a husband for it.

Therefore, not much changes with her character with regards to agency after her marriage. After seeing the effects of her father leaving her mother and attempting to be like her mother in stashing her money (97), it would be suitable to suggest that she did not want to face the same circumstances as her mother. She builds so much wealth that she had to "hide it in old water pots in [her] room" (98) and was not bothered when men made fun of her as she knew that "their father' fathers could not have a fraction of the wealth [she] accumulated" (98).

Furthermore, Iya Segi's reluctance to marry and take a husband is explained when she mentions her feelings of "lust" (98) in observing the tomato-seller woman and directly says that she "women don't need husbands" (101) when her mother prompts her to marry. Her mother, being against men and belittling men constantly, changes her mind about them and makes it her "life's ambition" (98) to marry Iya Segi off when she finds Iya Segi "bathed in money, wearing the notes like a garment…naked but for [her] pants" (99) thinking and fantasising about the tomato-seller woman. Iya Segi narrates that her mother, from this moment, believed that she has "made money [her] husband" (99) and that "the root of [her] madness was money" (99). Although Iya Segi never directly mentions that she is queer, her description of the attraction to the tomato-seller suggests that she is at least attracted to women and does not desire to marry a man at all:

> When I saw her, courage failed me. My liver weakened and I could not bring myself to talk to her…A gasp escaped my lips every time she rolled her hips and jiggled the beads that adorned her waist…I can't explain why but I wanted her for myself. I wanted to build a house for her and keep the key between my breasts. I wanted to dress her in the finest *aso oke* so she could parade herself for my delight alone. I wanted to lock her between my thighs. (100-101)

Iya Segi's confession of "want" and desire in this excerpt provides the reader with insight into her sexual and romantic preferences and provides further reasons for why she is not interested in marrying a man or even bearing children (101). Even after Iya Segi's marriage, When Bolanhle's friends come to visit, Iya Segi has to hold herself back in her attraction to one of Bolanhle's friends: "I couldn't stop my gaze from returning to Yemisi…I jumped out of my armchair…so I could see Yemisi's perfect form. Ah if only desire didn't always carry trouble on its back. Now is not the time…" (75-76). Iya Segi consistently exercises conscious decisions about what she wants, always demonstrating agency throughout. She values wealth and continues striving to attain her dream of being rich and wealthy and adheres to that.

Even though Iya Segi knew that she would not want to marry a man, her motivating factor to do so is money and wealth. Her mother makes a deal with a friend, Mama Alaro, to marry Iya Segi off to the son (Baba Segi) and "ransack[s]" (101) Iya Segi's room to give Iya Segi's money "to a man who will be [Iya Segi's] husband" (101). Iya Segi's perception of Baba Segi is not one of a husband, but rather as a tool to re-attain her wealth and money and she confesses that she will follow him anywhere (103), thereafter saying that she "would follow [her] money anywhere" (103), thus equating Baba Segi with money and her lost wealth. Although Iya Segi held wealth and agency before marrying Baba Segi, these attributes did not prevent her from entering into a polygamous marriage, contrary to what many Western feminists may put forth.

Iya Tope was made Baba Segi's second wife five years after his marriage to Iya Segi through the decision of the patriarch of her family, her father (83), and after her "older brother declared that

[she] was ripe for marriage" (77). She grew up in a village of cassava farmers and at the time felt as though she was still a child (77). She narrates that she "thought like a child and enjoyed childish pleasures like pursuing ants as they carried away sugar lumps, and scratching hardened scabs from the edge of [her] old wounds" (77). She even confesses that she "conversed with friends that only [she] could see" (77), which were her "imaginary friends" (78). In still being a child and continuing in a pre-pubescent mindstate, she was expected to be "planting, grinding, drying and selling" (78) from the farmland and was expected to be "concerned that no one [had] turned their mouths to talk of marrying her" (79), like her sister who had many suiters ready to win her hand (79). Her parents expect adult behaviour and actions from her with her father enforcing it and her mother supporting it by mentioning that Iya Tope is so old that she is "bordering on decay" (77).

It is when the yield of the crops fails her father that he decides to marry Iya Tope off to Baba Segi as "compensation for the failed crops" (82). Her father markets her as an object – one that is "not a great beauty…but that is strong as three donkeys" (81) and whatever that she "loses in wit, she gains in meticulousness" (81-82). This illustrates that her father, the patriarch, uses her as commodity in trade. He portrays her as a good candidate to be Baba Segi's wife by describing her qualities as virtuous (82) and a gain for a husband even though he, himself, does not think so. This is very similar to strategies used to sell objects. Baba Segi marries her, even though she is a child on the brink of puberty and makes her feel like she could not say anything about it (82). She attempts to speak to her father, however, she is met with his inability to look at her and a final statement: "I have made my decision and it's final" (83). Therefore, showing that she did not have any agency even then.

Iya Femi chose to marry Baba Segi as his third wife in 1994. A month after the death of her parents, Iya Femi's uncle and his girlfriend sold her off to a family to be a house-girl where she worked for fifteen years. Her uncle and girlfriend were interested in inheriting everything from Iya Femi's parents, leaving her with nothing. They further explained to her that "a girl cannot inherit her father's house because it is everyone's prayer that she will marry and make her husband's home her own" (121). The household she was forcefully sent off to was told that she is an "untamed animal" (123), and so, the woman of the house, Grandma, treated her badly. She was made to sleep in a "tiny space under the stairs… [on a] mat that was wedged beneath three wooden planks" (123) and was also physically abused where she was "cut…all over with a blade and rub[bed] [with] chilli powder into the wounds" (124).

Iya Femi was not allowed any romantic interests. The only interaction with a man that she relates is when Grandma "saw [her] speaking to the gateman [and] she stripped [her] naked, rubbed chilli between [her] thighs and locked [her] out of the house for a whole day" (124). It was only when Grandma fell ill that Iya Femi found the opportunity to leave. She was so desperate to leave the household before the ill Grandma returned that she paid Taju, Baba Segi's driver, to convince Baba Segi to marry her (129). Until this point, Iya Femi had not shown any form of agency. However, in her attempt to recruit Taju to get Baba Segi to marry her, she makes her first move as an agentic character. She later narrates how happy she was being away from that household and being able to experience the comfort of being a wife in Baba Segi's household. She mentions that "not even God Himself could have made [her] leave Baba Segi's house after that" (130).

Unlike Iya Segi and Iya Tope, Iya Femi and Bolanhle make the conscious decision to marry Baba Segi – both for their own reasons, therefore, showing that both these characters exercised some form of agency before entering into Baba Segi's household. Their backgrounds also seem to be harsh, leading them to choose what they think would be best for them by entering the marriage to Baba Segi. Bolanhle marries Baba Segi in 1999 and is often described as the "educated type" (55), different from the other wives who didn't know "which end of a pencil to set to paper" (4). Her decision to marry Baba Segi came from the fact that she was raped when she was a fifteen-year-old school girl.

Bolanhle also experienced an identity shift right after this when she "caught [her] face in the wing mirror [and asked] who are you?" (116). This develops into a struggle with the Self as she narrates:

> After everything happened, I tried hard to continue being myself but I slowly disappeared. I *became* Bolanhle, the soiled, damaged woman. Except that was hard too because Mama kept trying to make me do all the things the old Bolanle would have done. Don't you think you should get a job, Bolanle? Won't you apply for this bank job in the newspapers, Bolanle? Didn't you see the handsome boy that was looking at you, Bolanle! How could I tell her that I had failed to preserve my dignity? I was too ashamed to let her see the fickle shell I'd become. Inevitably, it became unbearable. The more she pushed, the more I resisted. I didn't want a job! I didn't want a white wedding! I just wanted the war between who I used to be and who I'd become to end. I didn't want to fight anymore. (16)

A separation occurs within Bolanhle's Self, between who she was before the rape and who she is after. She cannot bear to exist as before within herself and believes that the choices she makes are

the best for her and the current state that she is in after being raped, even if it is ten years later (110). Furthermore, the rapist's response to her silence is that she "should be happy… [she is] a woman now… [and she] should be thanking [him]" (116), pretending that he had done her a favour by horribly defiling her. Bolanhle further had to endure an unsafe abortion due to this in a hut with "planks knocked together, covered with corrugated iron sheets" (116) because "the risk of being seen [was] too high anywhere else" (117).

From these experiences, her reasoning for marrying Baba Segi becomes evident:

> I wasn't seduced. That *buffoon* [Baba Segi] was prepared to take me as I was. He didn't ask me any questions. Neither did he know a past he could compare my present with. I was lost and didn't want to do anything with my life. He was prepared to take me like that. All he wanted was for me to be his wife. Imagine how appealing that was to me! (151)

From this extract, it is evident that Bolanhle did not feel that she was worthy of a suitable husband because of her experiences and everything that she had to endure. She believes that Baba Segi and his polygamous household is the best fit for her, simply because she would "be able to empty [herself] of her sorrow" (16) and that Baba Segi would be a man who "accepted [her], one who didn't ask questions or find [her] quietness unsettling" (16). She believes that "younger men…[would] demand explanations for the faraway look in [her] eye…and Baba Segi was content when [she] said nothing" (16). Although Bolanhle is educated, her circumstances push her to deciding to marry Baba Segi and to enter this polygamous marriage. Once again, contrary to Western feminist thought, being educated does not hold her back from entering into such a marriage. Shoneyin demonstrates that sometimes the best thing for these women is to enter into

these marriages, such as in the case of Iya Femi as well. These women make strategic choices towards entering into such a marriage for their own benefit, thus exercising agency in a situation that for outsiders may seem oppressive. Although Bolanhle has a sense of agency in deciding who to marry, this decision is detrimental to her well-being. In Shoneyin writing Bolanhle's agency later in the novel, the author shows that this character has learnt how to use her agency for her own benefit when she leaves.

In *Stay With Me*, Yejide becomes Akin's 'first wife' or senior wife without expecting it. Adébáyọ̀ does not provide as much background information on each of the wives as Shoneyin and Emecheta do in their novels. However, she does show the reader the experiences of the wives when the marriage turns into a polygamous one. Akin introduces us to their problem of conceiving:

> Before I got married, I believed love could do anything. I learned soon enough that it couldn't bear the weight of four years without children. If the burden is too much and stays too long, even love bends, cracks, comes close to breaking and sometimes does break. But even when it's in a thousand pieces around your feet, that doesn't mean it's no longer love. (21)

Though they were under the pressure of being unable to bear children and their families questioning this constantly, Akin is still sure that he loves Yejide and that is the reason he is in this marriage (I explore this struggle with infertility with more detail in the next chapter). This, however, was not enough for Akin's family. His mother, after two years of his marriage to Yejide, would show up at his office with a potential second wife that Yejide knew nothing about (22).

