

Polygamy in Contemporary Yorùbá Society of Southwestern Nigeria: The Yorùbá Writers' View

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ABSTRACT

It is on record that Polygamy had been part of the Yorùbá tradition since the inception of the race. In the past, marrying more than one wife was a factor used for determining the wealth and prosperity of a man. This is because most men were dominant peasant farmers, hence, the need to have more women and children to assist in farming activities. It is interesting that despite this situation, they lived together in harmony. In most cases, unless one is told, it was difficult to distinguish between children of one wife from the other. Today however, Polygamy has translated into something else. This paper examines the views of selected Yorùbá literary writers on the issue of Polygamy as practiced in contemporary Yorùbá society. The objectives of the paper include: to determine the cause(s) of the change, the effect of the changes on the immediate, extended families and the society as a whole. Two Yorùbá written play texts are ex-rayed. They are: Lávuyì Ògúnníran's Ààrè-Àgò Aríkúyerí (2010) and Ọmọtáyọ and Ògúnníran's Abínúṣeni (1993). Our findings reveal that: colonialism and its attendant civilization caused a drift in the life of the people, that total dependent on foreign cultures and ideas have caused noticeable changes in the lifestyle of the Yorùbá people. The paper concludes that although it is not a crime to borrow cultural ideas since culture itself is not stagnant, it is however necessary to be careful and ensure that such borrowing is not at the detriment of one's culture.

Keywords: Polygamy, Contemporary Society, Yorùbá Writer

INTRODUCTION

Polygamy has been part of Yorùbá tradition right from inception of the race. In the past, marrying more than one wife was a yardstick used for measuring the wealth and prosperity of a man. This is because most men were peasant farmers, hence, the need to have more women and children to assist in farming activities. It is interesting that despite this situation, they lived together in harmony. In most cases, unless one is told, it was difficult to distinguish between children of each wife. Today however, Polygamy has translated into something else.

This paper examines the views of selected literary writers on the issue of Polygamy as practiced in contemporary Yorùbá society. It is out to answer such questions as how was it practiced, what changes are noticed? What are the causes of the changes and what are the effects on the individuals involved, the immediate and extended families and the society at large. It is aimed at finding a lasting solution to the dangerous happenings emanating from operating a polygamous family system.

Our methodology is descriptive. Two different Yorùbá play texts with the theme of polygamy are selected for examination. They are: Ògúnníran's Ààrè Àgò Aríkúyerí and Ọmọtáyọ and Ògúnníran's Abínúṣeni. The views of the selected authors are carefully and objectively examined and at the end, a conclusion is reached. It is hoped that this paper will open our eyes to the pros and cons of polygamy and this will eventually reduce the problems emanating from the subject of polygamy. Polygamy involves woman, therefore, we deem it fit to briefly analyse the Yorùbá view about woman.

Woman in Yorùbá Tradition

Efforts towards bringing about a change in the status of women in Nigeria have not been that of the government alone rather, it has been the concern of the entire Nigerian populace. Apart from the call for such change, many educated women have said it openly that they would want a very close relationship between them and their husbands, a change that will place them at the same level with their men. Changes that will give them recognition and elevate them from their present supportive role which the society or even nature place them.

Before now, the position of women in Nigeria and in fact in most countries across the globe was that of a second-class citizen. For instance, record has it that in the United States of America, the supportive role which society assigned to women was responsible for the formation of a movement group called Women Liberation Movement around 1800. Ogbuani, (1996, p.11), Adeyemi, (2001, p.155). According to these scholars, the movement alleged that the punishments meted on women were numerous. Women had no say in the affairs of the society. American constitution did not allow women participation in politics and they were restricted to certain types of work. They were regarded as second- class citizens.

In like manner, the Hindus see women as very insignificant members of their society. To them, a woman is a “slave” and therefore, she is not allowed to divorce even in the face of unbearable treatments. Although these practices might have changed. The Arabs buried their female children because they are females. Among the Fulani, according to Al-Amin Abu Manga, (1981, p.10).

