

EXPLORING NEGO-FEMINISM IN SHONEYIN'S THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES

By

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Abstract

Female fictional writers in Nigeria have won critical acclaim in women struggle. Efforts by some writers to address issues regarding women have largely emphasized radical non-negotiable approaches perhaps as it was thought that injustice against women should not be negotiated. Recently, however, the use of dialogue and negotiation in tackling women's predicament and peace building seems to gain acceptance. As the need for women liberation surges, literary arbitration has become vital when they arise. Some Nigerian female fictional writers appear to embrace negotiation as a tool to arbitrate and to advance the feminist struggle. Thus, this paper examines the issues faced by women and resolved through negotiation in Lola Shoneyin's novel "The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives" (2010). Using Nego-Feminism – a variant of African feminism theory – it advocates peace, harmony, cooperation and negotiation between the sexes. While it is true that women are oppressed and dehumanized in the hands of men and in society, Nego-Feminism postulates the idea that both female and male sexes are partners in progress and that their differences can amicably be resolved. The paper concludes that with dialogue, negotiation and collaboration, peaceful co-existence, social harmony and national development are achievable. Thus, the use of Nego-Feminism which advocates partnership, complementarity of roles between men and women for a happy family and national life is hereby encouraged.

Introduction

Female fictional writers in Nigeria have attained a status almost everywhere around the world. They present the female situations such as hardship, subjugation and all such types of discriminations against women. They also try to challenge and bring about

possible solutions that the woman can do to attain her freedom and success in a society through their writings. Their focus has always been the social projection of the society and emergent issues, such that individual representation and society are reflected. This could be a result of the fact that,

‘literature is a tool for informing, educating, elucidating, denouncing problems and proposing solutions’ (Wale, 2008, p.1). The improvement in the level of female writers’ contribution to Nigerian society most especially in literature and in creating awareness to female has been very impressive over the last few decades. Their writings are classified into the first, the second and the contemporary generations of writers. However, it is observed that most Nigerian female writers are mostly concerned with issues that affect the female gender in most of their writings. This is due to the influence of society’s forces which favour the male.

With Flora Nwapa as a debut, female writers emerged in the Nigerian literary scene in the late 60s with the zeal to address issues relating to women. Irrespective of the diverse intentions of these women, they preoccupied themselves with the issues of their respective socio-cultural environment with determination to re-direct the destiny of the female and inspire women through their works. Commenting on Nwapa as the pioneer Nigerian female writer, Nnolim (2011, p. 176) clearly states that:

Flora Nwapa is historically important in Nigeria and, indeed, African literature. Besides being the first Nigerian female novelist, the content of her works was on novel on the Nigerian and African literary scene. Her importance thus

derives from her pioneer position among African female writers and further, from the originality of her subject matter, making women the centre-piece of her novelistic endeavours, and their plight and their welfare, made to supremely matter.

Today, Nigeria has an avalanche of female authored novels. These novels, especially the contemporary or modern ones, attempt to re-portray the Nigerian woman that emerge from claws of social subjugation to become an achiever – a modern woman to say, to tackle the challenge of patriarchy and cultural subjugation. In the first generation of African writers, women issues were not given relevance. Women were projected as passive and insignificant members of their respective societies. The pioneer African writers, mirrored patriarchy in their works as Oriaku (1996, p 72) rightly observed:

In text after text the man is made the subject of the narrative, he is significant and dominate other people. Because he is invariably the central character, the lives of the other characters- the other male characters who serve as his foils or the women and children whose significance lies in their dependence on him are much less fully realized.

