

THE WOMAN SABOTAGE IN *SKY-HIGH FLAMES* BY UNOMA AZUAH AND *THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES* BY LOLA SHONEYIN

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Abstract

The dominant culture in the African setting is patriarchy and it largely marginalizes, subjugates, and oppresses the woman as she is often treated as a second class citizen. The ongoing fights against this syndrome, especially since the inception of feminism, have recorded little achievements. This is because the woman has an anti-womanist tendency of being hostile to a fellow woman. The woman has a hatred for her sister. She deliberately obstructs or prevents her sister's success. This paper addresses the issue of the woman sabotage in Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The issue of women sabotaging themselves leads to the continual subjugation of women which results to lack of development. The paper uses the lens of African womanist approach to analyse the texts under discourse. Womanism subverts the patriarchal authorities in Africa and is directed at reversing the relegation faced by the woman in Africa. It therefore upholds collectivity. The paper captures the selfishness and hatred exhibited towards fellow women, as well as backbite and evil machination against another constructed in *Sky-High Flames* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. The research finds that continuous sabotage to fellow women is dangerous and people should uphold collectivity evident in some of the issues resolved in the texts analysed, which is engraving a new message of love for fellow woman, affection and the unification of women as the only panacea for development that fosters national progress.

Key Words: Woman Sabotage, *Sky-High Flames*, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Lola Shoneyin

Introduction

The dominant culture in the Africa setting is patriarchy and it privileges the men more than women in the society. It marginalises, subjugates and oppresses women as they are often treated trivially. The inconsequentiality attributed to women in Africa has over the years made them to lament over the derogatory experiences they go through. The discrimination of women has compromised efforts aimed at including women along with men as agents of sustainable development. This is widespread even among the elite group. The scenario has continually been that of subjugating women in the society even though women manage their homes formidably and also contribute to the development of the society. However, there is an encumbrance that has contributed greatly to their marginalisation. This research opine that not only traditional norms of patriarchy oppresses women. Women often serve as vessels for the oppression of their fellow women. They have this antagonistic tendency of being hostile to fellow women.

This trend is a crippling trend that has eaten deep into the psyche of women and needs to be addressed. If the society must be integrated and development must be sustained, the issue of enmity amongst women should be continually addressed for a better society. Women go the extra mile to sow seeds of discord in the relationships of fellow women. They are hardly unified and deliberately obstruct the development of other women. This has brought about lack of development and has fostered patriarchal norms that subjugate them. It is this phenomenon that is termed the woman sabotage by this paper. Sabotage is used to indicate that women impair themselves by wilfully injuring or destroying other women. They damage the personality of one another and prevent their own freedom and self-growth.

Women mostly are used in the traditional patriarchal society as vessels to thwart their own. For instance, once a girl attains a marriageable age but is unmarried, women are the first to notice and sell-out such a girl. They are usually the first to notice that a woman that gets married is yet to bear a child for the husband and mostly they instigate family members against such a woman leading to separation or divorce. They are often used to oust their fellow women from their matrimonial homes owing to these reasons. Issues like forced marriages and polygamy would have long been forgone issues if women sympathised more with their own. The ability of women to nurture the society should be extended to fellow women by treating women well. This paper uses the lens of womanism to elucidate the hostility associated with women especially amongst themselves. Using the duo of Unoma Azuah and Lola Shoneyin's novels - *Sky-High Flames* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the paper elucidates the selfishness, hatred, jealousy and envy, backbiting, wickedness and the evil machinations exhibited by women against their fellow women. The paper, therefore, upholds the role of women to salvage and reform the society from its rottenness of dehumanising people. The paper also makes the call to the intellectuals, the general public and lovers of female development to promote the new message of love for fellow women, affection and the unification of women as the only panacea for personal integration and development which fosters sustainability and national development.

Theoretical Framework

Womanism is a literary theory that is based on the everyday life experiences of women. It is a theory that challenges masculine authority in African communities. It is directed at erasing the marginalisation and subjugation of women in Africa. It subverts patriarchy and upholds the unity of women. It frowns at individuality of women and

emphasises the need to be committed to the survival and wholeness of men and women. Womanism does not exclude men in its connotations like feminism do but encourages family ties in its inferences. It is grounded in African culture and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It upholds the coexistence of men and women while maintaining the cultural distinctiveness. It addresses gender oppression amongst people and does not directly attack men (Chike Mgbéadichie 192).

