# Rupturing Patriarchal Constructs: a Comparative Study Of Tanure Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives Of Baba Segi's Wives*

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## Abstract

This paper interrogates the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, and power in African literary imagination. Drawing on Nego-feminism, the study examines how both texts foreground extramarital affairs, childbearing, and the pursuit of love as sites of negotiation within patriarchal systems. In *Sovereign Body*, Ojaide situates the female body as a contested terrain, dramatizing how patriarchal authority inscribes control while women deploy subtle and overt strategies of resistance. Shoneyin's narrative, by contrast, emphasizes polygamy, infertility, and domestic politics, highlighting how women tactically navigate social stigmatization and affirm agency within restrictive marital structures. Read together, the two texts demonstrate that extramarital affairs and the cultural primacy of children are not merely private concerns but are deeply entangled with larger systems of gendered oppression and survival. Nego-feminism illuminates how women negotiate and recalibrate their positions within male-dominated households. Ultimately, the paper argues that both writers rupture patriarchal constructs by presenting female characters whose agency emerges through negotiation, resistance, and the redefinition of love and selfhood within oppressive cultural frameworks.

Keywords: Rupturing Patriarchal Constructs, Gender, Sexuality, Power, Nego-feminism, Agency.

## Introduction

The literature of contemporary Africa has long been preoccupied with the question of gender, particularly the position of women within structures of patriarchy that continue to shape the dynamics of family, marriage, politics, and identity. Writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tanure Ojaide, and Lola Shoneyin have consistently foregrounded the lived experiences of African women caught between tradition and modernity, negotiating agency in a social order defined by patriarchal codes. This persistent concern reflects the broader social reality that patriarchy in Africa is not a static entity but a constantly shifting system that intersects with class, religion, ethnicity, and history. It is against this backdrop that this paper engages Tanure Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* (2004) and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010), two works that, although differing in setting, style, and narrative architecture, both dramatize the rupturing of patriarchal constructs through female agency, exposure, and negotiation.

Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* is a psychological and socio-political novel that situates gender relations within the broader context of Nigeria's era of military authoritarianism. The protagonist, Anna, an intellectual and poet, navigates a marriage collapsing under the weight of her husband's patriarchal arrogance and political ambition. Her journey toward self-realization and moral clarity highlights the cost of female subjectivity in a society where both domestic and state power structures are configured by patriarchal norms (Ojaide, 2004). Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* on the other hand, examines polygyny in a contemporary Yoruba household, foregrounding the dynamics of rank, maternity, secrecy, and desire that sustain patriarchal dominance. Through multiple perspectives, the novel reveals how women improvise tactics of survival within oppressive structures, and how patriarchal power unravels when its foundational myths, such as male fertility and authority, are disrupted (Shoneyin, 2010).

The comparative value of reading these two texts lies in their divergent yet complementary modes of representation. While Ojaide emphasizes the intimate politics of a single marriage as a microcosm of state authoritarianism, Shoneyin deploys polyphony and satire to explore the politics of a household where multiple wives compete, collude, and resist under the shadow of their husband's authority. Both novels, however, converge on the thematic axis of rupture: the breaking apart of patriarchal structures, whether through dramatic revelations, as in Shoneyin's text, or through gradual ethical reorientations, as in Ojaide's.

Despite the richness of scholarship on African women's writing and feminist literary criticism, there is a relative dearth of comparative studies that place Ojaide and Shoneyin side by side to interrogate how patriarchy is contested in different socio-political and domestic contexts. Studies of Shoneyin's novel often focus on polygyny, the politics of infertility, and the exposure of male inadequacy (Adeleke, 2019; Azuike, 2013), while analyses of Ojaide have largely emphasized his ecological concerns, postcolonial critique, and poetic aesthetics, leaving the gendered dimensions of *Sovereign Body* underexplored (Nwagbara, 2011; Okunoye, 2015). Thus, a gap exists in comparative criticism that theorizes how two writers from distinct literary traditions and narrative strategies converge in their interrogation of patriarchal hegemony.