From the second generation, the trend changed such that, from the second generation up to the contemporary, the

presentation of female characters started to change especially with the advent of female writers on the literary scene. In their later novels, the men have had “a sudden awakening to the importance of women being” (Nwapa, 2009, p. 526). For example, Achebe who is describe as ‘Nigeria’s best known novelist and likely the best known writer of fiction... he has several novels and short stories which have achieved international recognition. These include *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*’ (Mode, 2002, p. 64) In *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) however, Achebe enacts female characters that are in contrast to the stereotyped ones evident in his early novels. They are self-actualized, focused, determined, and bold. This is shown in the characters Beatrice and Elewa. The contemporary female fictional writers appear to be steeped in factual realities at the expense of imagination. These new fictional writers are concerned with issues that are contemporaneous and topical. This paper contends that the ways these new writers write are impacted by the new Nigerian reality or that of the entire world, and their writings differ from that of the early female writers most especially in addressing and tackling female issues. Some female writers show serious commitment to narrating the woman experience through literature, from a more radical point of view and later with the emergence of the different variant of African feminism, the writers tend to write to negotiate the woman place in

the society using different methods From the beginning we have female writers like Buchi Emecheta whom in some of her works advocates that when a woman feels suffocated in a marriage she can burst out of the marriage and leave the free live she desires. This can be seen in her novel *Kehinde* (1994) In the novel we see how Kehinde stands firm and trusts her decisions about taking a new step in her life. Kehinde, who, for a long time in her life, has been an accomplice of the stultifying system, unable to bear it no more, literally bursts and tears off her veil of illusion, complicity and duplicity. In *Kehinde*, Kehinde is saddled with a husband who is selfish and does not consider her needs. At home she does the house keeping because she earns more. As if these are not enough, he fled to Nigeria where he marries without informing her. His decision without informing her really pains her. It is against this background that she gets separated from him. This pattern occurs in most of Buchi Emecheta’s works.

By creating women who opt out of marriages, Emecheta is insisting on the recognition of the worth of women as human beings. The contemporary female writers like Lola Shoneyin and Razinat Talatu Muhammad present female characters who go through a lot in life most especially in marriage but still remain in the marriage and find solutions through negotiations. For them, opting out is not a solution as creating strategies that will benefit both sexes.

Theoretical Framework

Feminism today is an ideology with many practitioners that have situated themselves in various theoretical intersections. In emphasizing the relevance of feminism, Balogun (2014, p. 19) believes that,

Feminist theorists have espoused the connection between otherness and class interms of the relationship which borders on gender inequality in which the dominant group (male) imposes the values of its own particular identity, while at the same time devaluing the identity of the 'other' (female) through the imposition of corresponding discriminatory measures.

One can say that feminism is all about what gives women their confidence; nonetheless, the confidence is still dangling and not as expected because what these women's desire is yet to be fulfilled. In a nutshell, Ojunobi (1998, p. 46) believes that;

feminism is an ideology designed to liberate and emancipate women worldwide from oppression, subjugation, brutalization, ignorance and self-immolation. It aims at wiping out all forms of inequity and oppression through the act of creating a more just, social and economic order universally and this implies the involvement of women in national liberation struggles, in plans for national

growth and global struggle for change.

However, the extreme demands of Western feminism paved the way for different variants of feminism. Ebunoluwa(2009, p. 232) reveals that,

feminism has failed in its global ambition to address the needs of women worldwide. Feminism as a practice addresses the needs of middle class white women. Because of the inadequacies of feminism, the African American women evolved the concept of womanism to meet the needs of Black woman in America. Second, we revealed that although womanism purports to address the needs of all Black women, African American womanism alone is generally inadequate for the specific concerns of African women in Africa. This then leads us to the question of an African variant of the feminist theory. Whereas various attempts have been made to meet this need, nevertheless no consensus have been arrived at, and from feminism, womanism, stiwanism to motherism, there is yet to be a commonly accepted indigenous theory peculiar to African women in Africa.

Nnaemeka develops a more sensible and rewarding feminism, a term she calls Nego-feminism, after all these 'new

feminist models are needed especially those that are realistic, practical and, fundamental” (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 26), In her paper, ‘Nego-feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa’s Way’ (2003), Obiomma Nnaemeka proposes nego-feminism from two similar positions. First, it directly flows from ‘negotiation’. Second ‘n-ego’ translates to non ego/ no ego’. It is therefore a feminism that is free from egoistic tendencies which neither male nor female holds. The center of her theory emphasizes complementarity of sexes’ (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 360) Nego-feminism charges both sexes to be willing-partners in progress. In short, where the notorious western and radical feminism is extreme and sidelines some aspects of African culture, Nego-feminism is open to the present and the future

This paper adopts Nego feminism because it gives room for understanding and appreciation. It is also not harsh and extreme in approach. Alkali, Tolif & Jan, (2017, p. 10) agree that ‘Nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration. Nego-feminism offers to the world how to manage the two sexes harmoniously’.