Womanism evolved out of the desire to construct theory encompassing the wellbeing of women at the same time not excluding the men thereby abolishing the thought that men are enemies to women as opposed to the feminist thinking. One of its theorists, Clenora Hudson-Weems rejects feminism's characterisation of the man as the enemy. She claims that this does not connect with Africana women as they do not see Africana men as the enemy. Instead the enemy is the oppressive force that subjugates the Africana man, woman, and child (Mgbéadichie 192).

In explaining the theory of womanism, Moses Umukoro and Uchenna Osammor aver that "African woman calls for a re-appraisal of cultural, political and economic norms that are antagonistic to their welfare. They see the feminist calls for lesbianism and homosexuality as not representing their cultural values" (70). This is the concern of womanism. It believes that the experiences of women differ according to their cultural backgrounds. The African culture is yet to assimilate the concept of lesbianism and thus cannot see feminist ideologies in the African cultural perspective. It is the cultural differences that suggest the varying theories of women's liberation such as womanism, feminism, motherism and stiwanism. To this claim, Mgbéadichie avers that "womanism, Africa's alternative to feminism is constructed to accommodate the culture of the African people" (190).

Womanism explores also the role of women in the marginalisation of other women in Africa. Regina Ode condemns women who “through their actions to fellow women, make womanity docile and submissive” (97). The women as lived in Africa today do not uphold unification as mandated by the womanist perspective. They are constantly in search of their personal gains, hence they backbite other women, they are jealous and envious of their fellow’s successes, they exhibit some form of wickedness towards one another and all these merge to subjugate women in general.

Mary E. Modupe Kolawole has shaped the theory by adding that “African women are not seeking to replace subjugation or separatism with another; African women yearn for a society in which they can assert their innate resourcefulness by rejecting the fetters of tradition and any aspects of socialisation that put them at a disadvantage” (30). The perspective here does not seek to replace patriarchy but discards or rubbishes the chains of patriarchy that aim at downgrading women. Accordingly, Umukoro and Osammor assert that “Walker coined the term womanism from the black folks expression of ‘you acting womanish’ a mother often tells her daughters”. The duo explain that “womanish’ here means ‘courage’, ‘mature’, ‘responsibility’, and ‘confidence’ in a woman and not being ‘weak and fragile’ as society often ascribes to the female gender” (70). Thus they are among those that believe womanism was first used by Alice Walker.

The core distinction of womanism is the unification of family ties, as opposed to the separation that is encouraged by feminism. Womanism emphasises unification, convergence, and collectivism amongst women and sees these as vital to the human existence. Today’s novels capture the tensions of subjugations and the desire of development. This theory is therefore used as a lens to make that statement that women should desist from being contributory factors that enhance their marginalisation and subjugation in the society

through hatred and hostility, jealousy and envy, selfishness, backbite, wickedness, evil machinations and any other way women constitute vessels of perpetrating oppressive principles.

Womanism in *Sky High Flames*

The novel is about Ofunne, a young girl who desires education. She is happy to be in school and looks forward to when she would graduate from school and become a teacher. Unfortunately, she is not allowed to complete her secondary education. She is married off to Oko Okolo. From her school during vacation she heads straight to Oko's house because the marriage had been done by proxy. Oko had been reckless with women and one of them confronts Ofunne as a new wife. This devastates her but she tries to make her marriage work to impress her mother. Nine months into the marriage, she yearns for pregnancy and asks her husband to seek help. Oko initially does not oblige her saying she is impatient. But due to her insistence, they visit a traditionalist who says Oko has infected his wife with syphilis. Weeks into the treatment, Ofunne becomes pregnant. Few months to delivery, she becomes unwell and they travel home for her delivery. She has a still birth owing to chronic infection. Rather than stay to nurture their hurt, Oko flees to Kaduna leaving her with his parents. Udoka, Oko's mother does not hide her contempt towards Ofunne. Ofunne is disheartened but encouraged by her mother to stay back to heal. She visits the hospital for check-up to ascertain why she had the stillbirth. The doctor reveals that he had told Oko that it is as a result of the syphilis and had even given Oko some drugs for her. The doctor reveals that the syphilis had reached its advanced stage and should be treated otherwise it may cause her blindness. Udoka thinks Ofunne infected her son with the disease thus she calls her wayward. Ofunne becomes furious with anger. She leaves Oko against all persuasion by her mother to continue her education and start up her life.

