African Masculinities: Discussing the men in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives (2013)* and Adebayo's *Stay with Me (2017)*

Review article

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Abstract

This essay undertakes an often-overlooked aspect of gender anatomy of African literature, bringing to the fore the challenges faced by a segment of African men. Using masculinity theories, it exposes instances of fake men who cling to hegemony as the pathway to achieve glory, while hiding their infirmities—impotency and sterility. The paper makes the case that the concept of African masculinity should be open up to debate in order to bring to the fore tensions associated with it. It articulates the position that mimicry should no longer be used as a power and glory mask to overlook tensions in many families often leading to tragic consequences granted that African men were to be innovative to adopt Western health standards. The discussion is achieved by looking at two key roles of males in African societies that places an unnecessary burden on them—as men in the sense that they should be able to biologically produce children and men as heads of their respective homes. The paper concludes that as long as these masculine roles remain rigid without considering that there are men who cannot perform these functions due to no fault of theirs, their female counterparts cannot be free of unnecessary and unfair socio-cultural responsibilities.

Keywords: African males, family heads, male burdens, masculinity, medicine, mimicry

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Public Interest Statement

Gender advocates working in the area of fertility, have often focused on areas affecting women. This attitude is not anomalous. Firstly, it is generally believed that majority of people on the African continent are women, yet their needs are often neglected. As such, advocate groups put the searchlight on this grey area. However, there are men who suffer from infertility. And it is their condition that often creates the suffering of their female counterparts. Thus, this work focuses on a neglected part of African Literature and Gender Studies. It is a conversation that must happen. In liberating these men, their female counterparts are equally liberated.

Introduction

Nikki Wedgwood, in her essay, *Connell's theory of masculinity – its origins and influences on the study of gender* (2009), explains that when Connell began her study on gender in the 1970s, her focus was on class structure in Australian politics, culture and history. (Wedgwood, 2009) According to Wedgwood, when Connell further developed her theory, she explained that the theory on masculinity was: "made up of three structures (later four), namely: labour – the sexual division of labour, power – the overall subordination of women and dominance of men, and cathexis – the practices that shape and realise desire (Connell 1995, p. 74)" (p.333) Connell's theory was a feminist approach to gender issues facing not only the Australian society but the western society at large. However, in as much as there are similarities the world over when it comes to the socio-economic and cultural privileges men enjoy, one cannot deny that the cultural focus of men in different societies or geographical locations might vary. It is for this reason that masculinity is socially constructed. Therefore, it becomes necessary to define a structure of masculinity that resonates with the representation of masculinity from an African context. In line with this, these writers believe that there is also the need to identify a distinct theoretical framework of masculinities that will clearly highlight elements of masculinities as pertains to African men. As such, the focus will be on African masculinities—where African masculinities simply mean a set of social and cultural placed attributes and patterns of behaviour expected to be exhibited by African men. Therefore two key elements will be identified for discussion—being accepted as a man due to one's sexuality (where this means that one must have a functioning male sexual organ and be able to produce children); being accepted as a man due to one's ability to be head of the family by being able to economically support the household he creates. The two key elements of masculinity, just mentioned, have an inadvertent effect on men and women. These effects are exposed in some African literary works.

African literary works that dilate on gender issues have, over the years, focused on the challenges faced by women. For example, in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* (2008), as

well as in two of Amma Darko's works, namely *Faceless* (2003) and *Not Without Flowers* (2007), we encounter the diverse and, yet, familiar ways in which African women are saddled with challenges that affect their ability to assert themselves within the socio-political and economic spaces of life. Likewise, we find a similar theme in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* (2017), exposing what Grudzina (2010) said were suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) in literature (p.26). Moril (1985) calls this development of males wielding almost all sources of power in society as "men's unearned privileges" (p.11), which requires that literary writers, as Opara (1991) observes, must give prominence to the merits of the female gender (p.119). Notwithstanding, a key concern of literature has been to promote justice. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Soyinka (2006) quips that justice should be the first condition of humanity, urging African writers to develop an "over-acute, remedial sense of right and wrong". Soyinka's concerns are well articulated by other African scholars, including Yitah (2013), who takes aim at "a discourse which … almost completely turned into a masculine affair", adding that the "preoccupation with masculinized discourse" often ignored the important role of female agency (p.162), stressing the need for remediation. In the same vein, Adams (2011) intones the need for writers to depict gender issues as they constitute one of several assaults upon dignity and agency that individuals face in contemporary Africa (p.202), with Grudzina demanding the need to "repair the potential harm done and achieve balance" (p.29), documenting "any evidence of the social, economic, and political exploitation of women".