Moreover, scholarship on Shoneyin's text frequently employs Western feminist frameworks that, while insightful, sometimes flatten the cultural specificities of Yoruba polygyny and African modes of negotiating gender roles. Conversely, readings of Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* often under-theorize gender, focusing instead on political allegory without adequately recognizing how authoritarianism reproduces patriarchal relations in the household. There is therefore a compelling need for a comparative study that foregrounds African feminist theoretical frameworks while also engaging global feminist debates. The problem can thus be framed in three dimensions: first, the lack of comparative scholarship that bridges Shoneyin's domestic satire with Ojaide's socio-political realism; second, the insufficient attention to the subtle, negotiated forms of female agency in Ojaide's work; and third, the dominance of Western feminist categories that may obscure the nuances of African cultural practices like polygyny, kinship obligations, and negotiated motherhood.

The study provides a sustained comparative reading of Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* and Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* focusing on how patriarchal constructs are exposed, destabilized, and ruptured, to examine how female characters in both texts negotiate agency through complicity, resistance, and negotiation within oppressive structures, Investigate how the quest for love, children, and extramarital affairs spur the female characters into rupturing patricahal constructs in both novels, and to contribute to feminist literary criticism by deploying African feminist theoretical model, particularly Nego-feminism, to reveal culturally embedded dynamics of gender power.

## Relevant Critical Reviews

Critical reception of Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's* Wives has been vibrant since its publication. Scholars highlight how the novel dramatizes the power dynamics of polygyny, showing how co-wives weaponize motherhood, sexuality, and secrecy in the struggle for survival (Azuike, 2013; Chukwuma, 2014). Adeleke (2019) argues that the novel exposes how patriarchy simultaneously victimizes and empowers women by compelling them into rivalries that reinforce male authority even as they open cracks for resistance. The exposure of Baba Segi's infertility at the climax functions as both a narrative rupture and a metaphor for the collapse of patriarchal certainties. Recent scholarship has also explored the novel's polyphonic narrative technique, its satire of patriarchy, and its enduring popularity in adaptation discourses across stage and screen (Olaniyan, 2021).

In contrast, Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* has received limited but significant attention. While his poetry has long been acclaimed for its environmental and political commitment, critics such as Okunoye (2015) and Nwagbara (2011) have noted that Ojaide's fiction extends these concerns to questions of gender and morality. The novel's protagonist, Anna, is emblematic of women whose intellectual and emotional lives clash with patriarchal expectations, revealing how the household replicates the authoritarian logic of the state. Although less widely studied than Shoneyin's text, Sovereign Body is increasingly recognized as a novel that stages the intimate costs of authoritarian patriarchy, positioning women's self-realization as a site of resistance.

The comparative lacuna is evident: Shoneyin has attracted substantial feminist critique but sometimes through universalizing lenses, while Ojaide's gender thematics are overshadowed by political readings. Bringing both together offers a richer picture of how patriarchal constructs are contested in African fiction.

## Theoretical Framework

To ground this analysis, the study adopts Nego-feminism (Obioma Nnaemeka). Nego-feminism, described by Nnaemeka (2004) as the "feminism of negotiation and no-ego," emphasizes that African women often exercise agency not through direct confrontation but through tactical accommodation, compromise, and maneuvering within patriarchal structures. It acknowledges that confrontation is not always culturally feasible or effective, and that women often "go around" obstacles rather than "battering down" patriarchal walls. In Shoneyin's novel, the wives' strategies, ranging from deception to solidarity, exemplify Nego-feminist agency, as does Bolanle's eventual decision to exit the household. In Ojaide's *Sovereign Body*, Anna's negotiation between marital duty, professional aspiration, and self-care demonstrates how women resist authoritarian patriarchy through careful balancing rather than outright rebellion.

Nego-feminism offers a culturally attuned, multi-dimensional framework for analyzing African women's strategies of resistance in literature. Nego-feminism resists the imposition of Eurocentric confrontational models of feminism, while ensuring that the study does not homogenize women's experiences but remains attentive to difference. By deploying this theory, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how African writers represent the rupture of patriarchy as a process negotiated by multiple social identities.