Few pages into the novel and the reader is faced with derogatory act of subjugation where Ofunne is discriminated against. She is made to overwork and is treated with harshness to the extent that she complains “maybe my mother was afraid I would fail her as a first daughter if she were not harsh with me” (7). Ofunne’s mother cares less about her wellbeing, she reprimands her often. Ofunne laments that “any minute spent by myself was called daydreaming” (7). This indicates that she overworked and was allowed little or no time to rest compared to her brothers who were allowed to freely go about which is perpetuated by their mother

Selfishness

Selfishness is a negative attribute that affects interrelationships. It has penetrated the minds of women in Nigeria causing downfall and denigration. It is a trait amongst many people in the society today. Women also are found of thinking only of themselves, thus they put the interest of other women behind them. This breeds lack of development and wellbeing of other women generally. This trend of thought is evident in *SkyHigh Flames* where though Ofunne desires to be educated. Her desire is truncated by her parents’ wish to marry her off for money. They do not deem it fit to consider her opinion. Even when she asks her mother why they are in a haste to marry her off, her mother replies it is “to help your father ... we have spent a lot of money for my fever and for Mama Isioma’s leg” (73). The mother is in a position to have deliberated the issue with her husband and come up with a solution. But as is the tradition of patriarchy, Ofunne has to be married off. Disheartened, Ofunne asks her father about their plan in this conversation,

Papa, you want to marry me off to a stranger because you need money? Don’t question my actions, Ofunne. What is wrong with finding a man for you? And what is wrong with

getting married? Are you not of age? Or has school blinded you priorities? ... My heart cringed at the thought of getting married because we needed the money, but I decided not to continue arguing with my father” ... I also knew that my father would not give up till I did what he wanted. (76)

The above indicates that Ofunne is mistreated not just by a man but a woman as well. She is a young girl that seeks education for a better life ahead yet she is caught in the net of traditional bigotry. She yields to her parents’ desire and marries a man she hardly knows evident in her statement “it was the same day I discovered that I was leaving for Kaduna with Oko” (88). Oko and Ofunne’s parents do not have the wellbeing of Ofunne at heart. Each of them acted from a selfish interest standpoint.

Wickedness and Evil Machination

This manifests itself amongst women especially those who feel the same way about men in their daily relationship. This first manifests in the relationship between Ofili’s two wives, Mama Ofunne and Mama Isioma. Ofunne’s mother is afraid of Mama Isioma who is a herbalist. Ofunne states that “It surprised me that my mother was harsh with us, but her strictness melted like ice under an intense heat She could not stand up to Mama Isioma’s taunts, sometimes she was too nice to her, and I suspected that her niceness came out of fear” (12). This indicates that their relationship is not cordial as should be the case amongst family members.

Mama Isioma is presented as a herbalist and she uses her wits in charms to attempt harming Ofunne’s mother. This is prevalent in the society and exemplifies the women sabotaging one another. Because of men, women tear themselves apart. This drives the feminist movement of being at equality with the men. When two women are in a relationship with a man, they do not mind harming each other. Some

even wish their fellow woman dead. Mama Isioma is caught trying to put a curse on Ofunne's mother. According to the narrator

There was a digging noise. ... I heard someone digging right in front of my mother's house. ... Mama Isioma was digging with a hoe and there was a pot sitting near her feet. Palm fronds were sticking out of the pot. Palm fronds were for curses. It must have been a curse. She was trying to place a curse on my mother's head. ... as she lifted the post to sink into the ground, I rushed out and grabbed it from her, then I tore into her house and smashed it through her open door. ... Even neighbours were crossed with what she'd done. Some snapped their fingers at her, some spat at her, and some openly wished her death. (21 - 2)

This is the extent to which women sabotage one another. Deploying their strength in harming other women in a world that they already face subjugation. This cannot bring about integration and sustainability. Readers are made to understand from the explanation of Ofunne's mother to the crowd that she is innocent and does not understand why Isioma's mother would want to curse her. She states "... my hands are clean, but he who says that I will not find rest will not rest even in his grave ... if I am guilty I will pay. If I am not, my chi is never asleep" (22). This represents the predicament of many women out there. For no justifiable cause they are picked on and harmed by their fellow women over trivial issues that would have been settled through dialogue.

