



COMING INTO PUBLIC AREA IN THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES (2010) BY LOLA SHONEYIN

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the issue of coming into public area done by women characters. The aims of this study are to find out how far the two women characters exposed the topic of coming into public area. Fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting are used to analyse this novel. The analysis is done through text and context-based interpretation. Those elements are analysed based on how characters are going out from domestic area and coming into public area. This study relates to the concept of Marxist-feminis by Holmstorm, C. Delphy, and Booth. The result of this study shows that the women characters success in leaving domestic and coming into public area. Though cultural condition limit them, they struggle to fight to be independent.

Keywords: Public area, independent, women.

A. INTRODUCTION

From generation to generation, society possesses the concept of gender roles that relates to culture. Most society influenced by patriarchal system controls gender how to behave. The norms that society creates generally consider acceptable, appropriate, and desirable for people. The rules, men were the breadwinner of the family while women took care of the house and children, is made by this system. The way to restrain women with this rule is by marriage. This concept makes the imbalance between gender in aspects of life such as career, social, and spiritual and has restrain women's movement in environment. In order to fight this condition women have to struggle to get knowledge and increase the awareness about the equality between men and women in every aspects of life.

Society makes two different areas of works for each gender; domestic area for women and public area for men. In Merriam-Webster (2010) *domestic area* is

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defined as a particular extent of space that devoted to home duties and pleasures. In another word, domestic area is a place to take care of house and the entire family members. This area is a place for women who refer to the wife and daughter. They only do works such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the house. Women do not deal with politic, economic, or academic works. They removed from those activities.

In contrary, in Merriam-webster (2010), *public area* is defined as devoted to the general or national welfare. It is a place for men. Lerner (1989:239) says the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. This statement supports a very clear sign that a particular situation or feeling exists of male is one of the reasons which makes men more likely to hold and powerful in public area.

This study is going to reveal the issue about *coming into public area* which refers to the acts done by two women character to leave domestic and come into public area. It is related to the concept of Marxist-feminist. Women's conscious have sought to disturb the certainties such a patriarchal culture and to assert a belief in sexual equality. Holmstrom (1984) states that to end women's oppression can only achieve by working. He saw the economic dependence might be the driving factor of women's subjugation to men.

It is also supported by Christine Delphy (1981) who states that marriage is a labor contract that gives men the right to exploit women. It implies that marriage becomes bondage for women. The wife becomes the slave for the husband without salary. This attitudes and behavior have existed for a long time in an organization and have become accepted as normal even though they are bad. Furthermore, socialist feminists concern with the roles allocated to women that are independent of class status. Thus, it makes space between sexes; domestic area for women and public area for men.

Thus feminists fight against this unfair condition. They argue the way to break free from women's oppression is by working. Considering sexism and gendered division of labor of each historical era is determined by the economic system. They go towards specifying how gender and class work together to create distinct forms of oppression and privilege for women and men of each class.

Women realize this condition give the disadvantages for them. They begin to free themselves from patriarchal rule that restrain them to enter public area. They amplify their awareness about the equality between sexes so that they can participate in every aspects of public business. They want to be free from the binds and prove women are not uncivilized or imperfect man. They want to establish and achieve political, personal, and social equality. Heather Booth (1972) says:

“Women and all people have a right to safe and good working conditions; but these need to be fought for all workers” (P.28)

From the quotation above, it describes that the work place should be done fairly and correctly for all people in the world, including women. Women have to fight the rights to work in every aspect of public works. The beliefs of men were the breadwinner of the family while women were the one who responsible for house works has change. Women must fight to show that they can also enter the place where they can earn money to support the others. Thus, to end gender roles in every aspects of life can achieve by working and being independent.

Thus, coming into public area in this analysis refer to the acts done by two characters to go out from domestic area and coming into public area. There are two protagonists as the central of this analysis. They were trapped in polygamous household. They were bound to rule and restriction made by husband and society. They only positioned in domestic works. However, they begin to leave domestic area and come to public area to change their life. They leave domestic area by doing business and applying knowledge.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's wives* (2010) by Lola Shoneyin is done through text and context-based interpretation. Fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting are used to analyze this novel. To evoke the acts of coming into public area, characters reaction toward conflicts are used in this analysis. Then, the setting deals with circumstances and atmosphere. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. Plot and conflicts in this novel give important role to reveal the conflicts that characters faced. Those elements are analyzed based on how characters are going out from domestic area and coming into public area.

C. DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses the fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict) and setting to reveal the issue of *coming into public area*. Coming into public area, in this analysis, refers to the acts done by the women characters.

2.1 The First Character

The first character, Iya Segi, is the first wife of Baba Segi who wants to be independence. She tries to pursue her dreams; by having her own property and being free. In order to fulfill the dreams, she works harder by earning money. In fact, she has begun her business before her marriage. She cooked and sold a staple food made by mixing cassava and plantain flour, *fufu*, in her hometown, Idanre. After having marriage, she has cement stores in Ibadan. Then, she even attended driving school for driving her own car to expedite her movement.

The character has strong desire and willingness to pursue her dream; to have her own property and to be free from whatever bound her. It appears in the following quotation:

“I will pile it on top of the money I have now and the heap will be as hefty as the hills of Idanre. Then, I will leave this city and return to my village. I will buy a big marble head-stone for my mother. I will burn down her bungalow and build a four-story building in its place” (P. 58)

The quotation above shows that the character’s dream. She wants to reach it. She makes planning to make her dreams come true. It indicates that she is a well plan person. The words *will*; *will pile*, *will leave*, and *will build* in the utterance shows the planning has been well made. From the utterance *I will pile up the money* implies that she has to prepare herself in order to pursue her dream. It implies that she wants to be economic independence from anyone. The setting in this text refers to the firmness and constancy when she wants to thrive and to pursue her dreams. Although the environment represses her, her willingness to pursue her dreams becomes stronger. The utterance *I will leave the city* shows that she wants to move on. She wants to detach from the restriction that complicate her life. She wants to lead her own life.

The next quotation shows her process to reach one of her dream; to have her own property. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“I had become quite adept at making *fufu*, and like my mother I had a stash of my money under my mattress. But it was a small mattress, in a small room, in a tiny two-bed house. I troubled Mama about getting my own quarters; I was tired of squeezing past her at every doorway. “I have told you before that you cannot buy land and build your own house. The village men will say you are ridiculing them, doing what they can’t!

“But it just a house, Mama!”

“And they will tear it down and burn it, daughter!” (P. 55)

The character starts small business. She cooks and sells the staple food, traditional food, by mixing cassava and plantain flour, *fufu*. She supports her own economy. She wants to have her own property. From the utterance *and like mother I had stash of my money under my mattress* shows she has keep and save her money in order to get her own house. The setting here refers to the cultural condition that

put limitation for woman to have property. Due to patriarchal system about property rights, men hold all the right to possess, manage, and control the property. This condition makes the character struggle with the confining of her role in patriarchal culture. The utterance *I have told you before that you cannot buy land and build your own house* clearly shows the obstacle for her to have her own property. The internal conflict occurs when she finds the unfairness in the system. She is eternally controlled by patriarchal culture that restraint woman to possess their own home and building. Though she worries about society's critics, she fights to have her own property.

The next quotation shows that she continues her business after her marriage. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“Now I have eight cement shops in Ibadan and my wealth swells by the day. Do not say I greedy because I am not. It's just as my money grows, my path to freedom becomes clearer. Everybody wants to be free from whatever binds them.” (P. 58)

From the quotation above shows that she success in her business. The word *cement* indicates that she is a clever woman. She observes the environment in choosing the object that she wants to sell. She knows what the environment needs in the era of construction. This increases her profit. The setting here refers to the struggle to earn money to leave the system. The words *free* and *freedom* show her persistence to change her life. She wants to choose the life she wants. She wants to own her money and property.

In this analysis, the first character confront mostly with internal conflict. She smartly chooses the best way to leave domestic and come into public area. She desperate to break the rule that made by society. She has to obey her husband to reach her goal. She fights the unfairness and enforcement from society, even the family. These internal conflicts push the character to make decisions.

2.2 The Second Character

The second character who wants to come into public area is the fourth wife, Bolanle. Unlike the first character, she is an educated woman. She married her husband in order to be free from her mother's control. She comes into public area with different ways. She teaches the other wives to write and to read. She educates the daughter, Segi, to have her own choices. Then, she shows the entire family members that she has choice, she speaks in public, and defends herself. Her actions affect and inspire another woman character to express their thoughts.