## Extramarital Affairs and the Importance of Children in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives and Sovereign Body*

Polygamy has long been embedded in African cultural traditions, often regarded as a marker of social prestige, masculinity, and wealth. Within this context, Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Tanure Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* interrogate the intersections of polygamy, extramarital affairs, and the cultural centrality of children, exposing the complexities and contradictions that underlie gender relations in African societies. By employing Nego-feminism, which emphasizes negotiation and compromise in the face of patriarchal constraints (Nnaemeka, 2004), and which reveals how gender, class, education, and cultural expectations overlap to shape women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1991), these novels highlight how African women navigate oppressive marital systems while asserting agency within, and sometimes outside of, the domestic space.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, children are portrayed as the very foundation of African marriage and a symbol of wealth. Baba Segi's polygamous household, comprising his three wives and seven children, represents the cultural belief that masculinity is validated through reproduction. As Austin Bukenya observes, "traits such as ambition, command, virility, and pride are expected of

Swahili men, qualities Mr. Alao, or Baba Segi, seems eager to display" (Mugambi & Allan, 2010, p. 141). This ties directly to Kwame Gyekye's (1996, p. 84) assertion that "there is no wealth where there are no children (…) and nothing is as painful as when one dies without leaving a child behind."

Baba Segi exemplifies this ideology by showering affection on his children, seeing them as the embodiment of his virility and social success: "He showers his children with affection, making each feel valued" (p. 8). However, the irony that emerges is that none of the children are biologically his. The wives, in their own acts of negotiation, bear children through extramarital affairs in order to protect themselves from the stigma of barrenness. This survival strategy reflects Nego-feminism: rather than openly rebelling against patriarchal expectations, the wives "negotiate" within oppressive systems by securing their positions through children, even if conceived through deceit. Their silence and complicity exemplify how African women often adapt to cultural norms by choosing the "lesser evil" for survival.

In contrast, Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* illustrates the oppressive weight of reproductive expectations by presenting Annie, who enters marriage not out of affection but through patriarchal arrangements. The union between Annie and Dr. Goomsay is devoid of intimacy or care:

> He showed no endearment, no excitement about me as a woman, no pourings of love. I did not blame him for what I perceived as his lukewarm attitude because we had barely known each other. We gazed as if each was gauging the other emotionally. We were not yet in love. It was something we had to start cultivating. I volunteered to break the silence… I was infuriated because his father asked him to see me. If his father did not insist, he would not have come to see me. But I couldn't blame him. He might be as lukewarm as I was toward the whole arrangement. But he should have created more time for us to get used to one another. I felt like a prisoner of war; I hoped I would not continue to be held against my will (p. 30).

Unlike Shoneyin's wives, Annie's challenge is not infertility but the suffocation of a loveless marriage in which her body is controlled by patriarchal dictates. Dr. Goomsay assumes that his foreign education and professional status as a doctor are sufficient to guarantee his wife's loyalty and gratitude. His arrogance mirrors a class-based patriarchy in which women are expected to find fulfillment solely in their husbands' social achievements.

Annie's experience is shaped not just by gender but also by her class position as the wife of an elite doctor, and by education, which both empowers and isolates her. She is educated and self-aware, yet trapped in a cultural system that expects her to be submissive. Her resistance through extramarital involvement with Professor Jonah reflects her refusal to remain the "lifeless body" in Dr. Goomsay's household. Unlike Baba Segi's wives who protect their social standing through children, Annie protects her humanity through pleasure and emotional connection, reconfiguring marital expectations on her own terms.

Both novels foreground extramarital affairs, but they are framed differently depending on women's circumstances and strategies of resistance. In Shoneyin's narrative, the wives' affairs are tactical, meant to ensure survival and social legitimacy within a system where a woman's value is tied to fertility. The revelation that Baba Segi is the infertile partner destabilizes not only his household but also the cultural assumptions about masculinity and reproduction. The women's secret acts of sexual agency undermine patriarchal dominance from within, showing how negotiation and subversion can occur simultaneously.

In Ojaide's *Sovereign Body*, extramarital relationships are not simply for survival but also for liberation. Annie openly pursues happiness with Jo, her lover, despite social risks: "This time she behaved as if she did not care about the jealous man but about herself and the man she loved. She did not care whether those who knew her husband saw her with another man, that was their problem, not hers, she told herself. People came from Barkin Ladi to Bukuru for shopping of sophisticated items. It had more to offer in many ways. Here Annie and Jo even held hands at the Zongo Dutse Park outside the town" (p. 169). Here, Nego-feminism manifests as a refusal to negotiate within the boundaries of patriarchy; Annie instead negotiates with herself, privileging her well-being over societal expectations. Similarly, Debra embraces multiple partners as a declaration of autonomy. These women embody a modern feminist stance so that their choices reflect how education and urban exposure give them leverage to contest oppressive cultural values.