Hostility

There is also the problematic situation amongst women which is usually experienced among mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This has posed a serious problem over the years. The relationship between women who are mothers-in-law to their daughters-in-law is inimical.

This has caused fragmentation rather than the desired integration that fosters development. *Sky High Flames* decries over this condition. Evidently from the text, Udoka is seen habitually taunting her daughter-in-law Ofunne. In fact Ofunne asserts that even though they never met, Udoka frowned at her when she greeted her in a manner that she began to wonder whether it was likeness or otherwise stating “the puckered brow on her face attracted my attention. I was not sure about why she was frowning, and could not tell if she didn’t like me or if it was her usual way of expression” (135). One begins to wonder if at first sight, a frown on a face is encouraging or heart-warming. Whatever the case, Ofunne had never met with her, she had many expectation and the initial expression on Udoka’s face gave her away. Udoka is expected to have welcomed her bride warmly but she does otherwise.

This is a replica of the happening in the society. From observation, women especially mothers-in-law are associated with hostility. It has become normal for some spinsters wish to be betrothed to men that have lost their mothers. It becomes a problem because if such a girl wants her mother alive then she should welcome the mother of the one who betroths her. Having a living mother should not be perceived to be a crime.

Simultaneously, young girls too are very apprehensive of mothers-in-law. The hatred becomes vice versa as no one of them wills to let go. The mothers feeling that a girl has taken over her son, and the young women feeling as though their mothers have become their rival. Relationships like this hinders integration amongst people and thwarts sustainability. They are often perceived to be insignificant but go a long way to make the society a better place to live in. The stability of individual is best heightened in a cordial relationship.

Ofunne desires to have a cordial relation with her mother-in-law and makes attempt at gaining such but fails. Even though she does not get a good signal from Udoka, she follows her to the kitchen and

offers to help her but is turned down. She states that “there was a long pause, and we had nothing to say to each other. I was already getting uncomfortable and tired of sitting around the kitchen so I walked around the table in the kitchen trying to look busy” (136). Ofunne attempts to converse like daughter and mother with Udoka but soon becomes uncomfortable as it is evident in the above quotation. One would expect that Udoka would have loosened up so that a communication will flow between them but she is rigid. Rather she asks Ofunne if her son Oko has been feeding well stating “have you both been feeding well? Oko looks emaciated” (136). Ifeata, Mama Abu and Ofunne’s mother first notice that Ofunne does not look well in her pregnancy but Udoka notices her son first. The situation is different with Oko’s father. As soon as he gets a chance with her by the dining table, he asks Ofunne, “so how is married life? Is Oko taking good care of you?” (137). This is how a warm relationship should begin and develop. This is why also the women must try and mend their ways regarding such relationships as they affects the nation at large.

Udoka diametrically opposes Ofunne all through the text. From another standpoint, she does not allow Oko to carry Ofunne to see her parents as Oko plans stating that “she has only spent a night with us ... one more day then she can go see her parents” (138). Udoka would have sensed her excitement about Oko and would have allowed Ofunne’s parents to see her on time too. Ofunne battles with the thoughts of letting Udoka sell her fish for her and giving it to her mother and eventually brings her fish to Udoka for assistance in sales. The gesture is also misinterpreted by Udoka. She first underrates the fish but brings a woman to buy and is surprised at the sale. She asks the woman that comes to buy the remaining fish to keep mute about the price thinking it should be sold for less, but Ofunne makes her profit. Bent on depriving Ofunne, Udoka asks Oko to collect the money from his wife. The narrator states, “before the yellow woman

left, I overheard Oko's mother telling her son to get the two hundred naira from me that I must have used his money to buy fish. He assured her that he would and she returned to the kitchen to let me know that Oko would need the money" (139 - 40). Udoka who should be grateful that her daughter has been smart to have invested the little token she got to start a petty business is rather jealous that Ofunne has a penny to herself. She tries to instigate her son to cripple his wife's sustainability. This is a replica of the society showing how women aim at depriving one another of financial freedom consciously or unconsciously. This is woman sabotage. She fuses about Ofunne until Oko becomes angry at Ofunne threatening to report her to her parents. Thus "I have told you to stop this fish business, but no, you've even brought them here to sell ... I'll let your mother know how stubborn you are" (140). It is great that Ofunne does not rely on Oko for every kobo she needs because the money from the fish sales is later used for her medication later in hospital.