> The feminist critic checks the work to see whether female characters have power and of what type of power it might be. A feminist critic views literature as a means by which inequities can be identified, protested, and possibly rectified Grudzina (p.37).

Interestingly, some men folk also experience some of these societal pressures that women have been subjected to since time immemorial. It can be said that in many respects, the African woman's socio-cultural and economic position has not changed positively perhaps due to the reason that her male counterpart's position remains entrenched in similar socio-cultural and economic beliefs and stereotypes. Indeed, within these literary pieces are the silent and often muffled voices of males on the margins who are also experiencing societal pressures due to their inability to perform some reproductive roles. That is to say that although men are the custodians of the patriarchal system, nonetheless, it is not all African men that benefit from the power and influence that the traditional system bequeaths to males. For instance, men who are impotent are treated with derision, necessitating the need for writers to valorise these instances of abuses that these unfortunate men do suffer, bringing about a sense of justice as demanded by Soyinka.

> Who are the powerful people in the text? Who are the powerless? Who receives the most attention? Why do the powerful have the power? Why are the powerless without power? Is there class conflict and struggle? Is there alienation and/or fragmentation evident in any of the characters? If so, in whom? The powerful? The powerless? Grudzina (p. 94).

This is why this paper takes a look at the African male's position in his society. This work follows in the footstep of what Beasley (2005) calls "identity politics" (p.50), which is a variant of the Modernist–Postmodern continuum of Gender Difference Feminism, which demands a "women-centred" approach to explicating literary texts as opposed to the other variant that dwells on "identity politics". However, in this work, identity politics can be extrapolated to mean bringing issues of men to the fore. In other words, it is not every man that is fortunate and it is not all men who have the reins of power. Besides, so many men face medical challenges, obfuscating their ability to perform their marital roles and, obviously, these are not men who are trying to use the levers of partisan politics to achieve political aims. These are men who have underlying medical conditions that society has often neglected because of their status as men.

Beasley (2005) forcefully argues that the subfield of Masculinity Studies offers a particular range of ideas and debates which exist in relation to but also at some distance from masculinity politics Connell (1995: 10) or the 'men's movement', adding that many feminist and pro-feminist Masculinity writers have argued that the so-called 'men's movement' is largely about shoring up masculinity and its existing social status Adams and Savran (2002) and Messner, (1997), whereas Masculinity Studies as an arena of academic scholarship has generally been concerned to offer critical analyses of masculinity. Thus, the study will place the searchlight on the African male's cultural position from two perspectives, which are, the male's position as "the man" and his position as "the head of the family". As Dobie (2002) stated, language shapes our unconsciousness and our conscious minds, thereby giving us our identity (p.48). Any attempt, therefore, aimed at changing any situation, including the situation being analysed in this text, must, therefore, begin with language. Thus, the reason for focusing on these two areas is to uncover the underlining effects these 'natural roles or responsibilities' have on the character and psyche of the African male. This paper, in discussing the African male's cultural position in the society will try to answer the question—does the role of the African male as 'the man' and the 'head' of the family place an unnecessary burden on him? In making an attempt to answer this question, the paper will discuss male representations in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me*. However, further references would be made to other works by African writers.