Men, however, are often permitted sexual freedom without censure. As Ojaide notes: "According to the male-favored customs he subscribed to, man could have affairs outside, have as many concubines and girlfriends, while the woman at home would be expected to remain loyal to an unfaithful husband" (p. 144). This double standard underlines the gendered asymmetry of polygamy. Dr. Goomsay's affair with Mary Nuk is not an act of desire but a means of punishing his wife, reflecting the dynamics of patriarchy and male ego. In contrast, Annie and Debra's extramarital pursuits become acts of defiance, challenging male privilege and demanding recognition of women's emotional and sexual needs. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the novelist put it that:

> In the village wives sought to please their husbands by way of their stomachs by preparing for them the most delicious dish possible. Most time, in the polygamous household, the wife who cooked for the man slept with him that day. The man's heart went for who best pleased his appetite for delicacies, a double treat for the man who was Lord! Whenever a man wanted to hurt his wife, he would refuse to eat the woman's food" (p. 159).

Such details reveal how even the mundane acts of food and intimacy are weaponized in patriarchal households.

Taken together, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *Sovereign Body* highlight the competing cultural logics of marriage, children, and fidelity in African societies. Both novels expose how polygamy, while upheld as tradition, often creates spaces of emotional neglect, jealousy, and strategic deception. For Baba Segi's wives, children serve as cultural capital and survival strategies within a hostile system, while for Annie and Debra in Ojaide's text, extramarital affairs are radical acts of reclaiming agency in the absence of emotional fulfillment.

Through the lens of Nego-feminism, these texts illustrate the spectrum of women's responses to patriarchy, from negotiation and compromise (Baba Segi's wives) to outright defiance (Annie and Debra). Nego-feminism deepens this analysis by revealing how education, class, and cultural context shape the possibilities of resistance. Whereas the illiterate wives of Baba Segi rely on children as their only tool for survival, the educated women of Ojaide's text leverage their knowledge and independence to assert control over their bodies and desires.

Ultimately, both Shoneyin and Ojaide complicate the narrative of female victimhood in polygamous marriages by foregrounding women's strategies of survival, negotiation, and resistance. They underscore that extramarital affairs, far from being merely transgressive, can function as modes of survival, self-expression, and feminist assertion within oppressive structures. Children, likewise, are not simply biological extensions of men's virility but become instruments of women's negotiation with cultural expectations. These novels thus challenge simplistic notions of fidelity and fertility,

insisting instead on a nuanced recognition of how African women navigate marriage, motherhood, and desire within patriarchal systems.

## The quest for love and the emotional well-being of the female characters

Shoneyin, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, vividly portrays trauma, gender discrimination, and abuse through the creation of complex female characters who endure cultural oppression and psychological torment. These women are positioned as victims of a patriarchal and polygamous household, where their struggles expose the harsh realities of systemic inequality. By contrasting the women's experiences and their roles within the family, Shoneyin emerges as a critic of polygamy, foregrounding the ways in which cultural and domestic structures perpetuate cycles of abuse. The children of the senior wives, for instance, are raised with a sense of superiority, thereby reproducing entrenched hierarchies and legitimizing physical abuse. Yoruba culture and beliefs are presented as tools of this oppression, even though some cultural nuances remain underexplored due to Shoneyin's sharp focus on her characters' suffering and resistance.

Shoneyin further argues that children raised in polygamous households often occupy the receiving end of trauma. Through her narrative, she suggests that male children are not immune to this harm, as they may grow into insecure adults, constantly seeking validation that is unevenly distributed among wives and their offspring. This theme is reflected in the Yoruba proverb, "pasan ti afi na iyawo, ni a fi na iyale'" (the whip that is used to punish the first wife will inevitably be used on the senior wife). Within such a cultural structure, daughters face the added pressure of chastity, since in Yoruba traditional society, a lady married as a virgin brings honour and respect to her family, while the one who has lost her virginity, bring shame. This fear of dishonour is central to the plight of Bolanle, introduced as wife number four.