Also, *Sky-High Flames* reflects the woman sabotage in many ways. For example when Ofunne has the still birth and is devastated, her mother-in-law does not hide her cruelty; calling her wayward. She exhibits her harshness to her in-law, Ofunne's mother, when she comes to nurture her daughter out of her state. She does not welcome her in her home stating that "I don't have a spare bed" (151). Ofunne's mother, sensing her hostility, replies "the floor would serve me just fine" (151). She yells at Ofunne's mother "take those dirty sandals off my rug" (152). When Ofunne's mother narrates the story from the doctor revealing why Oko left them for Kaduna hastily, Udoka alleges that "Ofunne must have been the one that got the (syphilis) first" (160). She claims she is a "loose girl, she must not have been a virgin when my son married her" (160). These are lies that pierce Ofunne so much that in her rage she decides it is better to leave Oko and start life all over,

promising herself to go back to school and develop herself for sustainability.

Womanism in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wife*

The text is about a young girl Bolanle. A girl who is raped after her university by an unknown man that offers her a lift home on a rainy day. Feeling soiled, she does not tell her mother for fear of disappointing her. She allows herself to be taken by Baba Segi (Mr. Atande Ishola Alao). She feels Baba Segi would ask no questions about her chastity which she initially preserved for her future husband. Baba Segi already has three wives but happily marries Bolanle because she is a graduate. Though Bolanle's mother loves her, she does not visit her even once because she is opposed to her marrying the polygamist.

Bolanle does not find life easy as she thought. She thought she would just be assimilated as another addition to the family. Alas, she meets three women. Two of whom are very hostile to her and one that likes her but cannot show it. The three wives share a secret amongst themselves. Baba Segi's testicles are empty without a seed. The wives found seeds and planted in their bodies thus bearing children that are not biologically Baba Segi's. Because they feel threatened by the graduate, the first Iya Segi and the third Iya Femi are vehement to see Bolanle suffer the shame of childlessness. The second though tilted towards Bolanle does not attempt to reveal their secret for fear of the first who is mother to the home. Bolanle on her own refuses traditional herbs offered by her husband. She opts for investigation at the hospital. The investigation reveals the true state of Baba Segi being sterile. This upturns the house, unveiling the other wives' secrets of having children from other men. Bolanle eventually leaves feeling unsoiled and a much stronger woman determined to face life. The text portrays the sabotage of women as this penetrates the pages of the text.

Taunts

Readers are introduced to the taunts Bolanle faces in Baba Segi's house which are engineered by the women. First, the women see her as a graduate and think she has come to take over. Iya Segi who is the mother of the house is pained that Baba Segi brings another wife. Iya Femi who is the third fumes that someone else has come to take her place and all the duo do is to taunt her. Initially Bolanle who just arrives the house compliments Iya Femi that she has gorgeous skirt and blouse on. She retorts "uneducated women wear good things too" (22). Bolanle thinks she would have to show them how to take compliments gracefully. Not forgiving Bolanle for taking a share in Baba Segi's affection, the narrator describes the actions of the first and third wife thus "Iya Segi and Iya Femi shout, hiss and spit. They sweep the floor, all the time singing satirical songs to ridicule me" (24). Bolanle does not blame them for their attitudes. She attributes it to the fact that they are not educated and exposed so she would not expect too much from them. She encourages herself stating

But it's not their fault that they are so uncouth. Living with them has taught me the value of education, of enlightenment. I have seen the dark side of illiteracy. So deep-seated is their disdain for my university degree that they smear my books with palm oil and hide them under the kitchen cupboards. I have often found missing pages from my novels in the dustbin, the words scribbled over with charcoal. (24)

