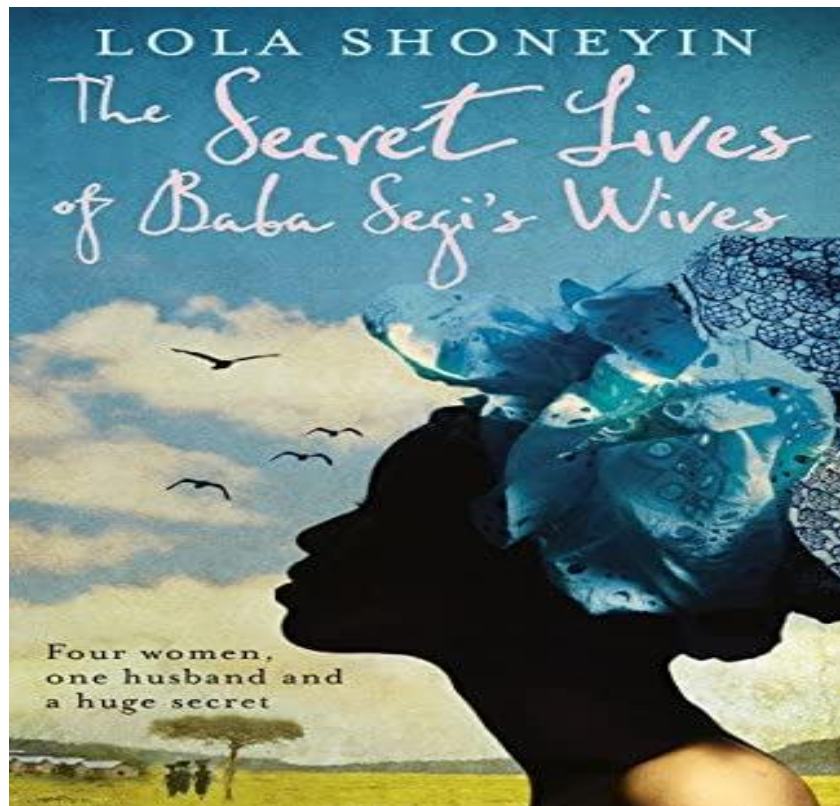


Book Review on The secret lives of Baba Segi's Wives

Lola Shoneyin's thought-provoking book.

By Jola Akintoye



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I recently had the privilege to read Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, it was witty, entertaining, and thought-provoking, and might I add to brag a bit, one of the children of the author and I have the same first name. She wrote this in her acknowledgments so indirectly she acknowledged me, yay.

As I said earlier, it was a thought-provoking read; the author mentioned vital issues that still plague our society, even now in 2021, eleven years after this work was published. These issues still plague our

society. Days after reading this book, I kept thinking about the characters and the world I was submerged in, and I couldn't pull myself out of it. It felt like I was the fifth wife or one of Baba Segi's children. I didn't want it to end. So, I decided to pour some of my thoughts about the book into this article. There are some spoilers ahead. If you haven't read the book, please, close the article now, there is a **HUGE** secret, and I wouldn't want to ruin the suspense. Please go on; I won't be angry.

#Issue no 1 Parenting

Parents are important influencers of their children's lives; the saying "Tabula Raza" has proven itself to be authentic humans are born as a blank slate, a blank sheet, and are shaped by their experiences and the environment they find themselves. In an ideal situation, children come in contact with their parents first, and they knowingly or unknowingly imbibe their habits and behaviors. For example, one of the main characters of this story, "Baba Segi, was a polygamist, " When Kole, one of his children *wink* was asked if he wanted to have many wives and kids, he said, "Yes, Baba. I want to be just like you!"

Another example of parenting is Bolanle's mom; Bolanle is baba Segi's fourth wife, her mom did a terrible job raising her daughters. According to the book, when their Exam results were out, the woman would look beyond all the other good grades and focus on the only subject she was not the best in, asking if the others had two heads, even going as far as saying she was not her child.

Bolanle's sister, Lara was even worse in her academics, and her mother would compare her to her sister and call her names; Lara was not as subservient as her sister, she soon began to falsify her results, and as Lara grew, her resentment for her mother also grew she began to exchange words with her with full-blown arguments and confrontations.

Words affect children a whole lot, and they leave scars in the heart that never heal. Words are born in the mouth, and they die in the ear, but some words live forever in the heart; harsh criticism from loved ones can and will break the heart of young children.

Bolanle used this statement describing what her mother said to her "The words that followed tore me apart" Provocative words to your kids can tear them apart. Their self-confidence, self-esteem, their spirit, and their love for you.