The Men in *Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *Stay with me*

In *the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Baba Segi, is married to four women, namely Iya Segi, Iya Tope, Iya Femi and Bolanle. Baba Segi marries Bolanle, his fourth wife, because she is young, and beautiful, as well as educated. His marriage to her enhances his status in the society. However, it is his marriage to Bolanle that reveals all of the secrets of his once harmonious household. This is because Baba Segi's other three wives, led by Iya Segi, the first spouse, are threatened by Bolanle's education, and, as such, treat her presence in their home as an intrusion from an outsider. This treatment of Bolanle as an outcast is what leads to the discovery that Baba Segi's children are actually not his biological children. Bolanle's inability to conceive leads to the revelation of this secret, that is, a false accumulation of power in that society based on the premise that he is a man based on his manliness, when he is actually not a man because he does not have the capacity to produce children and it is this ability that leads to the endowment of masculine power in that society. This is why Baba Segi is sorely devastated when the doctor he and Bolanle consult discloses this information to him. It is discovered that his sterility is as a result of contracting mumps during his childhood. Lola Shoneyin describes Baba Segi's mood after receiving the news from the doctor thus: "today Baba Segi's eyes were dimmed with melancholy; his wit would not be roused" (p.228) … When Baba Segi visits teacher's bar, he pours his heart to Teacher: "my life is ruined. I feel as if I am in a pit of quick sand. All is dark, Teacher. All is dark" (p.229). Baba Segi feels that his life is in ruins because he has been stripped of his manhood. Lola Shoneyin explains that Teacher, after hearing Baba Segi's story felt that a:

> Sense of comradeship brewed within him; it was comforting to hear that another man had been stripped of his manhood. If he could live in the knowledge that his penis would never prise apart a woman's lips, why couldn't Baba Segi live with his predicament? (p. 229)

This explains the importance of a functioning sexuality as a key component of manhood. A man, in the African society, who cannot get a woman pregnant in a conjugal relationship is not a man. He can be described as a false man. By discovering that all his children are not his biological children, Baba Segi loses his manhood. Teacher, on the other hand, has already lost his manhood because he is impotent and sterile. Segi displays what Androne (2012) refers to as the "hegemony of embedded patriarchal privileges", which compromises women's emotional relationships with husbands and lovers" (p.149). In this case, however, it is a case of false hegemony as Baba Segi does not have the power that hegemony imposes on males in the African society, yet he is desperately clinging to this power in order exploit his relationship with his lovers, a situation that results in what Androne aptly calls "profound

masculine anxieties" (p.149).

In order to understand this great loss of Baba Segi's manhood, it is important to understand where he comes from, that is, his cultural space. Another regular visitor to Teacher's bar is Olaopo, who also has four wives and is Baba Segi's competitor in the manhood match. Baba Segi's marriage to Bolanle, an educated young woman, puts him on a higher pedestal than Olaopo. However, when Baba Segi comes to the bar complaining that he has still not been able to get Bolanle pregnant, Olaopo takes a swipe at him for reminding them that he cannot manhandle Bolanle because she is educated. Olaopo retorts: "Yes, but whose wife's belly is flat as a pauper's footstool? I may be slight but I get the job done" (p.5). Olaopo's background, as well as his retort, highlights the cultural space, which is that a man's manhood is measured by the number of wives he has and his children. Thus, Olaopo stands to benefit from what Lindsay and Miescher (2003) call the "patchwork of patriarchies". What we glean from Miescher's explanation, which juxtaposes Olaopo's behaviour is the fact many African men are not deserving of the position they wield, clinging to old traditions. For them to be seen as men, they must work individually for these powers they wield instead of seeking to ascribe this power to themselves merely on the basis that they are men, even if medically they are not deemed as men because of some disease afflictions that obviate their abilities to perform as the so-called African men. Men must not exist in name. They must be men in the medical context, and they must cease being men merely by ascribing this power to themselves because their culture endows them automatically with this power.