A wife is portrayed more as an antagonist to the husband than a partner. Her in-born malice and innate diabolical nature enhance her fighting role

and therefore neutralizes the institutionalized authority of the husband.

In Nigeria in general, and within the contemporary Yorùbá society in particular, women are seen as subordinate to the husband. For instance, a wife should have no say in discussions centered on the husband's family. A wife cannot inherit, as she is part of the husband's properties to be inherited after the husband's death. She has no right to have a ‘male friend’ after her marriage whereas the husband could marry as many wives as he pleases. However, most of these practices have been affected by civilization.

As time went on however, the situation changed. Individuals and groups of people, through education and religion saw the need to raise the status of women from that of insignificance to that of recognition. It was realized that men and women could cooperate to move the society forward.

There are several perspectives to the issue of woman in Yorùbá society. There has been a great deal of work on issues that have to do with women politics and women development. A deep knowledge of the Yorùbá views about woman can be found in their oral traditions which include folktales, Ifá literary Corpus, proverbs, myths, legends and so on. For instance, Al-Amin Abu Manga (1981, p.3) notes that folklore functions to mirror the society's way of life in terms of its social structure and its method of regulating social behaviours.

Ogunsina (1985, p.376) refers to this in his discussion on “Co-Wife tales among the Yorùbá”. According to him, the main characters in co-wife tales are always women and that what usually happens in such tales may force them to have dealings with other creatures be it human beings, animals and so on. He also explains that the main theme of co-wife tales centers on covetousness as in the tale titled: ‘èrò tí ñ ròjéje’, deceit as in ‘ìgbákò orogún’, backsliding as in ‘àgbò gbewé mi jẹ’, malice as in ‘àsáró elépo rẹdẹrẹdẹ’ and other social vices that one may think of, all portraying co-wives negatively and in a way that one can derive one lesson or the other from the stories.

In the Ifá Corpus, there are different thoughts of the Yorùbá about womanhood. For instance, Abímbólá (1968, p.38) in Òyèkú Méjì, describes the situation in a polygamous family as thus: It reads:

Obìnrin lẹké - the woman is a deceit

Obìnrin lẹ̀dàlẹ̀ - the woman is perfidious

Kéèyàn m K'èèyàn má fí'nú hàn f'Óbìnrin - one should not reveal his mind to a woman.

Women are believed to be talkatives; it is dangerous to discuss issues that are secret with them. Hence, the Yorùbá saying:

Èèyàn tí ò gbọ̀n ní bóbìrin mụlẹ̀ - only the foolish confide in women

Ijó obìnrin bá mawo lawo bàjẹ̀. - the day a woman know a secret, such secret is spoilt.

Another one says:

Ẹ má jẹ́ ká finú hàn fóbìnrin - Do not give your mind to a woman

Ibi ojú rẹ̀ ò tó, ẹnu rẹ̀ débẹ̀ - where her eyes do not see, her mouth gets there.

Ogunsina (1982) also observes that many Yorùbá aphorisms and proverbial expressions contain luminous ideas about the characteristics and peculiarities of women. He gives this example:

Bí a pewúré, kí a má f'óbìnrin lorí jẹ

Bí a bá pàgùntàn bọ̀lọ̀jọ̀,

Kí a má f'óbìnrin láhọ̀n jẹ.

Ẹ̀gbọ̀n bí ẹ̀ bá padìẹ̀ òkòkó, kí a yọ ojú rẹ̀ f'óbìnrin.

Nítorí obìnrin kílì jorí, wọ̀n kílì jahọ̀n, ojú ní wọ̀n n jẹ

(If a goat is killed, do not give woman the head to eat.

If a sheep is killed, let not its tongue be given to the woman.

But when a fowl is killed, pluck its eyes for a woman to eat;

for women never enjoy eating the head, nor the tongue but

only the eyes).

These go in line with the belief that the position of headship is not in the nature of women, it is exclusively reserved for men. It is believed that in a compound or family where a woman is named Ikúmólú', meaning the death has taken the head, it is certain that their males are either dead or insignificant.