When approaching Yejide to introduce the second wife, Funmi, the elders attempt to show her that this marriage will benefit her the most: "our wife, our people say that when a man has a possession and it becomes two he does not become angry, right?" (10). They also suggest that she will become pregnant once the new wife becomes pregnant as "the king in heaven may answer [her] prayers because of this wife. Once [Funmi] gets pregnant and has a child, [they] are sure [Yejide] will have one too" (10). They further express how they "appreciate" (12) her and "know [her] value" (12), which is why they have chosen a wife significantly younger than Yejide and that they know that she "will not take this new wife like a rival" (12), rather as a "younger sister" (12) and be her *iyale* (first wife). Yejide, as expected, is not happy about this and narrates to us that, "the word crackled in [her] ears, *iyale – first wife*. It was a verdict that marked [her] as not woman enough for [her] husband" (12). We are also exposed to one of her conditions before even courting Akin where she says, "I don't do polygamy" (24) and Akin mentions that he does not either. In Akin's marrying of another wife, we see that Yejide does not demonstrate much agency within the marriage and even when she attempts to reject the new wife, she is often silenced, ignored or ridiculed by Akin and his family.

Funmi is Akin's second wife who came unannounced into their home and was initially unnoticed by Yejide (10). Funmi was selected by Akin's parents as a second wife as they believed Yejide to be infertile and the children that would come from Funmi would continue their name. Akin mentions that "of the string of girls [his] mother paraded through [his] office every month, Funmi was the only one who didn't insist on moving in with Yejide and [him]" (23). He justifies himself by saying that "Funmi was the obvious choice because she didn't want much from [him]" (23) and that she was "an easy compromise" (23). Funmi also "didn't argue" (23) and waited for him to

settle into their marriage without any pressure. In Funmi pretending to show a lack of agency in accepting anything that Akin and his family gives her, she actually demonstrates more agency before and within the marriage without any of the other characters realising it. Her justification of trying to stay as far from Yejide and Akin's married life grants her the ability to demand for her needs and also puts her in the position where Akin pays for her lifestyle and she would not need to be employed.

In *The Joys of Motherhood,* Nnu Ego is the senior wife of Nnaife. Initially, she is happily married to Amatokwu in Ibuza, however, to her surprise, "there was no child" (31) as the months passed. Nnu Ego stayed married to Amatokwu for some time, even after Amatokwu took a second wife out of desperation to please his people (31). When Amatoku's wife became pregnant, he treated Nnu Ego badly and even abused her (32-35). Nnu Ego returned home and after some time, Agbadi, her father, asks her if she would like a man and a family of her own (39), to which her reply was: "when one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have children, and your parents have gone, who can you call your own?" (39). Nnu Ego is given an opportunity to decide for herself when she is with her own family, thus being able to show some agency. This agency is only present when she is with her own family and mostly disappears when she is married to either of her husbands. When Nnu Ego married Nnaife, she "despised" (45) him because of the way he earned a living, working for the British colonisers, and his appearance, which was "short… [with a] protruding belly" (45). She makes a promise to her *chi* (spiritual guardian) that she would "respect [Nnaife],… be his faithful wife and put up with his crude ways and ugly appearance" (47) if she could become pregnant.

Adaku, the second wife to Nnaife, was inherited by Nnaife from his dead brother, Owulum (135). Nnu Ego describes her as "ambitious" (135) because Adaku "made sure she was inherited by Nnaife" (135), but felt that she was "enviably attractive, young looking, and comfortably plump with the kind of roundness that really suited a woman" (135). Because of this, "jealousy, fear and anger seized Nnu Ego" (136) and she could barely stand Adaku. Adaku tried her best to make things work with Nnu Ego and concealed any dislike for her with just a smile (138). She also expresses that the only reason she came to live with Nnaife is because:

> All she wanted was a home for her daughter and her future children. She did not want more than one home, as some women did who married outside the families of their dead husbands. No, it was worth some humiliation to have and keep one's children together in the same family. (139)

Although Adaku's behaviour may have been threatening at times, it is clear that just like Nnu Ego, she wanted a home for herself and her children. Adaku demonstrates a sense of agency in her decision to marry Nnaife after his brother's death. Furthermore, the importance placed on her daughters' well-being shows that she does not only hold agency for herself but also sees her daughter as agentic performers in the future.

By delving into the lives of these women characters before their marriages, it is possible to see how they were either pushed into these marriages or chose them, and their reasons for choosing polygamy. The reader is also exposed to their past conditions and the factors that they consider in order to have a better future leading to them fulfilling the projective element of agency that is mentioned above. Across all three novels, we see that many of the women come from something harsh or had something unfortunate happen to them before their marriage. Iya Segi's money, what

she cared about most, was taken away from her without her knowledge. Iya Tope was commodified by her father and the rest of her family and was traded in place of cassava yield. Iya Femi was sold and lived a challenging fifteen years with strangers who abused her constantly. Bolanhle was abused and raped. Nnu Ego was treated badly and abused. Adaku lost her husband and was left to marry another suddenly.

In exploring these women characters' pasts, their positions before their marriages to their husbands becomes clear. We observe characters who have agency, such as Iya Segi, Bolanhle and Adaku who all make conscious decisions for themselves and characters who do not have agency, such as Iya Tope. Furthermore, we see that there are also characters who move between having agency to not having agency within their past lives such as Nnu Ego and characters who experience the opposite of this and move from no agency to agency, such as Iya Femi. In the next section I intend to analyse this agency and the ways in which these writers give these characters a sense of agency within their marriages.

Agency as demonstrated by the women as wives across all three novels

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me*, and *The Joys of Motherhood*, some of the wives in these narratives demonstrate agency within their marriages by confronting patriarchy, and it is revealed that this agency occurs in different ways. They go even further by holding a desired imagined future in their minds and respond to certain challenges or unsatisfactory aspects of their past lives in order to create a better future for themselves, while others are content with the situation that they find themselves in.

Beginning with *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, readers witness how Iya Segi uses her intelligence to manipulate Baba Segi into starting up a business for her. Her strategy began around the beginning of their marriage and after the birth of her children. To claim Baba Segi's attention, she would sit up and shake her head hopelessly in their marital bed (Shoneyin 73) and when that did not work, she "took to crying" (73) by using onions and "smear[ing] [her] eyeballs with onion juice" (73) since she felt that she could not genuinely cry. In Baba Segi's concern about not being a husband good enough to please his wife, he granted her "wish to have a small stall where [she] could sell sweets wholesale, interact with other women and learn of new recipes, the best household detergents on the market, [and] better ways to please a husband" (74). Furthermore, by making it sound like these tasks would benefit him, she also wanted to attend driving school and made it seem as if it were just to "take [her] children to day-care without them sweltering in the heat like poverty-stricken orphans" (74), therefore playing on his wealth and ability to take care of his family. Iya Segi demonstrates her agency through this manipulative strategy and actively tries to move away from her past where Baba Segi took her money from her mother without knowing, towards a future that is even better where she has more money, freedom, and even other skills such as driving.

After her minor wins, Iya Segi pushes even harder by convincing Baba Segi to start up a cement business for her and build a proper shop (74). Eventually, Iya Segi becomes a wealthy businesswoman with "eight cement shops in Ibadan alone [with her] wealth swell[ing] by the day" (104). R.W. Connell, in their book *Masculinities*, defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of

men and the subordination of women" (Connell 77). Alternatively, according to the American Psychological Association (APA), toxic masculinity is defined as adhering to traditional masculine norms, which can be proven as harmful to men and people that surround them (American Psychological Association). This definition includes men having power over women, acting out intimate partner violence, demonstrating aggressive behaviour, emotional detachment, and heterosexual self-presentation (American Psychological Association). Although these terms are not interchangeable, it is arguable that hegemonic masculinity breeds toxic masculinity. Therefore, Baba Segi's masculinity can be described as hegemonic masculinity, which then becomes toxic masculinity as he desires power over his wives and upholds traditional masculine qualities that sometimes become harmful to himself and others around him.

Iya Segi appeals to this masculinity and Baba Segi's thoughts that "he might not be a perfect husband if his wife is saddened" (73). She uses his wealth to an advantage where she can cultivate her own. Moreover, Iya Segi's agency is highlighted again when she mentions:

> Do not say I am greedy because I am not. It's just that as my money grows, my path to freedom becomes clearer. Everybody wants to be free from whatever binds them. Baba Segi will breathe his last one day and my money will return to me. I will pile it on top of the money I have now and the heap will be as hefty as the hills of Idanre. Then, I will leave this city and return to my village. I will buy a big marble head-stone for my mother. I will burn down her bungalow and build a four-story building in its place. From the top balcony, I will watch hawkers come and go. (104-105)

In having this dream and aspiring towards it, Iya Segi asserts agency by challenging patriarchy (or the patriarch, Baba Segi) through her manipulation but also simultaneously making use of

patriarchy to further her aims by appealing to Baba Segi's patriarchal sense that he needs to provide for his family. Although Iya Segi is pressured and oppressed by patriarchy, she manipulates the situation so that she can use it for her own enrichment and towards her vision of what she considers freedom. Iya Segi makes the effort through manipulating Baba Segi and moves away from her past, towards her dream of being a wealthy woman, and also becomes a woman who deals with businesses and counts her money publicly compared to just being submissive to someone and only bearing their children. Her wealth and status also give her power over the other wives. Furthermore, by doing the work and pursuing the money that she lost to Baba Segi initially, she makes an active effort to achieve her happiness, comfort, and freedom despite any oppression that she may face from her husband or her culture. She is aware that her wealth is something that will help her reach her freedom, because "everybody wants to be free from whatever binds them" (104). She therefore uses manipulation, while still keeping in mind the future that she wants and even though she is in this marriage and is confined to patriarchal rule, she still makes an effort to attain what she wants.