Bolanle's character illustrates the intersections of personal trauma and cultural oppression. Having endured childhood rape, she becomes emotionally scarred, complex, and socially perceived as undesirable. Her marriage to Baba Segi is driven by the belief that an older, uneducated polygamist could help conceal her "secret." Yet, her inability to conceive reopens wounds of trauma, exposing her to renewed cycles of "physical, verbal, as well as emotional" abuse. The other wives mock her as incomplete, society ridicules her barrenness, and her identity as a woman is delegitimized. This reflects Yoruba society's tendency to treat married women who cannot conceive as failures. Baba Segi's harsh words underscore this humiliation:

> What do you know about what you saw? A woman cannot know the weight of a child until she carried one in her womb. Bolanle was determined to deny him pleasure of hurting her feelings…. Your barrenness brings shame upon me. And I am sure that you, as well, are saddened by it. (13–14).

Here, Shoneyin demonstrates how patriarchal institutions bruise the egos of women who, despite enduring suffering, remain committed to preserving dignity within their homes.

Similarly, Ojaide's *The Sovereign Body* exposes how women's lives are shaped by overlapping layers of objectification and oppression. Ojaide emphasizes that objectification is not always gendered, since any kind of person can be objectified in the sense of being stripped of autonomy and volition, and being treated as an instrument for the gain of others; as in slavery. Nonetheless, the plight of the African girl-child remains central in his narrative. The novel draws attention to the traumatic experiences of women stigmatized as second-class citizens in patriarchal societies. Annie and Debra's stories exemplify how both traditional culture and the family system reinforce subordination. The allocation of headship to men relegates women to silence, while domestic abuse is normalized as "correction."

Annie's letters capture the emotional devastation of living in such conditions. In one of her most poignant testimonies, she writes:

> Dear Jo:
>
> I write to let you know that my domestic situation has gone from bad to worse. Things have never been as bad and, I suppose, I won't allow things to get to the worst. I had a horrible beating from my so-called husband three days ago even when I had a severe migraine headache. The man would have killed me were it not for the intervention of a very kind female neighbor of mine that the children had run to call to my rescue... The simple reason for this bestiality was that I had gone to have a blood test for malaria or typhoid without telling him... He was angry that I went out for treatment. How can he be angry that I went out for treatment after ignoring me for so many years whenever I fell sick? He certainly knew I was sick but did not think of taking me to the hospital or administering me any treatment." (p. 133).

Annie's maltreatment at the hands of her husband, Dr. Nathan Goomsay, epitomizes the emotional toll of excessive patriarchy. Denied care and compassion, she seeks love and validation elsewhere. In Professor Jonah Ogbe, she encounters a man who treats her "like a princess" and cherishes her "as an angel that deserves to be pampered like a diamond jewel." Her poetry and letters to Ogbe reveal both her yearning for love and her frustration at her husband's hypocrisy: "If he does not care for me, why is he jealous of who cares for me? He does not like me. Why is he bothered that somebody else so much loves me and he harasses him with a threatening letter? He torments me and yet feels hurt that somebody has the capacity to heal the wounds he inflicts on me." (p. 110).

Both Ojaide and Shoneyin, though writing in different contexts, prioritize the emotional well-being of their female characters by depicting the psychological costs of cultural oppression. Their use of first-person narration fosters intimacy with characters, creating a strong pathos that binds readers to their struggles. Ultimately, both writers succeed in exposing the destructive power of patriarchal systems while affirming women's enduring quest for love, dignity, and emotional survival.

**Women's activism against patriarchal construct.**

The central concern of this study is women's resistance to male domination within both the home and society at large, as illustrated in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Through her characters, Shoneyin emphasizes how women respond to patriarchal oppression, whether as prostitutes, wives, or professionals, each negotiating limited spaces of survival and resistance. The novel introduces Baba Segi's friend, Teacher, who resides in a brothel. From the beginning, prostitutes are portrayed as women who cater to men's physical, emotional, and social needs. These women "cooked for them, drank with them, fought over them, had sex with them, nursed them, slapped them, and loved them" (p. 2). By performing spousal responsibilities without social recognition, they highlight the paradox of a patriarchal order that relies upon but simultaneously devalues their labour. They are dismissed as "side chicks," while the wives retain respectability as "main women."