Upholding the development of women, Bolanle is presented as an affectionate woman. Even in the situation she finds herself, she is not deterred. She tries to impact and affect the lives of her new family by teaching the women to read. Even though they envy her as a graduate, they turn the gesture upside down and refuse the offer. Though the text presents women as loving enlightenment, they do not

show interest rather according to the narrator “they conceal their yearning for enlightenment. They try to throw me off by making as if their coarseness is a thing of pride but I see through the subterfuge. I will not give up on them. I will bring light into their darkness” (25). This explains the idea that, owing to the mates’ lack of cordial relationship, they are blind to logic as presented by Bolanle to enlighten the other women. The mates refuse the light they so desire because it emanates from a fellow mate who prefer to continually taunt Bolanle. Bolanle observes also that “the children follow the examples that their mothers set them. Iya Femi’s sons will not sit on a chair I have vacated when I walk past them in the corridor, they turn to the wall and flatten themselves against it. No matter how many times I offer them sweets, they still treat me as if I have a contagious disease” (25). This explains the continuous nature of the woman sabotaging another, hence the children carry on from where the parents stopped.

Once this sabotage is bequeathed unto the younger generation it becomes a lifelong syndrome, an unfortunate situation. Thus, it needs to be curbed. Love and compassion should be emphasized amongst women for integration and sustainability.

Jealousy and Envy

Jealousy and envy is another gangrene that brings out the evil in women. The phenomenon beclouds the good intention of women. It brings out the worst in them. The scenario where it best thrives is in a polygamous setting as captured in the text. Evidently guided by jealousy and envy, the other wives ill-treat Bolanle as reflected in the novel.

Out of jealousy and envy Iya Segi describes a woman who demonstrates kindness to humanity as “a troublemaker, she will destroy our home. She will expose our private parts to the world. She will reveal our secret. She will bring woe” (50). Guided by this fact, Bolanle

becomes a victim of jealousy and envy in the Alao's house. According to the narration by Iya Tope

Bolanle's arrival had changed everything in their household. That evening, our mother-of-the-home was quiet. The stone in her throat moved up and down like beads on a dancer's hip. Iya Femi's head was hot. She wanted the blood of this new wife who had taken her place as the newest, youngest, freshest wife and Iya Tope's own worry was that Bolanle's arrival would disrupt the sex rotation. (43)

Going by the narration above, all the three women have one reason or the other against Bolanle and their dislike of her taking their place is not hideous in their interaction with her. This brings about denigration. Iya Femi states that "I will not be cast aside because she is a graduate! I do not want her in this house" (44). Also Iya Segi opines that Alao values children apart from what fills his mouth and if he can't find it with Bolanle, she will leave eventually stating "when she fails to give him a child, Baba Segi will throw her out! We know she will not give him children so we should watch from a distance. I don't want to see anyone scratching her door frame with their toe nails" (45). Also, according to Iya Femi Bolanle "walks around as if she owns this house. Who made her queen over us? ... and look at the lace Baba Segi buys her! What has she done to deserve it?" (47-8). All these statements point out the fact that they are jealous and envious of Bolanle and this leads to their constantly backbite.

Backbiting

Iya Segi and Iya Femi are presented as constantly talking behind Bolanle's back. It is behind her that they plot how to deal with her. One of the situations presented according to Iya Tope's revelation states

The more Bolanle puffed out her chest, the smaller Iya Segi became. Iya Segi told us she had changed her plan, that it was no longer to wait until Bolanle's barrenness made Baba Segi chase her out. Iya Segi said we had to join hands and force her out. Don't you see her highbrow and unconcerned eyes? She thinks we are beneath her. She wants our husband to cast us aside as the illiterate ones. As a wife who has recently joined our household, it is her duty to submit herself useful to our wishes not to think she can teach us!. (47)

Bolanle's good nature and goodwill is disregarded because the other wives feel threatened especially Iya Segi. She manipulates the others who are blinded by her provisions. Together with Iya Femi who also has great contempt for Bolanle they ploy on how to eject her out of their house. Iya Femi suggests that "now that we are rallying with our heads in the same direction, we must work together to blow this cloud away. These educated types have thin skins, they are like pigeons. If we poke her with a stick, she will fly away and leave our home in peace" (48).