Iya Femi understands all that she gains from being married to Baba Segi and does not want to return to the household where she was essentially a slave. After being at Baba Segi's house, she mentions:

> I decided to show mercy, especially after Baba Segi showed me my room. I was twenty-three yet I'd never had my own room before; I'd slept between my parents until the day they died. I looked at the double bed and tested the softness of the mattress with both palms. I would have been a fool not to lie on it, even if it was for just one night. I now know why rich people sleep longer than paupers. When I woke up the next morning, I felt like I was

> suspended in mid-air. It was as if I had reached my heaven. Not even God himself could have made me leave Baba Segi's house after that. (130)

By Iya Femi saying that "not even God himself could have made [her] leave Baba Segi's house after that" (130), she highlights that this comfort is what made her stay married to Baba Segi. This observation is also reinforced when she says that she does not hate Baba Segi, rather, she has "several reasons to be thankful to him" (132). Baba Segi is a figure who gives Iya Femi "a place of refuge when the wicked of the world were ready to swallow her whole" (132). It is reasonable that she would want to remain in this marriage and continues to use it to her advantage to get something in return for herself.

Rather than Iya Femi challenging the patriarchy and what Baba Segi represents as the patriarch in their household, her agency is demonstrated when she becomes a figure that is similar to the patriarch. Iya Segi, as the senior wife, takes on the role of the second patriarch, or the patriarchal woman, and dictates the ways in which the household will function. In Iya Femi realising that she will be at the mercy of Iya Segi, she decides to team up with Iya Segi in order to avoid being treated badly. Therefore, in this teaming up, both Iya Segi and Iya Femi oppress the other wives and take control of the household. However, Iya Femi feels as if she is really the one controlling the household: "when Bolanhle first arrived…I made her understand who was in charge of this house…she will run if she hears the name Iya Femi" (67). Hence, Iya Femi challenges normal patriarchal systems by conforming to it and becoming a part of it.

Iya Femi's agency is most demonstrated in her sabotaging of the other wives, including Iya Segi, when preparing clothes for a party that all must attend. She makes sure her own clothes are well

made with "beautiful gold thread" (68) and "fine sequins" (68) but tells the tailor to "sew the skirt two sizes too big" (69) for Iya Tope and even goes as far as to sew Bolanhle's outfit herself (69). Iya Femi also bullies the other wives by restricting household provisions (49) and even insulting them, treating them as if they were "animal[s] by the roadside" (55). Her agency proves to be negative for others, but is agency, nonetheless.

Although Bolanhle does not demonstrate much agency within the marriage, her decision to leave can be seen as her beginning to develop agency. The final chapter of the novel, titled 'Bolanhle' is where she finds the courage to leave and to look forward to a better future. Bolanhle narrates that the decision to leave this household was an easy one (243) and that the main reason Baba Segi was not opposed to it was because "it was more important to him…that his manhood be protected" (243). In this way, Bolanhle's final interaction with patriarchy and Baba Segi's hegemonic masculinity in this household proves beneficial to her freedom. She further mentions that she will remember the other wives as her "inmates" (245) because she feels as if she has re-joined her life and that they are still stuck in the same place. Her agency can also be seen in her hope for a better future:

> Don't think I can't see the challenges ahead of me. People will say I am a second-hand woman. Men will hurt and ridicule me, but I won't let them hold me back. I will remain in the land of the living. I am back now and the world is spread before me like an egg cracked open. (245)

Here, she escapes patriarchy and has the ability to move forward without feeling "soiled" (244) anymore due to her past experiences with sexual assault. Furthermore, as Bolanhle gains back her

agency, her Self that was previously split becomes whole, helping her identity become stable once more.

In *Stay With Me*, Yejide, just like Bolanhle, does not demonstrate much agency within her marriage until she decides to leave it. She goes through many obstacles such as visiting a traditional healer on a mountain (Adébáyọ̀ 54) and many doctors visits to become pregnant with Akin's child but never does. After the continuous deaths of her children with Dotun (Akin's brother) and the birth of her last child, Rotimi, Yejide decides to leave her marriage and the city without telling Akin (282). She removes herself from all the patriarchal expectations of what she should be and the children she must bear to be a woman. Yejide also hopes for a better future in Jos – Jos because [she] had heard it was the most beautiful city in Nigeria and [she] had always wanted to go there" (282). After all that she has experienced in her life, she chooses to act towards a better life.

Funmi, Akin's second wife, uses her marriage to Akin as an advantage to herself and this demonstrates her agency. Akin is made to think that Funmi does not desire much. However, Funmi demanded a "separate flat, miles away from [him] and Yejide… didn't ask for more than a weekend every month and a reasonable allowance" (23). She even "agreed that she would never be the one to go with [him] to parties and public engagements" (23) and that he would not have to see her for months after they married. From her strategic demands, it becomes clear that Funmi gains considerably from Akin through manipulation, mirroring the way Iya Segi benefits from Baba Segi. Although Akin and his family may think that Funmi is accepting their conditions of being a second wife, she is actually demanding things that are beneficial to her without having the responsibilities of being a wife. She benefits both socially and financially compared to Yejide,

since Yejide "paid half the rent every month" (14) for the house she and Akin lived in and had all the responsibilities of a Yoruba wife. Funmi does not have the social duties of being a wife to Akin, lives far away and is able to have her own freedoms and independence while still being financially supported by him. She later mentions that she does not "have a job since [their] husband is taking good care of [her]" (37) and that she "thank[s] God that he has enough money for all of [them]" (38). Although Funmi's background is never revealed to us, it is clear that in her effort to pretend to agree to certain rules in their marriage. Funmi actually gains a lot without having to put in much effort. Her agency can be seen here through her effort in responding to certain social challenges – Akin's marriage to Yejide – and distancing herself from what may restrict her in the future (her marriage to him) while also supporting her own desire for freedom and independence.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Adaku, Nnaife's second wife, demonstrates small acts of resistance within the marriage and reveals her agency when she leaves the marriage completely in order to have a better life for herself and her daughters. She plans for Nnu Ego and herself to go on strike when Nnaife does not give them enough money to run the household (Emecheta 154) and even drives Nnu Ego to stand up for them as women (155). Furthermore, when Nnu Ego goes away to Ibuza with her children and Nnaife comes to visit with some money, Adaku uses that money to fund her businesses (186). Adaku's marriage to Nnaife is an eye-opener for her to leave and branch out on her own (196) and this is mainly how her agency is shown in this novel.

Adaku no longer wants to live a life with the family that Nnaife provides if it is under such harsh conditions. Instead, she departs from the "stuffy room" (196) that they all inhabit and ensures her daughters an education, opting for a better life (196). Furthermore, this realisation can further be

read towards agency as she considers past reality and makes a decision to better the future. She expresses to Nnu Ego that she "realise[s] that we women set impossible standards for ourselves. That we make life intolerable for one another. I cannot live up to your standards… so I have to set my own" (197). In this realisation, she also becomes an agent who makes a decision not to do something that she does not want to do. Rather, she strives to build a new path of life according to her own intentions. Adaku knew what she wanted and became very successful in what she had built for herself:

> Adaku was now very rich. She had only two daughters to feed; she talked of sending them to private lessons to learn their alphabet though she had not actually done so yet, nor were they attending any school. Adaku's stall in Zabo market was stacked high with beans, pepper, dried fish, egusi and spicy foodstuffs. She would stay away all day at market, coming in late at night…(187)

Not only is Adaku successful in her business and financial endeavours, but she also thinks about improving the lives of her children – significantly, daughters, who are not traditionally invested in within the setting of this novel.

Lola Shoneyin, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ and Buchi Emecheta highlight the oppressions that women face whilst in polygamous marriages. I argue that in the exposure of these oppressions, they also present us with women who are strong enough to think about their past and change their lives for a better future. These women are written with agency and this allows us as readers to move away from general, patriarchal perceptions of African women and wives and move towards viewing these women the way Steady envisions – as complete beings who deserve their own freedoms, basic rights and are capable of actualising their rights and desires. By doing so, these authors also depart

from the earlier representations of African women by men writers. These representations were usually stereotypical, with women characters being portrayed the way patriarchy desires – as passive, submissive, and secondary or hardly featured (Ngara). An example of this can be seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where Achebe writes women characters as subservient to the men and the descriptions of women were fixated on their appearances and their duties towards men. Okonkwo talks about wanting his son, Nwoye, "to control his women-folk" (Achebe 45) and the ways in which women were not included in ceremonies, but rather "looked on from the fringe like outsiders" (76). Lola Shoneyin, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ and Buchi Emecheta writing in this way, adds to the literature and the intention behind the literature that African women were writing in the 1970s – the elimination of the misrepresentations of African women and womanhood that was created by men (Mekgwe). Furthermore, the oppression and marginalisation of women can be seen in their writing as opposed to the African men whose writing concealed this. The exposure of the marginalisation therefore highlights these women writers' feminist consciousness and possible feminist intentions in writing these women characters.

Chapter IV: The Commodification of Women and the Infertility Problem

> *Men call you Mother Africa and put you on a pedestal. But they want you to stay there for ever-and unhappy you if you want to step down and live the life of an ordinary human being.*
>
> - Miriam Tlali, from Mineke Schipper (1996)

Hortense Spillers (1985), in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, writes that "the work of Black women's writing not only redefines tradition, but also disarms it" (Spillers 251). In the writing of Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀, and Emecheta, there is an active battle to disarm tradition and simultaneously find a way to redefine this tradition through the writers' attempts to expose how patriarchal these traditions and societies may be, as well as how patriarchy may become the tradition that is practiced in these societies. These writers thus write women characters in ways that liberate them from these patriarchal traditions and societies. In order to attempt disarming a patriarchal tradition or society, one must be aware of what said traditions are and the ways in which they function, especially concerning women for the purpose of this dissertation.

In this chapter, I will explore the representation of patriarchy in Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta's novels whilst also drawing on Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), the first novel published in English by a Nigerian woman. I will examine how the societies featured in these novels are represented as promoting and encouraging the commodification of women and their bodies through compulsory motherhood and the actual exchange of these women's bodies for material objects. Furthermore, I will investigate the ways in which which Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ subvert the common trope of women being blamed for infertility and how some of these women, such as

Bolanhle and Yejide, strategically undermine patriarchy while others do not. In this discussion, I will mention patriarchal societies; however, it is important to note that the societies I discuss are the ones featured in these novels, that is Igbo/Ibo for *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*, and Yoruba for *Stay With Me* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. These societies are all portrayed as patriarchal in these novels even though they may have different cultural and/or religious practices and function differently.