Baba Segi embodies patriarchal entitlement, believing that his wealth and social position entitle him to dominate women. His engagement with Teacher underscores this mentality: "Although Baba Segi had previously been warned about Ayikara as a young man, the warning came from a woman and was thus easily dismissed" (p. 3). The dismissal of women's voices, regardless of wisdom, reflects the ingrained sexism of the society Shoneyin critiques. Bolanle, the graduate wife, becomes the focal

point of Baba Segi's discriminatory practices. Despite her education, her inability to bear children subjects her to humiliation from her husband, his household, and even the servants. The novel exposes how infertility in Yoruba culture is viewed as a woman's shame, reducing her social worth. Baba Segi allows his driver, Taju, to disrespect Bolanle openly:

> Get in,' he ordered, barely giving her enough room to press through.'Next to Mr. Taju? 'If you don't want to sit next to me, you can sit in the back. Only the wind is uncomfortably cool at this time of the morning,' Taju retorted. Baba Segi looked at Taju and grinned. Bolanle might have been going to the hospital dressed like a graduate, but his driver could still put her in her place" (p. 27).

This incident illustrates how patriarchal discrimination permeates every layer of the household, legitimizing abuse against women deemed socially incomplete.

Similarly, Tanure Ojaide's *The Sovereign Body* emphasizes literature's role as a corrective lens for society. For Ojaide, the writer serves as a gadfly, interrogating oppressive practices and advocating for justice. In contexts where patriarchal violence endangers the girl child, he imbues his protagonist, Annie, with revolutionary strength to resist social vices. As a lecturer at the State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi, Annie establishes the "Women Creative Writing Club," an activist group designed to promote girl-child education and female self-realization. Through this club, she raises awareness of women's subjugation and challenges stereotypes of women as passive or weak. She insists that women should not be treated merely as objects for male gratification, asking pointedly: "Why this gender imbalance? What inhibited our women from going to school? Or, if they did go, why did they not aspire to higher degrees and reach in Polytechnics and Universities?" (p. 47).

Her own academic success, earning a Ph,D and attaining the rank of Chief Lecturer, poses a threat to her husband's sense of authority. Yet she uses her professional stature and affiliations with organizations such as the National Organization of Women (NOW) and ANA to advocate for female education:

> ...assist our people in sending their girls to school rather than keep them at home to wait for marriage. Our secondary school girls, especially those in the drama groups, all look up to going to institutions of higher learning such as this polytechnic or university. The female student population here has increased tremendously. I don't want to be praised for it, but our women's groups have played a big role in this turnaround. I need no problems at home so that I can work harder." (p. 108).

Debra, another central character, embodies resistance through personal transformation. Choosing divorce over continued subjugation, she rejects her husband's infidelity and patriarchal control. She furthers her postgraduate studies, secures employment in Port Harcourt, and lives independently. In contrast, her former husband, Dr. Goomsay, descends into instability, unable to cope with her rise as a public figure and activist of national repute. Both Shoneyin and Ojaide thus reveal the power of women's activism in confronting patriarchal discrimination. Their works emphasize that resistance takes multiple forms, education, professional advancement, creative expression, and even divorce, through which women reclaim agency against oppressive structures.

## Conclusion

This comparative study of Tanure Ojaide's *Sovereign Body* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* demonstrates how both texts rupture patriarchal constructs by foregrounding

women's resilience within oppressive systems. Through Nego-feminism, the works reveal that women resist and negotiate gendered hierarchies, redefining love, sexuality, and motherhood beyond patriarchal expectations. While Ojaide emphasizes the body as a site of inscription and resistance, Shoneyin dramatizes polygamy and infertility as arenas of agency. Together, they illuminate the strategies by which African women assert subjectivity, destabilize male authority, and reclaim spaces of dignity and self-determination.

The study expands feminist literary scholarship by offering a comparative analysis of Ojaide and Shoneyin, situating their novels within the same discursive framework of rupturing patriarchal systems. Reconceptualization of the Female Body: The analysis illuminates how the female body functions as both a contested site of patriarchal control and a powerful instrument of agency and resistance in African literature. Polygamy and Infertility as Literary Tropes: The paper contributes to debates on African cultural practices by examining how polygamy and infertility, often seen as instruments of oppression, can paradoxically become spaces of empowerment and self-determination. Rupturing Patriarchal Narratives in African Literature: It foregrounds the diverse strategies through which African women in literature destabilize male authority, enriching the discourse on gender, sexuality, and cultural identity in postcolonial African societies.

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