Peace negotiation in Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*

Shoneyin’s novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* (2010) is set in

contemporary Nigerian society, in the city of Ibadan alongside Ayikara. The story is woven around the happenings in the polygamous home of Mr. Alao (Baba Segi). Baba Segi, a rich and illiterate polygamist becomes worried on the issue of Bolanle’s, his new wife ‘childlessness’ (p1). After all he is a father of seven children by his early marriages to IyaSegi, Iya Femi and Iya Tope, and of course he knows he does not slack in his marital obligations. In his quest for solution, he visits a friend Teacher at Ayikara and he advises him to take his modern wife to the hospital for test. The writer however explains how Bolanle met Baba Segi through her friend Yemisi. After her marriage to Baba Segi, their differences show case in the sense that Baba Segi is an illiterate, a traditionalist and a patriarch who believes that as the provider in his family, he deserves to be worship and obeyed. The writer explains an instance in the novel when Baba Segi arrived home and ‘the entire household poured out of different rooms to welcome their benefactor. Baba Segi’s three sons lay prostrate, their torsos curled upwards like mats rearing their edges. The daughters knelt before. From the eldest child to the youngest...’ (p8). Bolanle on the other hand; a university graduate is modern and sometimes finds some of his attitudes repulsive but tries to endure it and believes that one day she will change him for the better.

Bolanle clearly justify her reasons for marrying Baba Segi saying she chooses the home ‘not for the monthly

allowances, not for the lace skirt suits, and not for the coral bracelets. Those things mean nothing to me. I choose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity. And when you choose a family, you stay with them.’ (p16). In the case of Bolanle, she chooses the polygamous home willingly as she is not forced or influenced by anybody, it is her own choice. Apart from these personal reasons of Bolanle, she marries Baba Segi in order to make some changes in her life as she states ‘he wasn’t too old that he couldn’t change... I would devote some few hours a night to teaching him good manners.’ (p17) All the wives of Baba Segi except Iya Tope whose father gave her to him as a compensation for the debt he owes him, married him willingly.

After her marriage with Baba Segi, the house, the atmosphere and the attitudes of the co-wives have not changed. They consider her as an intruder who snatches the extra time they share with their husband. But, Bolanle is so determined to overcome all challenges on her way to having a blissful home that on one occasion she reasons within herself; “one day, they will all love me. I will buy their affection with the money Baba Segi gives me if I have to... one day, they will all accept me as a member of this family” (23). As Alkali, Talif & Jan (2013) rightly observe, nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace... and arbitration.’ (p. 12). Despite the challenges Bolanle faced in her home she is determined and hopeful. Bolanle’s upbringing, beliefs, experiences and

innate qualities enable her to be wise in handling the polygamous house she is in as well as her life’s misfortunes. She is also able to stay strong and confront any storm that erupts upon her arrival in the Alao household. The inspired jealousy by the first and third wives as a result of Bolanle’s education results in their connivance to make her life miserable and even to eliminate her. Despite their callousness towards her however, she tries to be pleasant to everyone.

Baba Segi decides to take Bolanle to the hospital for a check up to find the cause for her ‘barrenness’. At the hospital which they were seeing the doctor, Baba Segi intrudes in almost all the questions the doctor asks her and not until the doctor decides to call the security that he agreed to be quite. There at the Doctors office he learns the truth that Bolanle once had a sexual relationship at the age of ‘fifteen and eight months, four months before my sixteenth birthday.’ (p 37) the incident led to pregnancy but was terminated. This information upset Baba Segi, that the Doctor thinks he will hit his wife and was concerned but on the part of Baba Segi, he has his own way of consoling himself when an issue upsets or frightens him as the writer states;