During her marriage, she brings knowledge into her husband's family by teaching the other wives to write and read. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“I offered the wives to read. Iya Tope was keen to learn but then I found Iya Femi tearing up sheets from the exercise books to line the kitchen cupboards. When I reminded her why I’d brought them, she said I could crawl into the cabinets and teach the insects if I still wanted them to serve that purpose. I have tried to help the children too. I told them to assemble in the dining room so I could read to them.....Such is the extent to which 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 to their darkness.” (P. 13)

The text shows that she starts teaching the other wives. The setting here refers to the unwelcome situation where she must to struggle to run her purpose. She gets the denial from other family members. The conflict emerges when the other wives refuse her effort to educate them. The utterance *I found Iya Femi tearing up sheets from the exercise book to line the kitchen cupboard* indicates the extreme rejection from the other wives. However, the utterance *I see through the subterfuge* shows that her determination not to give up on teaching them. Though she deals with bad treatments, her strong determination to give knowledge to the wives does not detain her. The utterance *I will bring light to their darkness* shows her purpose. It becomes her motto. She wants to deprive the ignorance of the other women characters.

She success in giving the awareness to another woman character. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“Auntie!” Segi covered her eyes with her finger. “I swear I have not seen any more. He said he would teach me how to kiss a woman tonight but I left him and ran after you. I am sure all his friends are laughing at me now.” She sighed and looked over her shoulders. My heart would be in my mouth. I wouldn’t able to relax.” Segi put her arm through mine as the thought created new dread in her mind.
“Good. So even though you left him in the shack, you have peace of mind...which mean you did the right thing. A real woman must always do things she wants to

do, and in her own time too. You must never allow yourself to be rushed into doing things you're not ready for." We stepped onto the veranda where Baba Segi's house together, the same foot at the same time." (P. 86)

From the conversation above, it is known that she educates the daughter. She gives her awareness to have her own opinion, thought, and principle. The utterance *I left him and ran after you* shows her awareness not to accept physical abuse from others. It means that she has her own body; she refuses to be touched by men. The utterance *A real woman must always do things she wants to do* indicates that she instill the knowledge to other woman character, the daughter. For a woman, who forbid to express their feeling, speak is extraordinary thing to do in public. Then the utterances *you did the right thing* shows the way she reassures the daughter. The setting here refers to the pleasant situation where the character help in the doubt in her action. She gives the awareness to other woman that they have choices in life and rights to do anything in order to defend themselves.

Another quotation shows her success in giving awareness to other woman character. The third wife expresses her thought for the first time. It can be seen in the quotation:

"No, Iya Femi. You will go to prison." I said. I do not know where I got the boldness but I spoke my mind for once. "Was I there when you were cooking you enemy's las meal? Don't you dare drag me into your murderous plot! If you had God in you, you'd be praying for the child who barely cling to life. But no, you sit here wondering how to remain in the house that you have used your hands to burn. I left them there in the sitting room." (P. 119)

The text shows she inspires other wife. She is success in giving the awareness to other woman character. The setting refers to the tense situation when I, articulate by the third wife, express her thought in front of other wives. From the utterance *I do not know where I got the boldness but I spoke my mind for once* shows that other woman gradually changes. She delivers what is on her mind for the first time in her life. She does not want to be blame for anything like usual. The word *left* shows the other character take the decision without fearing anyone for the first time. She motivates from the character's action. It indicates that the character has successfully gives the awareness to speak their minds bravely. She inspires other woman to speak in public bravely.

Briefly, the second character mostly deals with the external conflicts. She struggles to give knowledge and awareness to other character. She faces up the rejection from the other wives. However, she fights this condition and inspires the other woman character. Her actions motivate them not to be controlled by other, to deliver their thoughts, to have choice. The character's purpose, to educate the family members, is successfully making the changes in her husband's family. Also, she is a woman with her own choice. She does not want to be controlled by others. She leads her own life with her own way.

D. CONCLUSION

This analyses shows that the two women character success in coming into public area. The first character comes into public area by doing business. She earns her own money. She refuses to be economic dependence. Then, the second character applies her knowledge to come into public area. She educates the other women character; the daughter and the third wife so they become independent. The two characters able to fight patriarchal system for their rights.

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