A typical example of a man's manhood being measured by the number of his wives and children is seen in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe describes Unoka, Okonkwo's father as a failure when he compares Unoka to his friend, Okoye: "Okoye was also a musician. He played on the *ogene*. But he was not a failure like Unoka. He had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives. And now he was going to take the Idemili title" (p.4). Although Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is set in colonial Nigeria, it shares the same cultural view point as Lola Shoneyin's *Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, which is set both in post-colonial Nigeria and in the early 2000s, perhaps indicating that the liberation of the African continent did not automatically lead to change in some of the cherished cultural practices of the people. An example of this fact is the observation that Miescher (2005) makes about Ghanaian life in his article, *Making men in Ghana*. Miescher witnesses inscriptions on some Ghanaian public vehicles, with a particularly sharp label on a truck which reads: "to be a man is hard" (p.3) This perhaps indicates the burden men face in the Ghanaian society so as to maintain their cultural status; a situation that has been exacerbated in modern times due to economic difficulties. Obviously, this is a clear indication that a man's number of wives adds to his achievement, which thereby enhances his manhood and status in the society. This is because although culture is believed to be dynamic, the culture of manhood among some African societies

remain the same. Perhaps, it is this sort of cultural psychology that influences teacher's abode—Ayikara. Lola Shoneyin describes Ayikara:

> Firstly, absolutely no one wanted to admit to knowing where Ayikara was, in case their neighbours were listening … the dark buildings were full of women whose face glowed under ultraviolet lights. These women lived for other women's men. They cooked for them. Drank with them. Fought over them. Fucked them (p. 2).

The above explanation of the setting states the obvious; this is a typical 'red-light district.' By setting up his abode and bar in such a location, it compensates Teacher's lost manhood. After all, he is within a place where he can assert his manhood by deciding which woman to be intimate with or not. That is to say that even if he has no sexual knowledge of any of the women, his living among them compensates his loss of manhood. It, therefore, comes as a shock when Baba Segi discovers that he has never really been a 'man' because all his children are not his biological children. Teacher advises him to send away his wives and their children. This advice is not given out of genuine concern, but as a way of making Baba Segi join him in his lonely space of lost manhood. This is evident in Shoneyin's description of Teacher's inner thoughts after listening to Baba Segi. Teacher is happy that he is not alone. However, Baba Segi does not take Teacher's advice. It is because he is convinced by Iya Segi, his first wife, to forgive and accept her and her remaining son. By listening to Iya Segi, Baba Segi refuses to sink into the darkness of Ayikara just as Teacher has done. Thus, he is able to hide from the public eye that "his big testicles were empty and without seed" (p.242). Obviously, this points to a difference between physical appearance of masculinity and the medical explanation of the actual situation and the need for Africans to embrace health and allied sciences in understanding these health phenomena instead of relying on cultural practises and superstitions that no longer serve any purposes. It is a form of mimicry. These men merely mimic their roles as they have no medical capacity to actual them. They are examples of what Homi Bhabha (1994) labels "mimic men" as they pretend to be what they are not, deftly copying the manners of complete men. They are dummies. In other words, Africa is still being left behind in certain aspects of social development and this situation will require another form of liberation.

A similar situation confronts Akin in Ayobami Abedayo's novel, *Stay with Me*. The narrative begins with Yejide narrating how her husband, Akin, is betrothed with a second wife because the first spouse, that is, Yejide, cannot have children. The problem, however, is from Akin and not Yejide. Akin is impotent, but Yejide does not know this fact. This is because Yejide's sole sexual encounter has been with Akin. However, unlike Baba Segi, Akin is aware of

his condition, but is mute about it. When Yejide's stepmother, Iya Martha, as well as Baba Lola escort Akin's new wife to Akin and Yejide's home to meet with Yejide for the first time, Akin who is home, does not alert Yejide that something of such great importance is about to happen. In fact, he is silent when Baba Lola presents the new wife telling Yejide that: "well, our wife, this is your new wife. Who knows, the king in heaven may answer your prayers because of this wife. Once she gets pregnant and has a child, we are sure you will have one too" (p.16). Baba Lola's comment confidently states two obvious—the problem of no children in the marriage solely rests on Yejide, the woman and wife. Also, Akin, the man in the marriage, is healthy and can have children with any woman; it is his wife, Yejide, that is stopping him. Although this situation places an undue and unfair burden on Yejide, it shows the extent to which the African man is unconsciously burdened to act as 'the man' even when he is unable to do so. As such, Akin is forced into living a lie. It becomes easy for Akin to live his lie because his wife, Yejide, is sexually inexperienced. Yejide sees the coming of Funmi as a threat to her marriage and she feels betrayed by her husband, Akin. However, unknowing to Yejide, Akin also feels threatened by the coming in of his second wife, Funmi. However, he is unable to stop it or speak up for fear of being exposed as a 'no man.'