Patriarchy on the Woman's Body

Although African feminism has progressed throughout the years, Sule Egya has found that in Nigeria, not much attention is paid to women's bodies. Rather it is assumed that women's bodies are being discussed while their fate under the patriarchal system is debated (Egya). In the societies featured in the three novels, women are often commodified by the male figures in their families; thus their bodies are commodified and regarded as objects at the expense of their personhood and subjectivity. The woman has no choice in whom or when to marry and is often given in exchange for a dowry to the family of the groom (Jaiyeola and Isaac). The man then owns her and she becomes the property of the family. These women are forced to conform to their husbands and in-laws' rules through their values, behaviours, and most especially their bodies and become the object and tool of the man's desire (Jaiyeola and Isaac). She is seen by society as simply a child-bearer, "and is held responsible for that failure to have one" (Jaiyeola and Isaac 14). Furthermore, this woman is "oppressed if she does not bear a male child" (Jaiyeola and Isaac 14).

Women in Nigerian traditional societies experience oppression from patriarchy from the moment they are born as girls, all through their lives, marriage, and old age. The girl child is immediately associated with their mother and all the traditional gender roles such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and most other domestic work (Jaiyeola and Isaac). She also has limited choice in what happens in her life with regards to marriage, a career, and education, and therefore becomes a "victim of masculine dominated policies emanating from culture and colonial legacies which have stereotyped and reduced women to a subordinate role of homemakers, childbearers and voiceless citizens" (Jaiyeola and Isaac 14-15). Furthermore, the patrilineal culture strips the woman of the right to inherit assets of the family in the case of a father's or husband's death. Rather, the eldest son takes over and if there is no son, another male relative takes the position (Jaiyeola and Isaac). This male relative may also inherit the wives of the deceased in order to father more children in his name. Therefore, society constantly moves in favour of men and promotes the patriarchal position.

Most of the above mentioned can be seen as a reflection of society in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *The Joys of Motherhood.* Some of the women in these novels, such as Iya Tope in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* have no choice in their marriages. Iya Tope is an example of this where she not only has no control over her marriage but also has no control over her Self and her body as she is also used as commodity between men. When Baba Segi visits Iya Tope's father to enquire about his investment crops, Iya Tope's father conducts a patriarchal assessment of his daughter by first beginning: "she is not a great beauty…but she is as strong as three donkeys. And thorough too. What she loses in wit, she gains in meticulousness" (Shoneyin 81-82) , behaving as if he is a salesman selling a product. She is described as an object, almost as a machine, whose

main purpose is to produce labour for her 'owner'. Iya Tope reports knowing that she was "compensation for the failed crops" (82) and that in her father's eyes, she was equivalent to the tubers of cassava or even something less than that (82). When asked if she was happy being Baba Segi's wife, she explains that she "couldn't utter a single word. [She] wanted to say something. [She] should have said something but [she] couldn't" (82). The weight of her position clearly does not allow her to explain how she feels and what she wants for herself. Her father further solidifies this by sternly saying that he has "made [his] decision and it's final" (83).

Women's right to inheritance in this patriarchal society further poses a great problem since there is no right to inheritance of assets from the father or husband. This lack of inheritance can be seen in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* where Iya Femi narrates her earlier life when her parents had died and she was left alone. Iya Femi is told by her aunt and uncle that she would be sold to work as a domestic worker to another family since "a girl cannot inherit her father's house…[and] this house and everything in it now belongs to [her] uncle [because] that is just the way things are" (Shoneyin 121). In the same moment, she is denied her education by her family and had been lied to that she may have the possibility of attaining one in the future (122). She is therefore not only disregarded by her family and society when her father has left the world but also mistreated and denied any right to remaining with her family. She is used as a commodified object and is sold to work in a household that also treats her negatively simply because her name is not tied to a man's. On the note of inheritance, women are also treated as objects to inherit from one man to another. Often when a man dies, his wives and property are passed down to his brother or another male relative in order to continue the family line (Jaiyeola and Isaac). This inheritance is reflected in *The Joys of Motherhood* when Nnaife inherits his brother, Owulum's, wives after Owulum's death

(Emecheta 135). Through this inheritance, Adaku becomes Nnaife's second wife, where she shares the room with Nnu Ego and her family.

This patriarchal society also allows physical and sexual abuse in order to ensure that these men have their children. There have been legal efforts to outlaw marital rape in Nigeria. However, it has been found that these federal legislations and statutes have failed (Smith). The criminal code of Nigeria legalises marital rape by exempting sexual relations between those who are married from the rape category (Smith). Section six of this code defines rape as "unlawful carnal connection which takes place *otherwise* than between husband and wife" (Smith, my emphasis). This lack of legal protection of wives from sexual assault allows traditional patriarchal societies within the country to promote such acts of marital rape as long as it continues the male lineage. The theme of rape is constantly featured in these novels. One instance of this can be seen in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* where Bolanhle has a horrible encounter with Baba Segi:

> It must have been my vulnerability that turned him on because he returned at midnight to hammer me like never before. He emptied his testicles as deep into my womb as possible. It was as if he wanted to make it clear, with every thrust, that he didn't make light of his husbandly duties. He wanted to fuck me pregnant. If there was ever a moment when the memory of being raped became fresh in my mind, that was it. (Shoneyin 43-44)

It is clear that this is abuse by Baba Segi. However, this is something that is generally allowed in this society as it would guarantee the man his offspring. Bolanhle is completely disregarded in this moment and Baba Segi pays no attention to how this impacts her. Another instance of rape occurs in *The Joys of Motherhood* when Nnu Ego marries Nnaife (Emecheta 41). She narrates that Nnaife

"demanded his marital right as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind" (45) and that she "knew why horrible-looking men raped women, because they are aware of their inadequacy" (46). Furthermore, we see that Nnu Ego has no choice but to bear this: "she bore it, and relaxed as she had been told, pretending that the person lying on her was Amatokwu, her first sweetheart of a husband" (46). Similarly, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Iya Tope demonstrates the same process when her mind goes to the meat-seller when Baba Segi rapes her (Shoneyin 89).

Womanhood, amongst many Africans, is directly linked to the ability to reproduce or procreate and if she cannot do so, she is not regarded as a woman and is always blamed for her infertility. A dowry is paid to the woman's family in order to gain full rights to her body and all rights to the children she bears for the man (Ngcobo). Therefore, in marrying a man and his family, a woman loses her rights over her body and her Self. Lauretta Ngcobo discusses the institutionalisation of motherhood and the creation of human capital (Ngcobo). She discusses how it is a man's sacred duty to father children and that the failure to do so is taboo and a shame that he cannot bear (Ngcobo). Due to this, infertility and childlessness is pushed onto the woman as to think that a man is the cause of this is also taboo (Ngcobo). Another reason that this blame is put on the mother is due to the belief of the three religious/traditional states of existence. It is believed that there exists a land of the unborn, the land of the living, and the land of the dead, and that children await their mother's call in the land of the unborn (Ngcobo). Therefore, it is the mother's fault for not calling and rescuing her children. Furthermore, Baloyi (2017) finds that women in this context who cannot bear children also face "the curse of the community" (Baloyi) because she has done wrong in their eyes. Infertility is further seen as an abnormal and shameful state for a woman and

her family to exist in (Baloyi). The state of infertility has a negative impact on a woman because it does not just remain her problem but also the problem of the community. The idea of 'a woman is only a woman if she bears children' leads to low self-esteem amongst infertile women as well as a low sense of self-value (Baloyi). This view also impacts her marriage in that she may not remain married and will be returned to her father's home for the dowry to be returned or that she will become a co-wife in a polygamous marriage (Baloyi).

Lauretta Ngcobo discusses the institutionalisation of motherhood and its promotion for the reproduction of human capital (Ngcobo). From her analysis, it is safe to deduce that this institution of motherhood is also one that is patriarchal. Through the patriarchy's romanticisation of motherhood, women are then subordinated and devalued as human beings (Ògúnfolábí). In these patriarchal societies, women are also put in the position where "their principle role is to attend to the needs of their men and to produce children, especially male children" (Killam). These children are important but often male children are treated as more superior than the girl child and are given significantly more privileges, such as inheritance, education, less tasks around the house etc. This is reflected in *The Joys of Motherhood* when Adaku is alienated by Nnu Ego and all those around her because she does not bear any male children. In a situation where Nnu Ego was at fault, Adaku was not given the right to talk about it in front of the men who came as peace-makers (Emecheta 193). All the men knew that Nnu Ego treated Adaku unjustly but could not side with Adaku due to her not having any male children while Nnu Ego does. In this moment, these men address Adaku:

> Our life starts from immortality and ends in immortality. If Nnaife had been married to only you, you would have ended his life on this round of his visiting earth. I know you

> have children, but they are girls, who in a few years' time will go and help build another man's immortality. The only woman who is immortalising your husband you make unhappy with your fine clothes and lucrative business. If I were in your shoes, I should go home and consult my chi to find out why male offspring have been denied me. (193)

Nwakusor essentially blames Adaku for not bearing male children and addresses her as if she is completely childless since girl children do not benefit their father, rather contribute to "another man's immortality". Furthermore, Nwakusor comments that Adaku has been "denied" boy children by her *chi* or personal god as if there is something wrong with her, thus, making her unworthy of being treated well within Nnaife's household.

Susan Andrade in her paper, "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion" (1990), finds that there are a lot of similarities between Nnu Ego and Efuru in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966). Interestingly, the second last line of *Efuru* mentions "the joy of motherhood" (Nwapa 281), which then becomes the title for Emecheta's novel in 1979. Andrade highlights that both Nnu Ego and Efuru share many qualities, such their Igbo culture, being the only daughters of important men, the favourite children of their fathers, their mothers are both deceased, both married twice with their first marriages ending in divorce, and both are stigmatised in some way for their inability to bear children (Andrade). *Efuru* shows us the weight of motherhood on a woman before she is even pregnant.