Creating an autocratic home where kids cannot confide in their parents, where the parents are not involved in their children's lives, will make you lose that close relationship with your children; you won't

be able to repair it with them when they become adults. If they cannot depend on you for emotional support when they are dependent as children as independent adults, why would they rely on you? They will hide things from you just like Lara did, Lara kept failing, but she successfully kept her mother in the dark, falsifying her result. Would you rather know your kids or think you know your kids?

Bolanle's case was even worse; she was raped at 15 and could not confide in her mother because of that deteriorating relationship. Imagine a fifteen-year-old carrying the burden of assault and keeping it all to herself, Bolanle had an abortion, and her mother did not know, so oblivious to the lives of her children.

Comparing Children is also another terrible thing Bolanle and Lara's mom did. Not only are you destroying the confidence of the child compared, but you are also causing Jealousy and strife between siblings. Bolanle's mom compared Bolanle and Lara on many occasions, and this strained their relationship as adults. Bolanle's mother once mentioned that she didn't know the sin she committed that made her children like this. Well, I just highlighted them for her.

#Issue 2 Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment was hinted at various times in this book, for example

Bolanle once sat next to Taju Baba Segi's driver, and while driving, Taju purposely leaned his arm to Bolanle's breast to change gears, now this is someone who was his boss's wife, and yet he was able to disrespect her this much, what would he do to the random woman on the street.

The book stated that young girls were assaulted and stripped naked on the street. Another example of Sexual Harassment in this book was Bolanle being raped by the stranger who gave her a lift.

I'm happy the conversation moves from victims and how they should protect themselves to the predators who harm them. Why would any man pick up a 15-year-old girl, knock her out, and forcefully sleep with her when they are women who would consent to have sex.

Sadly, there was no mention of Bolanle getting justice, and we could see how badly this affected her when she finally informed her clueless mother of her rape the word she used was she was damaged.

#Issue 3 Gender inequality and Domestic violence

SDG 5, Gender Equality, the fifth sustainable development goal, aims at empowering all women and girls, a major societal issue, most especially in this part of the world where a male child is preferred. In an

article written by Benebo, Schumann, and Vaezghasemi in 2018, one in four Nigerian women have experienced intimate partner violence.

The book mentioned how men went on a physical assault spree when a male senator slapped a female colleague. Isolating Taju specifically, Baba Segi's driver beat his wife because their child sucked a coin, a child they shared equal responsibility for. I am sure by now, dear reader, we both share our dislike for this Taju character.

The penal code permits husbands to use physical means to chastise their wives as long as it does not result in "grievous harm," which is defined as a loss of sight, hearing, speech, facial disfigurement, or life-threatening injuries" Imagine that.

The book mentioned many cases of Gender inequality.

Iya Tope, who was facing issues because she had only girls, the book did well to educate the science of giving birth to boys through a sign in the hospital Bolanle and Baba Segi visited. **IF YOU HAVE ANOTHER BABY GIRL, BLAME DADDY!** Changing the wrong notion that women were to blame for having only female children

Another case of Gender inequality mentioned in the book was Iya Femi's prohibition from staying in her own father's house after his demise because women were not allowed to inherit properties, and her Uncle took everything.

In the words of her Uncle's wife

"A girl cannot inherit her father's house because it is everyone's prayer that she will marry and make her husband's home."

You will notice how prejudiced society can be and some aspects of male privilege. For example, Segun's character would bring in various women and be called a virile ladies man, a compliment, but the women would be called whores.

#Issue 4 Illiteracy and Ignorance

According to Knoema, the adult illiteracy population in Nigeria as of 2015 is over 40 million. The characters in this book would instead visit medicine men or prophets than visit the hospital. Bolanle's mom would pour packs of Alabukun, a pain killer, in her mouth whenever she felt ill as an alternative to the hospital; she later had a partial stroke.

The Ignorance of Baba Segi's mother, Mama Alaro, in taking her son to a medicine man when he had a life-threatening illness was what affected his fertility.

#Issue 5 Child Labour

Iya Femi went through a lot as a House help in Grandma's house.

Child Labour is an issue that plagues cities where working women take underage girls to work with them. The author explained how Grandma beat her at the slightest provocation. A child that previously enjoyed love, pampering, and care from her parents. Iya Femi was stripped of her education. The woman called Grandma treated her terribly, shaving her hair if she overslept, cutting her with a blade, and rubbing chili pepper into her wounds.

It was this experience that shaped Iya Femi into the scheming malicious, and hypocritical woman she was.

An honorable mention is a policeman who collected a 50 naira bribe from Baba Segi and how corruption has eaten deep into all country sectors.

The secret lives of Baba Segi's wives were not only an entertaining read. It was thought-provoking. It's a book I see myself going to read over and over again. Kudos to the author, and my greetings to Jola.



The literary genius Lola Shoneyin

Image| [Wikipedia](#)