Evil Machinations and Wickedness.

The first act of wickedness against Bolanle is the wives encourage Baba Segi to push her away from the comfort of her armchair. They observe that Baba Segi broke his rule with Bolanle. Otherwise, the tradition in their home was that "the comfort of an armchair had to be earned, which meant that unless you were pregnant with edema, breastfeeding or watching over a toddler, you were not entitled to one" (48). This is how trivial jealousy and hatred can blur people. A common chair becomes a very important thing to be earned. Baba Segi takes back the armchair according to the dictates of Iya Segi.

The second act of wickedness is to banish Bolanle's friends from visiting her home. Even Yemisi who introduced Bolanle to Baba Segi is banished from visiting her friend. Iya Segi insinuates that Yemisi could be a bad influence to Segi who was at an impressionable age (49). Bolanle is compelled to live a lonely life in the midst of many people. She only goes out with excuses to buy something often when it becomes too boring for her. Iya Segi rids her of the company of friends.

The most alarming plot is to plant a charm in her room on the day Baba Segi takes her to the hospital for investigations over her alleged barrenness. Iya Segi and Iya Femi plant a decomposed rodent head in her bedroom alleging that Bolanle plans to kill their husband. Immediately she returns, Iya Tope asks her to confess if she ever did it to be pardoned. She refuses stating that she cannot confess to a crime she knows nothing of. Baba Segi nearly chokes her as a result of the allegations, but soon realises that she is innocent (50 - 55).

Having exhausted every other plan, the duo of Iya Segi and Iya Femi decides to kill her. Iya Femi states "Iya Segi, forget about Iya Tope! Let us take care of this matter ourselves. We have the wisdom and the strength between the two of us. We can restore this home to what it was" (62). Iya Segi agrees and they poison Bolanle's food on Kole's birthday. The poison is brought by Iya Segi and administered by Iya Femi. They leave Bolanle's food in her room while she is away to see her mother. She returns into the room with Segi. Sighting the chicken in the rice, Segi's gulps down all the poisoned food meant for Bolanle. This eventually leads to her death.

Conclusion

Women are seen to be nurturers in the society owing to the nature bestowed on them. If in turn women engage in things like jealousy and envy, wickedness and evil machinations the society will become a horrible place to live causing disharmony and disintegration.

There is the need for women to have a rethink and re-valuate themselves to curb these reprehensible practices. The women should dismantle any form of subjugation that can limit them from successfully participating in the family unit, economic, political, and socio-cultural policies that limit or affects women. The situations constructed and presented in the texts do not fall from the sky. They are reflections of everyday life of women and the ill-treatment they face.

The paper notes that the African way of life has continually been mean to the women. The system subjugates women and the women themselves subconsciously sabotage themselves thus thwarting their integration in the society which further curtails national sustainability. This paper concludes that, if the society will become a better place, the women must begin to look at one another differently. Not as rivals but with compassion. The women should be committed to the survival and wholeness of women as well as male as upheld by the womanist tradition. The rivalry attitude and other forces like backbite, wickedness and evil machinations that emanates from jealousy and envy often affects the welfare of womenfolk and need to be combated further to halt the oppressive forces against women. Notice how the wives of Baba Segi subverts patriarchy in their unification when they decide to collectively throw back his sterility at him. It is also noteworthy to check the aftermath of the unification, Baba Segi though with raised brow never subjects his children to any paternity test as this would have worsened his situation and caused chaos like is prevalent in the present day. This indicates the essence of collectivism. The paper therefore implores women and men alike to ensure a peaceful coexistence and sustainability through unification and collectivism.

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives has a scene where men gather in Ayikara to discuss problems and offer solutions to one another. The meeting was not prearranged; it just happen when two or three men

gather evident from the narration that the meeting “started with one man lamenting his travails with a quarrelsome wife. And as more men ducked through the door frame, solutions were proffered. What worked wonders; what didn’t work; what was worth trying; and what, if the man concerned wasn’t careful, would eventually kill him” (8). These men discuss their problems objectively and Baba Segi belongs to the group. This is a reflection of collectivism and its effect that should be pondered upon by the womenfolk for development and sustainability.

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