Remi Akujobi in their chapter, "African Literatures and Cultures and the Universal of Motherhood", finds that Nigerian women are ordered to undergo certain rituals involving their

bodies for their first pregnancy (Akujobi). This woman undergoes circumcision and clitoridectomy, and the blood then binds her to the land and the ancestors (Akujobi). This circumcision counts as an agreement between the woman and her society and until she has undergone this procedure, she is viewed as an outsider (Akujobi). This procedure is not done by a doctor, rather by an elderly woman of the clan and after this procedure, the woman is permitted to remain in a secluded room without bathing for seven days (Akujobi). In *Efuru*, Efuru is made to undergo this procedure before she falls pregnant in her first marriage. Nwapa takes us through Efuru's procedure and narrates that "Efuru screamed and screamed. It was so painful. Her mother-in-law consoled her. 'It will soon be over, my daughter, don't cry" (Nwapa 10). Ajanupu, sister of Efuru's mother-in-law, also reassures Efuru that "it is what every woman undergoes" (12) and that Efuru should not worry. Throughout Efuru's circumcision, her husband, Adizua, was in his room and is said to feel all of Efuru's pain (11). Adizua "seemed as if he was the one being circumcised" (11). Although Adizua seems to feel Efuru's pain, he does not physically undergo any rituals like this. This demonstrates that in parenthood, all of the physical burden falls on the mother, thus illustrating the actual burden of motherhood.

In the discussion of women's bodies and motherhood, it is clear that *Efuru* is a fundamental text that can be seen as intertextual with *The Joys of Motherhood* since it illustrates a life that may be similar to Nnu Ego's but is also different. Efuru, to some extent, desires motherhood and never achieves it after the loss of her child. Contrary to this, Nnu Ego constantly births more children for Nnaife and her life ends tragically compared to Efuru's. Nwapa and Emecheta show us each side of the coin of motherhood, and they show us that motherhood may not necessarily be fulfilling but

may also push women towards tragedy. This is why the title of Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, can be seen as quite ironic.

In the patriachal society being discussed in this dissertation, a woman's Self and identity of womanhood is dependent on whether or not she has borne children. It is believed that a woman is only a woman if she has the ability to or has already borne children. This is reflected across all three novels under examination. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Baba Segi makes a point that if Iya Tope's father "has sold [him] rotten fruit, it will be returned to him (84). This demonstrates the strictness of this society in a man only being married to someone who will bear him children for his line. In *Stay With Me*, Yejide's mother-in-law goes as far as to compare women as manufacturers – "women manufacture children and if you can't, you are just a man" (Adébáyọ̀ 47). Furthermore, when Yejide believes she is pregnant, she calls herself "a woman at last" (61) also believing that she cannot be a woman if she does not bear children. This societal power over a woman's thoughts of being a fulfilled woman can also be seen in *The Joys of Motherhood* when Nnu Ego's first child dies and she is convinced that she is "not a woman anymore! [she is] not a mother anymore" (Emecheta 67) and all the people of the village "agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman" (68). Furthermore, women are treated abusively when they cannot perform this task for the man and his family. This can be seen clearly by Nnu Ego's first husband, Amatokwu, when he says: "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me any more. You are so dry and jumpy" (33).

Subversion of Patriarchy on the Woman's Body

As seen thus far, women are always blamed for childlessness in these patriarchal marriages and the consideration of a man being infertile is in itself a taboo. Interestingly, Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ portray this childlessness in a different way to this norm. In their exposure of patriarchal society, they choose to demonstrate how men can also be the ones who are infertile and that it is not always the woman's biological issue. These authors subvert patriarchal narratives in order to show that a woman should not always be blamed for a biological issue and that men can be infertile too, even if they hide it.

Shoneyin employs dramatic irony in her writing, creating a situation where the reader is somewhat aware that all of Baba Segi's children are not his, but he, himself, remains oblivious to his own infertility. It is only towards the end of the novel where Baba Segi finds out that he is infertile and all of his children are not biologically his: "only then did it fall into place. Baba Segi's big testicles were empty and without seed" (Shoneyin 242). Suddenly, it begins to make sense why it took a long time for his wives to become pregnant and why Bolanhle never did as she remained faithful to him. Adébáyọ̀'s Akin also finds himself infertile; however, he chooses to let Yejide take the blame for the couple's childlessness. He constantly assures Yejide that nothing is wrong with him after he had undergone testing (Adébáyọ̀ 46) and allows his family to think that she is the one preventing him from having a child (47). He later admits to the reader that he had never had an erection (272) and had "started treatment at a private clinic in Ikeja during [his] final semester at university" (272). Since Akin and Yejide had met in their final year of university and married after, Akin had been aware of his infertility their entire marriage and let the blame fall on her rather than facing his family and society.

Baba Segi and Akin's reactions to their infertility are different. Baba Segi already has children under his name while Akin does not. Furthermore, the two differ vastly in age and find out at different times of their lives. Baba Segi finds out after he has married multiple wives who have already borne children, albeit not his, while Akin finds out before he has married and decides to take matters into his own hands. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Baba Segi's first reaction to his infertility is: "my life is ruined" (Shoneyin 229). This is somewhat close to what a woman experiences in this society when she is unable to bear children. It is, however, very different since Baba Segi already has children in his household and because he is a man with different expectations from his society. His further reactions also show this difference and demonstrates how his focus lies more on the betrayal of his wives. Baba Segi's first reaction to Iya Segi is one of violence: "he lunged at her and raised his arm until it almost touched the ceiling fan. Then, with one smooth sweep, he brought it down onto her jaw" (232). Furthermore, Baba Segi expresses to his wives:

> I will not pretend the words that struck my ears at the hospital have not preyed on my mind the way hunger preys on the mind of a motherless child. I have been deeply wounded. It is not every day that a man discovers his life is a mere shadow and that there is a gulf between what he believes and reality. Neither is it every day that a man finds his children are not his own. (240)

Since Baba Segi knows that he already has children, and that even though they are not biologically his own, they still belong to him, he places his focus more on the wives and their betrayal. This, however, also promotes a character shift for him where the reader can see some redeeming qualities in a conversation that he has with his eldest son. He urges his son to take only one wife and to

listen to the wife in order to be prepared since "a man must always be prepared" (238). Rather than having many wives with many pains caused (238). He realises that one wife was really enough for him.

In order to further keep Baba Segi's secret of infertility from society, the wives and their children remained in Baba Segi's house. Baba Segi's wives knew that "it was more important to him…that his manhood be protected" (243). To ensure this, Baba Segi created further rules in his household:

> He promptly banned them from leaving the house without his permission. Iya Segi was instructed to close down all her shops and relinquish every kobo she had saved to him. Iya Femi was forbidden to wear makeup and there would be no more church. God hears your heart no matter where you are, he'd said. Surprisingly, he didn't have any rules for Iya Tope. Rather, he came to favor her and now decided to spend most of his nights with her. In return, Baba Segi swore to buy them all the jewelry, all the lace, every luxury they needed and wanted, provided these were only worn within the four walls of his home.

In abiding by all these rules, Baba Segi ensures that there will not be any more illegitimate children and that his wives will remain strictly under his rule so that they may not share his shameful secret with others. In Baba Segi promising them all the luxuries they wanted or needed, it shows that he is still aware of societal views and that the conditions of his wives still reflect his name and image. Furthermore, Baba Segi can also be seen as bribing his wives to remain silent and limiting their presence in society in order to protect himself.

Baloyi (2017) has found that in some families, a husband may influence another male member of his family to have sexual relations with his wife in order to bear children. This is Akin's reaction to his infertility in *Stay With Me*. After Yejide's pseudocyesis (phantom pregnancy), Akin decides to take charge of the situation and asks his brother, Dotun, to have sexual relations with Yejide and impregnate her when she is ovulating (Adébáyọ̀ 186). When asked if Yejide knows of this plan, Akin lies and says, "Yes. Truth is I hadn't discussed it with Yejide, but I just wanted him to agree" (186). Akin's logic behind this plan is that this would not be an instance of rape, rather, Dotun would merely seduce his wife every time Akin wanted to have another child (187). The plan was that "one weekend will do for each child. All things being equal, three kids are OK" (187). This plan is also one that proves to be patriarchal since these men make life-changing decisions for Yejide without consulting Yejide at all. Furthermore, we see no other reaction of Akin's infertility other than this plan to bear children by other means – a deceptive plan. By allowing Yejide to take the blame for his infertility and then making a plan like this, it reflects the immorality of his patriarchal practices.

By these writers subverting the trope of the partner who is infertile and the stereotype of the infertile woman not being a 'real' woman, they expose the ways in which men may behave when they are on the end of potentially receiving the blame. Unlike women characters who derive the meaning of being unwomanly if they do not bear a child, these men still go to various lengths to protect their manhood without feeling unmanly. Baba Segi keeps the children and his wives in his family because it might be even more shameful for him if the truth was exposed. Akin refuses to admit his problem and allows his wife to take the blame while hatching immoral plans with his

brother. These men are not shown to think of themselves as unmanly because patriarchal society always favours the position of the man.

These novels also show the impact of non-consentual physical touch on a woman's body. Egya (2018) discusses the challenges of erasing any sort of physical contact on the woman's body (Egya). They mention that even if scars of any sort are blurred, they cannot be removed, and these scars constantly remain available for discourse which haunts the owner of the body (Egya). An example of this can be seen in Bolanhle's character in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. We witness Bolanhle's rape and the way it impacts her body, mind and concept of Self. Bolanhle's body experiences even more torture later when she has to have an unprofessional abortion done due to the first rape. This entire incident haunts her to the point where she feels unworthy and unvaluable and puts herself in the position of being a polygamous wife. This position allows others in society to make decisions on her behalf and also allows these people to discuss her body without her being present. The body becomes a site of cultural contestation when it begins to influence discourse beyond its biological function (Egya). Therefore, the body of the African woman invites investigation since it is always being presented as a body of one who is victimised and subjected to cultural torture and abuse (Egya).