Similarly, Abimbólá in Òyèkú Méjì of the Ifá Corpus, a woman is described as a trouble maker, selfish, in the sense that no woman would willingly tolerate having a co-wife. They detest rivalry of any form. Their motto is "me and my husband". It reads:

Òkan ọ̀so ọ̀poró lobìnrin dùn mọ̀ - only one woman is good

Lọwọ̀ ọ̀kọ̀.- for a man

Bí wọ̀n bá dí méjì, - when they are two in number,

Wọ̀n a dí òjòwú - they become jealous.

Bí wọn bá di mēta, - when they are three in number

Wọn a dēta-n-túlé.... -they become association of three that destroys a home.....

There are short lyrics used in portraying the jealous nature of women. This is most pronounced within polygamous set ups. The song goes thus:

Òjòwú 'bìnrin abìpònrin létí - jealous woman, iron sharpener on the ears

Bó lóun sùn lọ, a sì mǎa wúkọ - when she claims to be in deep sleep, she coughs.

In like manner, the Yorùbá will say:

Ọkọ to bá rù - when the husband becomes lean

Ẹ bí ìyàwó rẹ léèrè - ask the wife why?

Or even this:

Bóbìnrin bá gbọn lágbọnjù - if a woman is too wise

Pénpé laṣọ ọkọ rẹ ẹ mọ - the husband's dress becomes undersized.

Nevertheless, Yorùbá still recognize some good things about women. For instance, Ogunṣina observes that we can see the positive nature of women among the Yorùbá in proverbial songs and poems. He refers to one Ògbóni song, which goes thus:

Ẹ wólẹ fóbìnrin - let's respect our women

Obìnrin ló bí wa - they are our mothers

Káa tó dòrìsà - before we become an idol.

Abimbola (1968, p.59) referring to Òdí Méjì of the Ifá Corpus, writes:

Funfun niyì ẹyín - whiteness, the beauty of the teeth

Ègùngàgàrà niyì ọrùn- Longness, the beauty of the neck

Ọmú ẹkíkìṣíkìṣíkí, niyì obìnrin - Robust breast the beauty of a woman.

A díá fún ẹjì ọdì - Divine for ẹjì ọdì

Tí n sùnkún aláilóbìnrin- Crying for being a bachelor

Tí n fọjoojúmọ káwọ ọtan- Putting his hands in his laps everyday

Èrò ọpọ, èrò Ọfà - People of Ọpọ, people of Ọfà

Ìgbà ọdì di méjì - when we double the buttock

Nàà la dọlómọ - It is then we become parents.

Ogbuani writes that a woman is a solution carrier rather than a trouble giver. She argues that if women who constitute almost half of the population of a country like Nigeria, are not being carried along, development in Nigeria cannot be fully realized because according to her:

Without women, men will labour under the sun without suitable relief in the home. The presence of women on earth adds meaning to living. Women are not the pains of life; they are the beauties of life.

This belief led to the formation of several women organizations both locally and nationally with the sole aim of changing the status of women from unrecognized to that of recognized, from that of a slave to that of a daughter, from the unfaithful to that of the faithful and so on.

The references above point to the roles of women as mothers and that without them, there won't be anything like child bearing. As a mother, the Yorùbá believe that whatever situation one finds himself/herself, the mother will not desert him/her. Hence the saying:

Etí were ni tèkúté ilé - the mouse is always at alert

Abiyamọ kǐi gb'èkún ọmọ rẹ - a mother will not hear the cry of her child

Kí ó mǎà tatí were - and fails to respond.

What these infer therefore, is that the Yorùbá traditional oral literatures are not just an embodiment of unimpressive and powerless verbal expressions about women; they also contain impressive and powerful verbal expressions. These may account for why Ogbuani writes that:

Women are not evil. They are vessels of favour and stability... remember, she is your partner and your co-builder in the destiny plan.

The two selected Yorùbá play texts address the negative aspects of a woman, especially as it concerns polygamy. i.e. having a rival wife and this is our next port of call.

What is Polygamy?