By hiding the truth of his impotency, Akin causes Yejide to become unnecessarily desperate for a child. Yejide becomes so desperate that she takes the advice of a friend, Mrs. Adeolu, and visits the Prophet Josiah who lives and performs miracles on a mountain. Mrs. Adeolu assures her that the prophet can give her children. As such, she does not question the rationality or health implications when Prophet Josiah orders her to breastfeed the sacrificial goat that she brings with her. In Yejide's own words she explains the horrible scene:

> After he whispered those words, it was natural for me to reach behind my back and unhook the ivory lace bra I wore. To lift up the bra and push my bra cups. To sit on the ground with my legs stretched out, squeeze my breast and push the nipple to the open mouth in my arms (p. 58).

Akin's cowardly silence forces Yejide to undergo victimisation even though she is not at fault. Her desperation to have a child forces her into irrational behaviour. At the end of the day, she still does not become pregnant and, later, she discovers that her friend, Mrs. Deeolu, who introduced her to the mountain prophet actually had her babies by having sexual intercourse with the prophet. Yejide discovers this when she decides to revisit the prophet after being pregnant for over nine months without showing any signs of labour. Yejide finds the two: "in the shed, Prophet Josiah and Mrs Adeolu were having sex" (p.84). Akin explains to the reader that: "Yejide told me she was pregnant on a Sunday" (p.60), insisting that she is not pregnant. He keeps insisting because he is aware of his problem. Akin explains that Yejide's insistence

on being pregnant: "opened my eyes to the fact that I needed to do something before she lost her mind. At some point that Sunday morning, I decided it was time to get her pregnant." (p.63) And getting her pregnant meant contracting his brother, Dotun, to have sexual intercourse with Yejide and impregnate her. This course of action Akin takes is to save his face and maintain his position as a man. It is easy for him to carry out his plan because Yejide is ignorant of his problem. However, when his second wife, Funmi, comes in, things get complicated. Funmi, unlike Yejide, is sexually aware and soon discovers Akin's impotency. She is, therefore, surprised that Yejide gets pregnant. Funmi threatens Akin that she would reveal his secret. In order to keep his secret safe, he murders her. Akin narrates the scene: "I could see her clearly as I studied the stained glass. I could hear her final yelp, see the way her hands tried to grab the banister after I pushed her down the stairs" (p.135).

In order to hold on to his manhood, Akin commits murder. Miescher (2005) explains that "while the big man status and Akan ideas of adult masculinity" has proven to be "resilient" (p. 199), at the same time, these Akan men, like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, "were reshaped to embrace" the Western model of capital accumulation. Thus, Akin was able to hold on to the hegemony as a man in his community who has a lot of economic affluence, as well as cultural capital. But this status is a pretentious grade, and when pricked, exposes its hollowness. This is similar to what happens in Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*. In order for Okonkwo to maintain his manhood and hard worn reputation within his community, he feels obliged to be the one to take Ikemefuna's life. Although his elderly friend, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, cautions him: "that boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (p.49), Ogbuefi Ezeudu comes to Okonkwo's house to caution him because "Umofia has decided to kill" (p.49) Ikemefuna. According to Ogbuefi: "The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father" (p.49). Okonkwo does the exact opposite. He accompanies the men who are going to kill Ikemefuna and then cuts Ikemefuna down with his machete when he runs towards him for help after the first man attacks him with his machete. Chinua Achebe narrates that: "dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak" (p.53). After all, the men Okonkwo journeys with were ridiculing other men who refused to embark on the journey to murder a little boy as effeminate. Achebe's narrative makes it clear that "the fear of being thought weak" clouds Okonkwo's judgement of the ability to decipher that there is no line between 'manliness' and 'humanity.' In fact, to be 'a man' is to be human, to have empathy, to love, to be afraid, and also not allow fear destroy our humanity. Like Okonkwo, Akin is afraid of being seen as not 'manly.'