Baba Segi could never keep things in. He was open-ended. His senses were directly connected to his gut and everything that did not agree with him had a way of accelerating his digestive system. Bad smell, bad news and

the sight of anything vaguely repulsive effect: what went in through his mouth, recently shot out through his mouth, and what was already settled in his belly sped through his intestines and out of his rear end. Only after clearing his digestive system could Baba Segi regain his calm. (p 29)

However, with this one cannot help but agree that Baba Segi is not that violent and irrational, he has his own style of consoling himself when in a terrible situation. This attitude of his makes him reason with his wives to reach a proper and reliable solution at the end. When he realizes the truth that Bolanle was once pregnant at the Doctor's office, he could not hide his feelings, he 'opened his mouth and brawled, 'where is your toilet?' (p 39) when he was done he returns to the office but 'he looked subdued and the strain was gone from his face' (p39) The doctor advises Bolanle on what to do next and asks her to bring the results of the tests done while coming back for her next appointment.

Baba Segi and Bolanle relationship has now turned sour, turning out to be loveless without any affection since she now confirms that Baba Segi wants her to conceive and give him a child and nothing more. He always tries to rub what he called her 'barrenness' on her face each time. These issues he keeps tormenting her with all the time. She adds; 'things have changed. Now there is no pleasure in the pleasing, no sweetness

in the surrender. Baba Segi only comes to deposit his seed in my womb. He doesn't smile or tickle me. He doesn't make jokes about my youth; he just rams me into the mattress.' (p 43) The writer through Bolanle and Iya Tope create the image of Baba Segi as a rapist according to Bolanle;

'It must have been my vulnerability that aroused him 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 of being raped became fresh in my mind that was it. (p 44)

Iya Tope, the second wife is also a victim of Baba Segi's 'pounding', she encounters this attitude from Baba Segi when they were still two wives for their husbands and he had her thrice a week, 'there were weeks I ached so much that I could hardly sit', describing Baba Segi's penis as 'so big that two men could share it and still be well endowed. Where he used it gbam-gbam-gbam, like a hammer.' (p 132) However, Alkali & Olorunshola (2016, p. 178) agrees that Shooneyin uses this instance 'to educate the readership that sexual violence is not only committed against women by criminals and rapist alone but also to a larger extent, by husbands, and there is

the inability of women to voice out their pains, which perpetually keeps them in agony without the husband knowing.'

Shoneyin portrays Baba Segi's first wife, IyaSegi as a good and successful business woman. IyaSegi is a character in the texts that deploys effective dialogue and negotiation in getting whatever she desires most especially from her husband. She does not complain openly any time her husband takes a new wife and always answers Baba Segi anytime he needs her help over the maintenance of his household. With her verbal eloquence, she explains how she manages to convince Baba Segi to give her some money to start her business. She succeeds and has shops in all the major markets in Ibadan: Mokola, Dugbe, Eleyele, Sango and Ojoo' (p 75). IyaSegi's effective dialogue leads her to become a very successful business woman. IyaSegi is adamant not to share her influence in Baba Segi's home with her co-wives. She is of the opinion that freedom can be achieved if a woman is economically independent. Like other early female writers Nwapa and Emecheta, Shoneyin is also of the same opinion that a woman can be free from any bondage if she is economically independent as she portrays in the character of IyaSegi saying: 'now I have eight cement shops in Ibadan alone and my wealth swells by the day. Do not say I am greedy because I am not. It's just that as my power grows, my path to freedom becomes clearer. Everybody wants to be free from whatever binds them' (p 104)

Before Iya Tope's marriage to Baba Segi, she lives in a village with her parents. She was married to Baba Segi as compensation. According to her, 'I was a compensation for the failed crops. I was just like the tubers of cassava in the basket. May be something even less, something strange- a tuber with eyes, a nose, arms and two legs.' (p 82) Iya Tope marries him at the 'age of twenty three' (p 72) as a virgin; she is sexually abused by him. She experiences a lot of pain after having sex with him. The pain lingers on in her mind for quite a long time she says: 'there were weeks I ached so much I could hardly sit.' (p 83) Months later after the marriage, IyaSegi warns her that she needs to get pregnant as soon as possible or Baba Segi will feed her concoctions from medicine men. IyaSegi initiated her into the secrets of being a wife to Baba Segi. This shows that IyaSegi wants her husband to remain ignorant about his infertility and also to prevent him from finding about her infidelity. She finally seduces a meat seller IyaSegi usually sends her to. He fathered her three daughters: Tope, Afolake and Motun.