Marriage, as we can see in these novels, either start off as part of a hostile culture that the African woman's body has to face, or becomes a part of this hostile culture. In these writers exposing these circumstances and even making an effort to subvert the problem of infertility they practice African feminist theory and consciousness. They even move a step further to show us women who

undermine or resist patriarchy and women who do not, and the difference between them. Bolanhle, Yejide, and Adaku all find ways to resist patriarchy and their lives all move towards something better where they leave their marriages and attain autonomy, peace within themselves, and wealth and ease respectively. Bolanhle leaves Baba Segi's household and accepts that bad things have happened, but becomes motivated to deal with it and move past it for a better future. Yejide leaves Akin and lives freely by herself in another city. Adaku leaves Nnaife's household and earns her wealth whilst also educating her daughters. These writers show that women's emancipation is worthwhile. This emancipation may look different for different women but one should strive towards this for a better life. They also give us examples of women who do not make the effort to resist patriarchy in order to show how their lives turn out. Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi all remain under Baba Segi's roof but now have to abide by significantly more strict rules he puts forth and their interaction with society becomes limited. This means they cannot do anything without his permission and any interaction they had with others, such as having market stalls or talking to other women, are no longer an option for them. Funmi is murdered by Akin as his frustrations of being impotent consume him. Nnu Ego, having expected that her children would look after her the way she did for them, dies alone on the road. These writers also demonstrate that no resistance to patriarchy whatsoever can possibly lead to this outcome, which is death – it is both a psychological and physical death. For characters like Nnu Ego and Funmi, death is the only release from patriarchy as they do not choose to leave or resist patriarchy as the other women characters do.

In her writing of *Efuru,* Nwapa does not directly oppose motherhood. However, she does illustrate the colossal burden of motherhood that is placed on a woman. She further shows that women can

find fulfilment in things that are not motherhood, such as relationships, wealth, social status or beauty. In *Efuru,* Nwapa demonstrates that motherhood does not determine the success of a woman in being a woman (Ògúnfolábí). This can be seen in the final lines of *Efuru*:

> Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. (Nwapa 281)

This extract demonstrates that the goddess Uhamiri, who has not experienced "the joys of motherhood" is happy and wants Efuru to be happy too (Ògúnfolábí). Similarly, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta wrestles with motherhood and the fulfilment of a woman. Emecheta shows that motherhood, as fulfilling as it may be in some ways, can also be destructive to a woman under a patriarchal order (Ògúnfolábí). Nnu Ego only believes herself to be a woman when she becomes a mother, therefore, part of her Self is fulfilled. However, motherhood in Nnu Ego's sense can impact the wellbeing of a mother and even lead her to her demise (Ògúnfolábí). Nnu Ego's end is found rejected by her community, without any of her children present and no friends as she failed to cultivate other relationships: "she died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother" (Emecheta 262). Nnu Ego has exhausted her physical and emotional strength by bearing all her children and simultaneously battling poverty (Kebdi and Iamrache). Through her death, Emecheta shows an ironic liberation from the motherhood that brought Nnu Ego sadness and suffering (Kebdi and Iamrache). Furthermore, it is narrated that, "stories afterward, however, said that Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death because, however many people appealed to

her to make women fertile, she never did" (Emecheta 265). Nnu Ego, in death, refused to pass on the burden of motherhood for those who prayed for it as she knew firsthand how tragic it can be.

In chapter two of this dissertation, I delve into the existence of different generations of Nigerian women writers who aim to represent the African woman in different ways from the ways African men writers have in the past. This concerns women's education and position in the economic world and society; however, it also focuses attention on the ways in which women's bodies are represented. Nwapa is seen as part of the first generation of Nigerian women writers, Emecheta is seen as part of the second generation, while Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ are part of the third. Since these women writers are part of different generations, it can also be seen in their writing and the ways in which they pay attention to women's bodies.

When looking at the representation of women's bodies, desires and pleasure through sex, Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* is very subtle about it. The most the reader hears of Nnu Ego's sexual experience is when she is raped by Nnaife and admits that she was "pretending that the person lying on her was Amatokwu, her first sweetheart of a husband" (Emecheta 46). Furthermore, Emecheta writes that Nnu Ego was "used to her long wiry Amatokwu who would glide inside her when she was ready" (46). There is not much delivered to us as readers about the ways in which Nnu Ego felt pleasure or desire at any point in the novel. Rather, she just bore her sexual interactions with Nnaife and imagined the significantly more bearable, or even enjoyable times with Amatokwu. Contrary to this, Shoneyin writes about the desire and lust her characters feel apart from the rape they experience from their husband. Iya Tope describes the chemistry she

feels with the meat-seller, where she "took his eyes into [hers]…[and her] heart rejoiced" (Shoneyin 85). From this experience, Iya Tope feels emotional satisfaction as well since she feels "there were other people on this earth who could tell what was on [her] mind" (85). Furthermore, she describes how the meat-seller "made [her] body sing" (85), and how he "made [her] howl when he bent [her] over…whimper when he sat [her] on his belly [all until] the warm air escaped through her limbs" (85). Furthermore, Shoneyin shows us how "eager" (86) Iya Tope was in seeing this man and how it felt as if she were "healing" (86) from Baba Segi's "pummelling" (86) when she was with the meat-seller.

Similarly, Adébáyọ̀ proves to be even more straight-forward in her writing of women's desire. Her character, Yejide, is vocal about how she "expected to feel more" (Adébáyọ̀ 110) during sex and explains further that she "wanted more, needed more, craved more, feverishly" (171). She also describes how she desires "his tongue, his hands, his hardness deep inside [her] again" (171) and how later, when it was over, "it still was not enough" (171). The third generation of Nigerian women writers prove not to be afraid in writing women's bodies and its burdens. They openly, in their writing, explore the pleasures associated with women's bodies – a contrast to the second generation writers like Emecheta who may shy away from writing such pleasures or desires as openly.

Lauretta Ngcobo, in her discussion on African motherhood, talks about the writer's responsibility:

> If writers took the time to explore the circumstances, the pressures and the deprivations that their characters suffer, this would soften the social conscience and society's scales of

> justice would shift towards the correct balance. Punitive literature perpetuates the oppression of women; it denies them justice. (Ngcobo 150)

In my argument, I propose that the type of writers Ngcobo seeks here are found in my examination of Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀, Emecheta and even Nwapa. Emecheta and Nwapa begin exploring the lives of their women characters closely and are attentive to their social circumstances and society's preferences. Then, through *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *Stay With Me*, Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ show that the patriarchal institution of motherhood is still one of concern in our contemporary times just as it was for writers like Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa. Ngcobo further mentions that "there is an age-old fear that the independence of the female spirit will destroy the pillars of our society" (150). I argue that this independence that is seen as something to be feared by the patriarchy now becomes something that empowers women and this can be seen in the writers that are being discussed. The so-called "pillars of society" were erected by the patriarchy and are being collapsed by writers like Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀, Emecheta and Nwapa. Readers are able to read and reflect on what a society looks like and what is good and bad about that society. Ngcobo further writes that, "we are looking for…a liberating literature that not only forgives women their mistakes but condemns men who take advantage of women and does not condone men's fallability" (151). *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me*, and *The Joys of Motherhood* are exactly this, with the writers presenting us with characters like Bolanhle, Yejide and Adaku, it is easy to argue that we are looking at liberating literature that favours women and condemns patriarchal men and society.

Chapter V: Homosocial Relationships Between Women in Patriarchal Spaces

Nnu Ego told herself that she would have been better off had she had time to cultivate those women who had offered her hands of friendship; but she had never had the time…she had shied away from friendship, telling herself she did not need any friends, she had enough in her family. But had she been right?

- Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (248)

Sonja Vivienne defines sisterhood not only literally as "the relationship between sisters" but also more broadly as the "feeling of closeness or affinity among a group of women or all women (Vivienne 2). These groups of women often find themselves connected through common interests or situations such as "political or spiritual beliefs, race, class, sexuality or employment" (2). bell hooks in "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women" explores the meaning of Sisterhood and the ways in which patriarchy attempts to limit relationships between women. She writes that:

> Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood. (hooks 127)

Writers like Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta, through their subversion of patriarchal norms, show us how important it is for women to establish and cultivate friendships amongst each other. Their novels illustrate the patriarchal challenges that their women characters face due to

subjugation. In their attempt to show us the importance of friendship between women, they show how these friendships have the ability to allow women to resist patriarchy and survive. These bonds allow women a place to connect and combine their power in fighting back.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which patriarchal pressures hinder the women characters in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me*, and *The Joys of Motherhood* from forming friendships with one another and experiencing unity and sisterhood. While the lack of strong ties between women can be seen in each of these novels, some of these characters also make an effort to resist patriarchy at certain moments by attempting to forge friendship. Through such resistance, they have the potential to come together in solidarity and break down the hierarchies amongst themselves, which were built by patriarchal systems. In showing how such networks of solidarity operate, Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta allow us as readers to obtain glimmers of insight towards what these settings could look like if women continuously resisted patriarchy together, rather than allowing it to divide them.

Homosociality

For the purpose of this discussion, it is important to distinguish between a patriarchal woman and a matriarch. A patriarchal woman can be seen as a "woman who depend[s] on a patriarchal system for their power, and in many cases uses this power to oppress other women" (Steenkamp 39). These women perform the roles of patriarchs in the household and use this power to oppress other women by using patriarchal discourse (Steenkamp). On the other hand, a matriarch is different as they have "authority that is rooted in their femininity" (Steenkamp) and would not use power from

the patriarchal system. I will be using the term 'patriarchal woman' rather than 'matriarch' in this discussion when referring to the households and the women that occupy them.

The concept of homosociality was originally predominantly used to refer to non-sexual relationships between men and other men (Lipman-Blumen). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* views homosociality as "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (Sedgwick 1). Sedgwick discusses a model of how homosociality generally exists between three men throughout their book. These men have non-sexual relationships and encourage each other's ideas while women often find themselves excluded from this (94). According to Lipman-Blumen, homosocial relationships can be defined as "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex" (Lipman-Blumen 16). Merl Storr takes these two definitions and puts another in place, stating that female homosociality "is a variety of gender régime with three distinctive structural features: women promoting the interests of women who promote the interests of men; gender identification… [and]; lesbophobia" (Storr 50).

Storr differs from Sedgwick and Lipman-Blumen in arguing that homosociality does not promote the interests of men, rather, it promotes the interests of women who in turn promote the interests of men. In my use of this theory, I am not only interested in how homosociality may promote the interests of women who promote the interests of men, that is, the patriarchal woman. Rather, I am interested in how homosociality can promote the ideas of women who promote the ideas of other women, just as Steenkamp (2019) suggests. Therefore, the definition that I put forth, drawing on

Sedgwick, Lipman-Blumen, and Storr, is that homosociality can be defined as the social bonds that are formed amongst individuals who share the company of people of the same sex and also work towards the advancement of the interests of both those of the same sex and/or the opposite sex. When women cultivate friendships with other women and share similar circumstances, they can find comfort in each other and help each other strive towards agency and resistance. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *Stay With Me*, and *The Joys of Motherhood* all contain homosocial spaces. In these novels, the households function as homosocial spaces where the women share the same physical space, as well as similar experiences in their roles of being a wife. These experiences may vary among the wives as some can be considered patriarchal women and others occupy different levels in the hierarchy, but they still all interact with each other and develop some kind of relationship.

Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta on women's homosocial relationships

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives demonstrates the most hierarchical system of wives among the three novels. In this novel, Iya Segi is Baba Segi's first wife and occupies the role of senior wife who is above all the other wives. Next in this hierarchy is Iya Femi, who is officially Baba Segi's third wife but in her partnership with Iya Segi, she appears second on this hierarchy. Third is Iya Tope, who is Baba Segi's second wife but is often silent due to her fear of Iya Segi and Iya Femi, and last is Bolanhle, Baba Segi's fourth wife. In this household, Iya Segi can be considered a patriarchal woman as she gains her power from the patriarchal system, upholds it and uses it to oppress the other women. Iya Femi can be considered a patriarchal woman of a lower rank since she does not have all the power that Iya Segi does but partners up with Iya Segi in order to lessen her own victimisation and also oppress the other wives.

Iya Segi is the patriarchal woman in this household, or even the patriarch by proximity since she is highest up on the hierarchy of the wives and therefore closest to Baba Segi. Through this, she takes up some of the power that Baba Segi has as a patriarch and exerts it over the other wives. Iya Segi views the other wives as beneath her and often makes decisions for the household and the other wives. She views Iya Tope as a "beggar in the market place" (Shoneyin 71) and also chooses to discipline Iya Tope's children against the latter's wishes (71). Furthermore, Iya Segi makes sure that Iya Tope is not to receive any help from the other wives since she feels that she is the one who should be consulted with in times of need (72). Iya Segi is also in charge of sharing provisions and running the household, therefore, she feels offended when her methods are questioned. This can be seen when Iya Femi mentions that her daughters need more provisions since they are younger and Iya Segi responds with:

> Iya Femi, you are in the habit of saying things that are too big for that little mouth of yours. If you are not satisfied with the way I share provisions, take your ingratitude to another man's house. Mind you, make sure you are the first wife and not a lowly third". (49)

Iya Segi, as patriarch by proximity, makes it known that her rules should be followed above anything else and that if her methods are questioned, the other wives should leave her household.

Iya Femi supports and teams up with Iya Segi in order to have power and get her way in the household. However, this support is neither genuine nor positive. She mentions that she does not want to be "cast aside" (49) due to Bolanhle coming into the family and plots to get rid of her with Iya Segi (57). These wives go to extreme lengths, as far as planting *juju* (black magic) in Baba

Segi's room attempting to frame Bolanhle as an evildoer who wants to murder Baba Segi (58). As a reaction to the *juju*, "Baba Segi scrambled up the back of his seat and leapt into the air like a gorilla in flight. He landed bang in front of Bolanhle and gripped her throat with both hands, pressing his thumbs on her windpipe" (58) just as Iya Segi and Iya Femi wanted. They also arrange for poison from a medicine man, which they add to Bolanhle's food (138). Furthermore, it can be seen that Iya Femi enjoys oppressing the other women and does it simply for her own entertainment: "sometimes I wish I could pat myself on the back. My cunning knows no bounds!" (68). She arranges clothing for all the wives for a function and makes sure she has the best dress for herself (68). She makes the tailor hold off on adding sequins to Iya Segi's dress (68) and makes the dress "resemble a pillowcase with long sleeves and a ruffled collar" (69). Iya Femi further "told the tailor to sew [Iya Tope's] skirt two sizes too big, and her blouse baggy and without darts" (69) and sews Bolanhle's dress herself after watching what the tailor did for the others (69). Iya Femi invests a lot of effort in oppressing the other wives in order to be the best and have Baba Segi's favour. As much as Iya Segi and Iya Femi partner together to achieve their common goal of removing Bolanhle from their household, they still do not like each other and do not form a meaningful relationship. Even though they use patriarchy to their advantage, the patriarchal system still affects them negatively and takes away the opportunity to cultivate meaningful relationships together. These wives have the potential to be genuine friends without sabotage if not for their concern over power.

Iya Tope and Bolanhle are the most oppressed out of the four wives. Iya Tope often remains silent in the household due to her fear of being further oppressed by Iya Segi and Iya Femi. The only relationship that she has with the two comes from a place of fear and submission. Iya Segi and Iya

Femi have significant control over Iya Tope where Iya Segi mentions that "she would destroy [Iya Tope's] useless life if [she] ever sat to learn anything from Bolanhle again" (51). Iya Tope is pushed to a point where she does not have a choice in her actions because Iya Segi "was the person who gave [her] provisions and held [her] life and the lives of [her] daughters in the middle of her palm" (51) and Bolanhle was just someone "who wanted to teach [her] to read and write…[and] did not yet know that she could also be crushed by Iya Segi's powerful fist" (51). Iya Tope is made to be so fearful of the two patriarchal women that in interactions with all the other wives, she "learned to keep [her] head down and sing in [her] mind so [she] would not hear the sound of their voices" (52).

Similarly, Bolanhle is completely alienated in this space and she is not given the privileges that the other wives were given by Iya Segi. Bolanhle is not informed about Baba Segi's infertility in hopes that she will be cast out when she cannot bear him children (50). Furthermore, Iya Segi inconveniences Bolanhle in small ways in order to negatively affect her happiness and comfort in the home:

> The first thing Iya Segi did was to talk to Baba Segi about Bolanle's armchair. Baba Segi had broken his rule for Bolanle. The tradition was that the comfort of an armchair had to be earned, which meant that unless you were pregnant with oedema, breastfeeding or watching over toddlers, you were not entitled to one. (53)

Although having an armchair may seem like a small inconvenience, the fact that everyone except Bolanhle has one would make her feel alienated and unwanted. Iya Segi does not just stop there.

In order to make Bolanhle feel even more alienated, she makes sure Bolanhle's friends are banished from visiting their household:

> The second evil thing that Iya Segi did was banish Bolanle's friends from [their] house. After Yemisi and other friends visited for the third time, Iya Segi told [their] husband that they were bad role models for the daughters in the family, especially her daughter, Segi, who was at an impressionable age. Baba Segi jumped at the notion as if he had been looking for a reason to keep Bolanle to himself. He told Bolanle that he didn't want unmarried women near his doorstep. (54)

Although Iya Tope is afraid of cultivating a relationship with Bolanhle, there are moments in which they bond and that they are there for each other. These moments can act as a signal of resistance against patriarchy through resistance against the patriarchal women. Apart from Bolanhle teaching Iya Tope how to read, Bolanhle attempts to take care of her in times when she is ill and cannot receive help from anyone else in the household. Bolanhle helps Iya Tope by bringing medication for her stomach after Iya Tope is ignored by Iya Segi (55). Due to the patriarchal women and pressures in this household, Iya Tope and Bolanhle are robbed of the opportunity to cultivate a friendship. Even though Iya Segi and Iya Femi are close enough to partner together towards achieving a common goal, they demonstrate that no relationship is formed between them either. If there is any sort of friendship formed, it proves to be false.

In *Stay With Me*, Yejide is the first wife of Akin and Funmi is the second. These wives fully show that they do not like each other; however, the severity of the ill-treatment is not as intense as in

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives. In *Stay With Me,* it is not Yejide who puts the hierarchy in place. Rather, it is put in place by another patriarchal figure from Akin's family, Baba Lola, who makes Yejide take Funmi as her sister: "…I know you will not take this new wife like a rival. Her name is Funmilayo and we know, we trust, that you will take her as your younger sister" (Adébáyọ̀ 12). Yejide does not accept her position in this situation and ignores Funmi's existence by pretending she does not exist for a long time (26) and when Funmi calls her "our mother" (35), Yejide rejects this too. Apart from sharing Akin with Funmi and being *iyale* (first wife), these titles contribute greatly to why Yejide does not like Funmi as well. Yejide automatically rejects these patriarchal pressures of taking Funmi as a sister or being called mother, resulting in an instant rejection of Funmi as a whole. Furthermore, Funmi does whatever she can to insert herself into Yejide's life, becoming a nuisance. Funmi visits Yejide's salon calling her "mother" and saying things like, "I want you to know that this bitterness can be one of the things causing the barrenness-o" (38). She also moves into Yejide's house without notice and claims her place in the house by saying, "this is my husband's house too. Why must you keep me outside this house?" (80). A lot of Funmi's actions are intended to annoy Yejide and claim a place in their life, resulting in Yejide disliking her.

Although they do not get along, once living together, Yejide accepts that Funmi is now a part of her life and helps her be a better wife to Akin. She "shared tips about Akin, from his favourite shade of lipstick – a bright red that would look garish on her – to how he liked his beans – watery and with lots of pepper" (116). Yejide, however, does not share her knowledge about Akin's favourite things out of love or friendship, but rather because she now has what she desires, which is being pregnant with a child. Moreover, just four pages later when Funmi is found dead at the

bottom of the stairs, Yejide mentions that she "wished Funmi had picked a better day to die" (121) and that she "wasn't supposed to think like that; [she] should have been sad. Instead, [she] felt inconvenienced, upstaged even, but not sad, not at all" (121). Yejide does not cultivate a friendship with Funmi due to their constant competition to be a good wife to Akin. No further social bonds of friendship or affection are formed between the two. Therefore, even though Yejide spent time with Funmi in their homosocial space, she was not moved by her death. She is aware that she should be but knows that she is not. These women characters do not show any moment of resistance against patriarchy, therefore, they do not come together in solidarity.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego and Adaku also demonstrate a lot of dislike towards each other. Nnu Ego felt "jealousy, fear and anger" (Emecheta 136) and "hated this type of woman" (136) while Adaku "was able to disguise any disgust she felt by wearing a faint smile which neither developed into a full smile nor degenerated into a frown" (138). When Adaku first moves into the household, the only way she can proclaim her power is by engaging with Nnaife sexually and making Nnu Ego listen: "…because even when [Nnu Ego] tried to ignore what was going on, Adaku would not let her…Adaku made sure she knew" (144). Nnaife also contributes to Adaku's claim of power when he insults Nnu Ego and says "you must learn to accept your pleasures quietly, my new wife Adaku. Your senior wife is like a white lady: she does not want noise" (144). Initially, Nnu Ego only disliked Adaku because she came into their household as the second wife, but Adaku's actions give her more reasons to dislike her, preventing a true friendship between the two due to these patriarchal pressures.