Similarly, society considers a man who cannot impregnate his wife or even have sexual knowledge of her as 'not being a man.' Like Akin and Okonkwo, Baba Segi is afraid of losing

his manhood. As such, he decides to continue playing father to the children from all three wives. Children who do not carry any aspect of his DNA. Androne (2012) explains that these anxieties were often based on friends' opinion that a male was not behaving like a man, quoting Ama Ata Aidoo's novel, *Changes* (p.38).

The need to see oneself as a man through childbearing is also evident in Amma Darko's novel, *Not Without Flowers*. Idan and Aggie have been married for years without children. Although Aggie has seen a gynaecologist and it has been medically confirmed that she is okay, Idan, on the other hand, refuses to do same because "the very suspicion that he could be the one responsible for their childlessness would dent his self-esteem as a complete man" (p.41). As such, when Idan goes home to inform his mother, Sisi, and his elder sister, Efe, that he has finally: "gotten a woman in the family way. I have made someone pregnant and she is not my wife" (p.205). They are excited for him. Their excitement at the news overshadows the problem of Idan's unfaithfulness to his wife, Aggie. In Sisi's joy she tells her son, Idan: "do you know how troubling it is for a mother to have it impugned that her son was not a complete man?" (p.209) The fact that Idan cannot get his wife, Aggie, pregnant means that he is not a complete man. Therefore, Randa's announcement that she is pregnant affirms Idan's manhood. The need to be seen as a man is so great. So when Efe draws their attention to the probability of Randa terminating the pregnancy because she is still studying at the university, Idan replies that: "I hope she doesn't even consider the probability of termination. She must keep it, Sisi, I will die if she doesn't. She must bear me my child, Sisi. God she must!" (p.209) The prospect of fatherhood brings Idan joy. Randa's pregnancy validates Idan's manhood. It therefore comes as a shock when Randa yells at Idan: "I am not pregnant with your child. You did not make me pregnant. I am not carrying your baby or any other man's baby for that matter" (p. 289). This cold news delivered to Idan returns him to his position as not being a man.

Lauer (2012) notes, however, that "our identity can be taken up as our own construction" (p.108), pointing out the alternative which is to who we are by "reaching beyond spatial (geographical) and the temporal (historical) dimensions of our region in the world" (p.109). Put differently, Lauer challenges our acceptances of African values as consecrated entities that must be held, even if these beliefs are causing harm to its people, calling on Africans to embrace other values to enrich their own. In this wise, a value that Africans can adopt is Western medicine to improve on the wellness of African men who suffer, in silence, from reproductive ailments, when they can be assisted to achieve these ideals. The failure to adopt and the discredited desire to cling on false values will continue to cause tension in African societies.

However, not being a man is not the only burden African males bear. Aside the burden of males having to maintain the cultural and socio-economic positions as 'the man' they also

have the burden to play the cultural and socio-economic role of 'head of the family.' For instance, the Christian religion presents the man as head of the family. An excerpt in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 23 of the Bible, states: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." (p.1316) This implies that the Christian man must live up to the life of Christ in performing the role as head of the wife and family. The life of Christ as recorded in the bible is a selfless way of life and comes with the huge responsibility of dying for the ones you love. Similarly, in the traditional setting among the Akans, specifically, Asantes, the male is the head of the family. He is the leader who sees to the welfare of the family. He provides and protects the family. An Akan proverb that solidifies the male headship is: "when a woman buys a gun, she keeps it in the house of her man."

For instance, traditionally, it is the man who must give the child a name. Among the Gas of Ghana, the naming ceremony of a child is very important. The father must acknowledge the birth of the child and give it a name accordingly. In Ruby Goka's *Plain Yellow*, the main character, Amerley, who is telling the story explains the culture of the Gas of Ghana. Amerley explains why her younger sister, Tsotsoo, is called Tsotsoo instead of the name she should have been given by their father. Amerley initially explains to the reader that in the Ga culture the man names the children. She also explains that "our parents know what our names will be even before they know what sex we will be" (p.11). Then she informs the reader that because her father, Ataa, "did not show up, the ceremony was not performed and Tsotsoo was not named Naa Amatsoo." (p.13) This goes to show that for a male to be accorded the full respect of a man, he must take up the cultural and socio-economic responsibility that his society dictates to him. This goes to show that aside being fertile enough to produce children, the man must also be responsible for the children he fathers in order to be accorded the full respect as a man. And in some cultures like the Ga culture, the children need their father to be the man and the head in order to be accepted into the larger family and society.