Iya Femi 'the new wife' (p 87) arrives and soon gives birth to a son which makes Baba Segi happy and speaks of Femi as a 'jewel' (p 88) his praises of Femi makes IyaSegi to remind him that she already 'had an heir in Akin, her own son' (p 88). This however shows another important aspect of the female identity in the society. That is the preference of a male child. The three daughters of Iya Tope are not praised and cherished as

Femi and thus, this attitude makes Iya Tope advise her daughters to follow the right path. She adds: 'do not commit adultery... follow the path that is good and right' (p 88). The writer narrates the life of Iya Femi before marrying Baba Segi. Iyafemi's parent died when she was still a child and was left in the custody of her uncle and his wife. Her greedy uncle sold her to slavery to a woman in Ibadan who likes Iya Femi to address her as Grandma but Iya Femi promises to come back to her village to take revenge and she did that by burning down her father's house that her uncle snatch away from her after the death of her parent. At Ibadan, grandma enslaves her and treats her badly. Tunde, grandma's only son introduces her to the pleasures of the flesh. He is the one whom Iya Femi says the 'first who climbed between my legs' (p 124). From that day onwards, they continue to meet. Iya Femi confesses in her account that she connives with IyaSegi to put the rat head in the room of Bolanle in order to implicate her. She hates Bolanle with a passion and often refers to her as 'monkey' (p 137), 'the ghost' (p 138), and 'that witch' (p 138). She also refers to IyaSegi as 'a frog' (p 131), 'toad' (p 137). She refers to Iya Tope as 'pygmy goat' (p 137) Baba Segi is not left out as she refers to him as 'a flatulent pig' (p131) and 'illiterate man' (p 133) Iya Femi is adamant that Bolanle is going to displace her as his favourite wife. She believes that her uncle is responsible for all the happenings in her life for not allowing to study. She says; 'I have never forgotten the evil that my

uncle did to me my uncle deprived me of opportunities. And Grandma too' (p 133) she also adds that if not for their wickedness for not allowing to go to school 'I would have been rich and powerful, not a third wife in an illiterate man's house' (p 133). With this, the writer shows Iya Femi's strong belief that education is the solution to all her problems.

However, it is quite unfortunate to realize that the oppression, segregation and debasement of the womenfolk is not the exclusive reserve of the male gender. Some women are themselves guilty of actively participating and upholding some of these oppressive structures to the detriment of their female counterpart. Ogbonna (2015, p. 391) states that:

Unfortunately, it is women who propagate all these negative socio-cultural expectations against themselves. Women compete with themselves. They are the mothers who learn that another woman's daughter married a rich man at 18years and encourage their own daughters to abort their education and do the same. The same women snatch their fellow women's husbands, frustrate their fellow women out of jobs, and build hostility and spirit of competition amongst themselves... Mothers are quick to assent to cultural values, even against their daughters.

The ideal solution to women is that ‘women should learn to eschew self-hatred and envy, in order to gain social, political and economic reforms that will be of benefit to women. A culture of cooperation in utter sincerity will help women achieve solidarity to overcome their oppression’ (Azodo, 1998, p. 178) If IyaSegi and Iya Femi had known that the aftermath of their plan to get Bolanle out of the house would end up the way it did at the end, they would have accepted her and shared their ‘secrets’ with her.