Due to their sharing of a homosocial space, some sort of bond develops between the two and their relationship shows a shift. Adaku very quickly begins to support Nnu Ego in their conversations. She mentions that Nnu Ego worries too much to please Nnaife (146) and even stands up for Nnu Ego when Nnaife scolds her (146-147). Nnu Ego further disciplines her son, Oshia, and says that he should have respect for Adaku because she is also his mother (148). The women also stand together in protest for more household money from Nnaife, leading Nnu Ego to stand up for herself due to her support from Adaku (155). However, due to Nnu Ego's conforming to patriarchy and begging Nnaife for the money behind Adaku's back, it pushes Adaku to revert to her original feelings about Nnu Ego and she "resent[s]" (160) Nnu Ego, calling her a "shameless fool" (166). Even though Nnu Ego treats Adaku's guest badly and prompts Adaku's choice to leave their household (195), Adaku still makes the effort to encourage Nnu Ego through her words. She alerts Nnu Ego that men or the patriarchy "set[s] impossible standards for [themselves]. That [they] make life intolerable for each other" (196).

Adaku pushes Nnu Ego to realise a lot of things about her own position as a woman in this patriarchal setting and how she differs from Adaku. Adaku has the strength to take a chance and leave Nnaife so that she can make it on her own for her daughters. Adaku mentions that she would pass on her stall to Nnu Ego but she is rather going to rent it out so that it could pay her rent (199). Nnu Ego questions:

> 'You mean you won't have to depend on men friends to do anything for you?'

> 'No', [Adaku] replied. 'I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters, though I shall not do so without male companionship.' She laughed again. 'They do have their uses'. (199)

Adaku shows that she can function away from patriarchy and can support herself, just as Nnu Ego already does whilst being married to Nnaife. Furthermore, by Adaku mentioning that she will have male companionship, she demonstrates to Nnu Ego that the relationship she has with men now will be her choice and that she will not be subservient, rather, she will also have the power to 'make use' of these men. Even though Nnu Ego witnesses Adaku's growth, she does not make the choice to go out on her own and leave Nnaife. Due to the patriarchal pressures that exist around Nnu Ego being the senior wife and Adaku being the second wife, these women do not form any genuine relationships with each other. The ending of the novel also plays into this, showing us that if Nnu Ego had a friend to talk to her, she may not have died alone on the side of a road (265). By the time she reflects on how "she would have been better off had she had the time to cultivate those women who had offered her hands of friendship" (248) it is too late.

Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta invest their words in illustrating what it looks like for women to live in polygamous patriarchal spaces. Their writing attempts, in some way, to expose the hierarchies that exist in these homosocial spaces and announce that these hierarchies are all patriarchal in some way. Their work brings to light the suffering that these women characters experience, not only because the men in their lives are patriarchal, but also because the women around them can conform to patriarchy and also use it to become patriarchal women. Their work provides first-hand accounts of women's perceptions of polygamous marriages and the ways in which these marriages may prevent women from forming bonds with other women due to how the

spaces are set up. In the exposing of the patriarchal system, these writers also give us a glimpse of what it would look like if these hierarchies were disturbed. In *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Bâ writes, "Friendship has splendours that love knows not. It grows stronger when crossed, whereas obstacles kill love. Friendship resists time, which wearies and severs couples. It has heights unknown to love" (Bâ 66). Emecheta demonstrates what it would look like if women who come together in friendship and sisterhood acted as a weapon against patriarchy. Emecheta also shows the consequences of quickly abandoning a resisting position, as in the case of Nnu Ego when she betrays Adaku by speaking to Nnaife during the food strike. Shoneyin further illustrates how women can subtly resist patriarchal systems by helping each other and providing support in their time of need. These acts shake the patriarchal hierarchies put in place and work to slowly undercut and resist such systems.

Through their rebellious writing techniques, Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta urge readers to consider how these patriarchal systems impact women and push readers to reconsider and critically evaluate these systems. Understanding what these writers' texts are about requires the reader to move beyond reading the oppression as just a list of things that are morally wrong and explore the ways in which these characters answer the challenge of making it through inhumane conditions (Begum). The writers demonstrate feminist consciousness in their revelation of these societal issues in their writing and use literature as a weapon in revealing and challenging aspects where patriarchy dominates and women are subjugated.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

The preceeding chapters undertake a literary analysis honing in on how Lola Shoneyin in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ in *Stay With Me* and Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* write their women characters in polygamous marriages and demonstrate African feminist theory and consciousness through the writing of their characters. I have explored the ways in which these authors' representations of the African woman are distanced from past representations, which were written by men writers. By doing so, they have given their women characters agency in patriarchal spaces (their polygamous household), where the characters become agentic and use the patriarchal structures of their marriages to their advantage. Women like Iya Segi use their intelligence to manipulate their husbands into getting what they want while other women like Funmi hide behind the façade of being told what to do rather than allowing patriarchal figures to know that they are achieving all they intend. Furthermore, Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ make the active effort to expose patriarchal pressures on a woman's body and go even further to subvert the blame of infertility leading to the husbands in the novel being infertile rather than the wives, liberating women from the blame narrative. These authors further bring to light the ways in which patriarchal pressures may prevent women from forming relationships with each other due to the need to maintain power in the household. Regardless of this, these writers create spaces where their women characters show the potential for friendship, even if it is in the slightest, and show that this friendship, in itself can act as patriarchal resistance.

Chapter one of this dissertation served as an introduction to my study, offering concise summaries of the novels under examination and set out the significance of this research project. Chapter two

examined the literature around concepts such as feminism, exploring its origins and the reasons for why Western feminism is not suitable to use when discussing the African woman. This chapter led the reader to explore African feminism, the debates born around its inception and the reasons for why it provides a greater inclusion for African women than Western feminism does. Furthermore, I explored African writing and showed how colonialism led to the migration of oral story-telling to written story-telling, and the ways in which this informed African writers who were men to correct their depictions that existed in Western literature while allowing the depiction of African women to remain as is or further reinforced the Western depictions. Thereafter, I went on to present the three generations of Nigerian women writers and how they each tackled various issues around the representation of the African woman in literature. Lastly, in this chapter, I explored the concept of polygamy and how other scholars have analysed this concept with regards to my three selected texts.

Chapter three explored the ways in which Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta depict characters who actively seek their own freedoms. This chapter began by exploring the concept of agency and the elements that make up agency as proposed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Thereafter, the chapter explored each of the wives across all three novels and their pasts in order to show a contrast between how they were in their pasts and how they moved to achieve agency in their own personal narratives later. I showed how these writers create pathways for their characters to find or demonstrate a sense of agency, thus trying to distance the representation of African women from earlier representations written by African men who depicted African women as obedient and unambitious.

Chapter four exmined the representation of patriarchy in these novels and closely reads how the authors chose to write the societies in these novels. These societies are exposed for promoting and encouraging the commodification of women and the pressures they put on women's bodies through compulsory motherhood and the trading of women for material objects, which does not include dowry. This chapter further explored *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa in order to support how these societal practices have not changed between all three generations of Nigerian women writing stories. I further demonstrated how Shoneyin and Adébáyọ̀ make the conscious effort in subverting the patriarchal role of the blame of infertility, providing that it is the male characters who are now infertile and struggle to cover it up so as to not tarnish the image of their masculinity. Moreover, this chapter also explored how certain women characters like Yejide, Bolanhle and Adaku choose to strategically undermine patriarchy whilst other women characters like Iya Segi, Iya Femi, Iya Tope, Funmi and Nnu Ego do not, and the ways in which the narratives demonstrated a negative end for the characters who did not.

Chapter five investigated homosocial relationships between the women characters and the ways in which patriarchal pressures restrain these women from forming comforting and nurturing friendships. This chapter began by exploring the theory of homosociality, presenting my own definition for this concept. It then went on to explore how homosocial relationships exist between each of the women in these novels and the patriarchal hierarchy that prevents them from deviating from their position in the household. Furthermore, this chapter examined how some characters use their agency to resist patriarchy, which opens up a space for them to come together in solidarity and break down the hierarchies formed by the patriarchy.

Each of these chapters work together in showing that when these three novels are juxtaposed, it demonstrates how Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta write their women characters with patriarchal rebellion in mind, making these authors practitioners of African feminist theory and consciousness. Through these chapters, the ways in which they practice African feminist ideology becomes evident. Firstly, these authors give their women characters agency, which automatically pulls them away from their usual patriarchal representation. Secondly, these writers expose patriarchy for its marginalisation, making readers aware of the suffering women are subject to simply due to the patriarchal system. However, these writers also make an effort in subverting a certain narrative that patriarchal societies, such as in these novels, like to push regarding the African woman. Furthermore, these writers show their readers that women do not merely dislike each other in closed spaces. Rather, it is these patriarchal spaces that promote the idea that women should not like each other in order to sustain patriarchal hierarchies. These writers make us, as readers, aware that by women supporting each other in such spaces, there is a higher possibility of rebellion and an undercutting of patriarchy.

My research project not only contributes to the existing research around ideas of African feminism, polygamy, agency and liberation, but also strengthens it. This dissertation extends the argument around how patriarchal pressures exist when it comes to the woman's body and that the woman's body becomes a victim of patriarchal power (Egya) by showing that even though patriarchal powers are often exerted upon a woman's body, there are ways in which it is possible to resist these powers as shown by these authors. Furthermore, my research shows how women in homosocial spaces not only desire to dominate each other for the husband's attention as Azizah (2019) suggests, but also because they would like to practice their own agency and be less

subjected to the patriarchal pressures. However, contrary to some research published around polygamous marriages being incompatible with the hope for women's happiness (Ndabayakhe and Addison), Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta demonstrate that women can be content within a polygamous marriage, as long as they have some form of agency.

Returning to Shoneyin's interview with Wana Udobang, Shoneyin mentions that her intention of writing *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is due to her need to allow the voices of women like her women characters to be heard. My intention behind writing this dissertation was very similar in that I believed that polygamous spaces were often overlooked and the literature around it was quite minimal. In my investigation, I hope to have achieved something similar to Shoneyin, Adébáyọ̀ and Emecheta in their writing: I hope to have highlighted how the impacts of patriarchy are present all around and that we, as women, have the strength to resist and evolve out of places that only offer us marginalisation.

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