Similarly, in Binwell Sinyangwe's novel, *A Cowrie of Hope*, the thief and husband, Winelo Chiswebe, does not shirk his responsibility as a father and a husband even on his hospital bed, after he is shot by the police while caught in the act of robbery. Sinyangwe narrates that:

> Winelo knew that he was dying and should think of the wife and child he was leaving behind – he told the policeman who was guarding him at the hospital to give him a pen and a clean sheet of paper. On the paper, …, he wrote that for the sake of his child, Sula Chiswebe, his house in Kalingalinga and everything in it that he was leaving behind, including the money to the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand kwacha, should be given to his wife, Nasula … (p. 9).

This act by Winelo, although a thief, reveals the cultural responsibility that the African society places on the man to act as head of his household by being responsible for his household's economic wellbeing. Another instance is in Ben-Daniels' *Mimosa*. In this narrative, one encounters how the cultural and socio-economic responsibility placed on the African male compels him to take up his role as head of the family by providing the economic needs of the family as depicted by Yaa Saah's ill treatment of her jobless husband, Kobby. Yaa Saah is exhausted and bitter about the fact that she is the only one with a job. She screams at Kobby when he makes an attempt to touch her cheek after she snatches her loaf of bread from him: "Instead of standing here and touching me, get out there and look for a job! I am tired! Do you hear me? I am tired of feeding you and paying the bills and making love to you! I am frigging tired! Be a man and get out there" (p. 57). Yaa Saah's outburst reveals how society through cultural beliefs and practises has been pre-programed to expect the African male to play the role as 'head' of the household through the act of being its economic provider.

Thus, the cultural and socio-economic responsibility that society places on the African male is evident in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Baba Segi is the head of the family. He provides the economic needs of his family. When he meets Bolanle for the first time, in his shop and tries courting her, she asks: "and will your wives not come and drive me out with a broom (p. 7)?" Baba Segi replies: "my wives do not visit my workplace. Your friend should have told you that. Why should they? They are taken care of; they have no reason to trouble me" (p. 7). Baba Segi makes this statement to prove that he is the head of his household. And as head, he provides adequately for his large family. As such, his wives have no reason to complain about his excesses.

In addition, Baba Segi's role as head of the family supersedes all other issues. This is because being manly must manifest itself in a man's ability to be the head of his home. As such, if Baba Segi refuses the illegitimate children born to him by his wives, he does not only loose his manhood but also ceases to be the head of his family. This means that he can no longer be the leader of his household, and as such, his home falls apart. As such, the writer, Lola Shoneyin, explains that after he mops around the house for three weeks, "contemplating the manliest, most honourable way to present his proposal" Segi eventually calls his wives to a meeting. He decides to remain father to his illegitimate children and the head of his household. Baba Segi understands that by giving in to Teacher's advice to send his wives and their children away he loses the reins as the head of his household. However, being the head of his household is a great responsibility that he cannot shirk for any reason. To do so, would be to cease being a man. To cease being a man is to loose himself and his identity.

It is observed in *Stay with Me* that Akin's family, especially his mother, expects him to be the head of his house, and by so doing, must make his wife accept her rival, Funmi, and also ensure control over both women. However, Akin is unable to control Funmi. Funmi asserts

herself as second and most favoured wife in ways that not only upsets Yejide, but also exposes lack of control of his new polygamous situation and, as a result, lack of control as head of the family. For instance, when Funmi pays an unexpected visit to Yejide at her salon, she informs Yejide that: "our husband is a very caring man. He has been taking good care of me. We thank God that he has enough money for all of us." (p.44) This makes Yejide very upset. She confronts Akin at breakfast over the matter: "she said you are taking good care of her … what does that mean? Explain to me what 'good care' means" (p.47) Akin who has no tangible answer, seeks escape in work, by rushing out of the house with the excuse that he needs to go to work. Yejide screams at him: "you are deceiving me, *abi*? … Akin, God will deceive you, I promise you. God will deceive you the way you are deceiving me." (p.48) Then Yejide goes on to observe that Akin "was all wrong." (p.48) Then she goes on to describe what she meant by 'all wrong:'