Bolanle takes her tests result to Dr. Dibia, the specialist at UCH. After examining the report, he told her that there was nothing wrong with her but he warns her to be careful and avoid anything that could endanger her life in the future. He also calls her ‘a lucky woman’ because there was no damage done to her when an unqualified nurse had assisted her to abort her pregnancy. The doctor condemns the medical personnel that carried out abortion. He also adds that ‘I hope you won’t subject yourself to that butchery again.’ (p 171) He further asks her that he wants her husband to be examined because ‘it takes two to make a baby.’ (p 172) The appointment is scheduled for Monday ten thirty in the morning. Bolanle tells him that the doctor wants to see him. They visit Dr. Dibia and a sperm sample is taken from Baba Segi. When it is examined, there was nothing ‘not a solitary sperm swimming around’ (p 197) As a man who always boasted of his masculinity that he fathered seven children, as he once said to the doctor: I

hope you are not trying to say that I might be the cause of these difficulties...listen doctor, I have many children, I have sons and I have daughters. The only thing God has not blessed me with is twins... are the tests you want to do on me not a waste of time” (p 189). The doctors could not tell him that the test carried out on him shows that he cannot father a child, that is he is infertile. All they did was to use their own strategy to make him bring one of his wives for a medical test. At the hospital, IyaSegi did not hesitate to reveal the truth to let them know that the children he adores are not his. According to her narration, she says:

I was a young wife and I found myself in a cloud of sadness. I was childless and restless. Every time I saw a mother rocking a baby on her back, my nipples would itch to be suckled. My husband and I tried everything. He did not let my thighs rest but leapt between them every time dusk descended upon us. Even his mother was hungry for his seed to become fruit. Then, I had an idea. It was a sinful idea but I knew it would bring my sadness to an end. In fact, it was more than an idea; it promised to be a solution. If my husband does not have seed then what harm could it do to seek it elsewhere?... so, I found seed and planted it in my belly. (p 215)

For the other wives she adds: ‘ I misled them perhaps if I had not shown the second one my way, this same would have come out sooner’ (p 216). The doctors and Baba Segi were shocked by this revelation. He returns home and tells his three wives to pack. When Bolanle asks, he tells her that his wives have brought him bastards in his house; they should all leave his house with their children. Baba Segi calls for a meeting and orders his wives to leave him since it has been revealed that he is not the biological father of their children. Terrified, Iya Femi asks; ‘but where? Where? Go where? (p 241) he replies ‘wherever you please! I do not want to keep you here.’ (p 241) At this point IyaSegi adds using her wisdom and effective dialogue of negotiation:

You talk of father of our children. Who is the father of our children...there is no other but you... you named every single child in this house, every one. You have nurtured them so it is your name they will bear. You say that they are other fathers, but you are the only father they know. You alone have been their father, for it takes more than just shedding seed to be a father.’ (p 241)

IyaSegi further says that she takes the blame for everything for she is the one that misled the rest. She continues saying: ‘if you want to punish us for our misdeeds, let me single handedly carry the waste bucket... I say this because it

was I who led these women into the darkness that engulfs them now.’ (p 241-242) Baba Segi listen to every plea attentively but was quiet.

IyaSegi knew him better than the others silenced by anguish, so she dealt her final card. ‘My lord, I know you want to send me off into the wilderness but I beseech you to have mercy on me. My eyes have already seen what no mother’s eyes should see. Forgive me, for I seek nothing else but to stay by your side, serving you as I have done all these years. Consider that I have lost one child but there is yet one remaining. I give that child to you. Take him! Own him! What do I know about bringing up a son? Which words will I use to chastise him? If your heart does not forgive me, my lord, take Akin. And if your heart accepts me to serve you, receive me also’ With this, she lowered herself onto her knees, lay flat on the floor and reached out her hands until they held her husband’s feet. ‘My lord,’ she whispered, let us not allow the world to see our shame. Let us keep our secrets from those who may seek to mock us.’ (242)

Applying wisdom and tactics, IyaSegi melts the heart of Baba Segi. Even Bolanle that was watching the whole incident said nothing but praises IyaSegi

saying 'she was good' and also realizes 'Baba Segi's big testicles were empty and without seed' (p 242). Baba Segi thinks of the embarrassment of chasing his wives will cause him as IyaSegi understood 'that his manhood be protected' (p 243), he calls another meeting where new rules guiding the operations of the women in the house are laid:

An agreement was drawn up: they could stay if they promised to be the wives he wanted them to be. He promptly banned them from leaving the house without his permission. IyaSegi was instructed to close down all her shops and relinquish every kobo she had saved to him. Iya Femi was forbidden to wear make-up and there would be no more church... surprisingly, he didn't have any rule for Iya Tope... Baba Segi swore to buy them all the jewellery, all the laces, every luxury they needed and wanted, provided these were only worn within the four walls of his home. (p 243)

This however is the final resolutions to the conflicts in the text. The three wives agree to live with Baba Segi under the new strict rules that restrict their movement but Bolanle decides to leave so as to start afresh and breathe the air of freedom and the new life that awaits her.

Lola Shoneyin in the novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) does

not show case that this variant of African Feminism to be antagonistic to African men. In the novel, she examines structures that are both oppressive to both men and women in a society most especially polygamous setting. She explores options to both men and women when their relationship fails or is on the brink of failure. She identifies strategies in accordance to nego-feminism by which both sexes could manage to stay together even after their union had been compromised through infidelity and betrayal such as in the case of Baba Segi.

However, nego-feminism is used as a strategy by the women to negotiate their way with men in order to 'build a harmonious society' (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 381). Nego-feminism can also be adopted by women in dealing with their female counterpart too just as the way Bolanle and Iya Tope did with their co-wives; Iya Segi and Iya Femi. Bolanle's beliefs and good nature enables her to be wise in negotiating and handling her life misfortunes and she is able to withstand all the evil plans by Iya Segi and Iya Femi to oust her out of Baba of Baba Segi's house. Despite all the provocations in the household, Bolanle remains calm and cautious like the chameleon; just as Nnaemeka (2003, p. 383) observes that 'the chameleon is cautious. When the chameleon comes into a new environment it takes the colour of the environment without taking over. The chameleon adapts without imposing itself.' She further adds that: 'we need to walk like the chameleon-goal oriented, cautious, accommodating

and open to diverse views.’ (p 382). This is how Bolanle was able to stay in Baba Segi’s house calmly without imposing herself on the family members, but slowly and gently she wins the affection of some members.

In the case of Iya Tope, she also knows well how to remain calm and to negotiate with every situation in the house. When Iya Segi asks her to stop seeing the meat seller, she does that despite the urge and need for him because she does not want her children to suffer her absence. She does not envy Bolanle as the other co-wives did; her unaggressive and understanding nature makes her become the husband’s favourite at the end.

Nnaemeka (2003) agrees that: ‘nego-feminism in Africa is living those legacies in theory, practice, and policy matters. African women’s engagement still nurtures the compromise and hopefulness needed to build a harmonious society.’ (p 381) However, one cannot say that nego-feminism is not without deficiency as Akanmode (2017, p.7) rightly observes that: no feminism model is however devoid of any weakness, they all have their strength and weaknesses’. As a matter of fact the; ‘principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance’ (Nnaemeka, 2003 p. 37) does come without effect. An instance can be drawn from the novel under discussion, when Baba Segi decides to forgive the women for all the

secrets, infidelity and lies, in his effort to ‘cope with successfully/go around’ (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 378). After the pleas from the wives, Iya Segi gives him reasons for their act which is to protect his manhood and protect him from those who may mock him and also not to lose his ego as a man. He gave them rules to abide by; first he bans them from leaving the house without his permission, secondly he asks Iya Segi to close down all her shops and relinquish every kobo and finally, he forbids Iya Femi from wearing make-up and going to church. Looking and analyzing these strict rules makes one reflect the early issue concerning feminist movement which is ‘woman’s freedom’ all over again. The wives are now going to be dependent on him for every single thing in their life. Notwithstanding, they agreed with the rules and promise to make amends and stay in their matrimonial home. The applaud goes to Baba Segi, in his effort to ‘build a harmonious society’ (Nnaemeka, 2003 p. 387), accepts the children fathered by different men despite his personality and ego.

Nonetheless, nego-feminism provides efforts and strategies that are needed to offer solutions to men and women in order to achieve certain objectives in life without being radical. Alkali, Talif & Jan (2013, p. 11) also agrees that ‘nego-feminism offers the world how to manage the two sexes harmoniously.’

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