> Instead of holding his briefcase in his hand, he gripped it to his side with his left arm so that his body tilted a little to the left, and he looked as though he was about to double over. His jacket was not slung over a shoulder but clutched in his right hand; the edge of a sleeve touched the ground and slid down the porch step … (p.48-49)

In fact, Yejide's observation that her husband was 'all wrong' is accurate. However Akin is 'all wrong' because deep inside he knows that his life is about to fall apart. He is not 'taking good care' of Funmi out of love, but to keep her silent and content. Funmi's sexual experience makes her aware of Akin's problem. Yejide is unaware of the problem. Of course, Akin is deceiving Yejide. Akin insists on keeping up a deception in order to hold on to the reins as head of the family. This adds additional strain on Akin. First, like Baba Segi, he must be 'a man.' Secondly, he must assert his cultural and socio-economic position as 'head' of the family.

Conclusion

This role as heads of their respective families clearly places a huge burden on Akin and Baba Segi. This huge burden stops Akin from crumbling and screaming to his mother and the world that he is impotent and as such, cannot handle a second wife and see to a peaceful home at the same time. This huge burden also stops Baba Segi from sending away his wives for their infidelity because then he would be judged by the society as a weak and infertile man who could not hold his home together. As such, the lives of Baba Segi and Akin answers the question—does the role of the African male as 'the man' and the 'head' of the family place an unnecessary burden on him? Yes, it does. The two characters, Baba Segi and Akin are both forced to accept situations that they would hitherto not have accepted if their cultural

circumstances were different. The unnecessary burden placed on them bounces back on the women in their lives and negatively affects them. In order not to be seen as barren and, therefore, ridiculed by society, Baba Segi's wives, Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi are forced to look for men outside their marriage to impregnate them. The fact that they get pregnant and have children absolves them of being barren. However, Baba Segi is the one with the problem. But in order to be perceived as a man and maintain his place as head of his household, he accepts to father the children of other men and also sets new rules for his wives—they are not to go out of his compound.

In *Stay with Me*, Akin, on the other hand, plays the role of father and mother to his daughter, Rotimi, who is actually his brother, Dotun's daughter. He must live with the secret of what he, Dotun and Yejide did in order to have Rotimi. Perhaps a most emotionally charged imagery of his role as a father is evident when he has to carry his sick child, Rotimi, to the hospital by raising her high above his head so that the soldiers on the streets enforcing order after the successful coup do not shoot him or his child. Akin is a great father, he stays with Rotimi and sees her through her daily struggles as a sickle cell patient. But unfortunately, this is not enough to make him a man per the society's standards. Once his secret is out, he ceases to be a man.

It is also interesting to note that Taju, Baba Segi's driver, and the man who is actually the father of Segi, Baba Segi's first child, does not have to bear the burden that Baba Segi and Akin bears. He is only a sperm donor based on the African society's definition of who a man is. Taju is not responsible for the upkeep of his children or their mother. That is Segi's burden. Unfortunately, being responsible for the children is still not enough to make Baba Segi a man. Taju also absconds when it comes to light that Baba Segi is not the biological father of his children. He does not wait to be discovered. Taju's behaviour and role in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* can be compared to Dotun's role in *Stay with me*. Men who father children they are not responsible for after the birth of such children. But they are rather respected as men because they can perform the biological role of implanting a sperm cell in a woman.

Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, in her novel, *Kintu*, states through her character, Kintu, that: "society heaped such expectations on manhood that in a bid to live up to them some men snapped." (p.21) In fact, in order for the woman to be liberated from the shackles of unfair socio-cultural bondage, her male counterpart needs an equal measure of liberation. It is evident that the African society can only see the change it seeks to give its women if only attention is paid to the men as well. After all, males and females are two equal halves of the whole.

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