Gbádéḡeṣin (2017) opines that:

Marriage as a social arrangement is a nomos building instrumentality that creates for the individual, the sort of order in which his or her life makes sense. One can even argue that as part of socially constructed world, marriage is a given and predetermined by the Yorùbá social world for the individual and made available to him or her for ordering his or her everyday life.

This implies that marriage is a social as well as ritual act in which two people from different backgrounds (who may or may not be of different cultural background) come together and redefine themselves.

It is worthy of mention here that of all traditional rites of passage considered by the Yorùbá people to be important milestones, it is only marriage rite that an individual personally witnesses and actively participates in and until today, marriage still retain its meaningfulness to almost all members of the Yorùbá society.

It is the process of founding a new family. It is the beginning of a new life whereby a man and a lady from different family background, different orientation, different exposure and so on, come together to live as one family.

In Yorùbá society, it is an act of irresponsibility for a man or woman who has reached marriage age to shy away from it. This act, Gbádéḡeṣin says is against the social convention of the society no matter the situation the man or woman finds himself or herself. Therefore, what we experience today where young men run away from marriage or delay marriage because they have no job is unacceptable to the Yorùbá.

As earlier mentioned, polygamy is a form of marriage in constant practice before the advent of Christianity. Polygamy seemed to be the norm and not an exception to the rule in the Yorùbá society (among the Ọyó

dialect group, many old men were polygamists). Adéríbigbé opines that “Instances of polygamy are almost exclusively in the form of polygyny. Polygyny refers to a man being married to more than one woman at the same time”.

A majority of the Yorùbá Muslims were and still are polygamists. Few men still practice polygamous marriage in many mainline churches in Yorùbá society. Another reason why polygamous marriage was common was due to the fact that many young men often inherited the younger wives of their deceased kinsmen (known as levirate or widow inheritance).

In the Holy Bible, Augustine sees marriage as one covenant between one man and one woman which may not be broken. According to him: “It was the Creator who established monogamy; therefore the first natural bond of human society is man and his wife”.

Although the Old Testament describes numerous examples of Polygamy among devotees of God, most Christian groups have historically rejected the practice of polygamy and have upheld monogamy alone as normative and in line with biblical injunctions. Today, it is doubtful if there are Christian groups who currently do practice polygamy. Most churches today are even skeptical about divorce. For instance, Mathew 19,vs.4-5 reads:

Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.

According to the Roman Catholic Catechism,

Polygamy is not in accord with moral law (conjugal) communion is radically contradicted by polygamy; this in fact, directly negates the plan of God that was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive.

According to Dupanloup, et al,

Anglican Communion on the other hand, upholds monogamy as God’s plan as the idea of relationship of love between husband and wife, nevertheless recommends that a polygamist who responds to the gospel and wishes to join the Anglican church may be baptized and confirmed with his believing wives and children on the condition that the polygamist shall promise not to marry again as long as any of his wives at the time of conversion are alive that the receiving of such a polygamist has the consent of the local Anglican Community and that such a polygamist shall not be compelled to put away any of his wives on account of the social deprivation they would suffer. Dupanloup, et al (2003, p.86).

The polygamy that is allowed in Quran is for special situations. There are strict requirements to marrying more than one woman, as Quran vs. 4:3 says: “the man must treat them fairly, financially and in terms of support given to each wife, according to Islamic law. However, Islam advises monogamy for a man if he fears he cannot deal justly with his wives.

If ye fears that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans. Marry women of your choice. Two or three or four but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them) the only one or one that your right hand possesses that will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice. (Quran, Sura 4. Ayah 3 (112).

From the reference above, one can say that even the Quran does not approve of polygamy in the sense that it gives a condition under which a man can chose to be polygamous and this condition is such that, by human nature, it is doubtful if any man can meet the condition. The question is whether it is humanly possible to marry more than one wife, love and treat them equally in all things. But unfortunately today, because of the love of the flesh, such condition is either ignored or misinterpreted and the result is not always interesting to

witness. This implies that monogamy is by far the norm in Muslim societies as most men cannot afford to maintain more than one family and many of those who could, would rather not.

According to the Nigerian civil law, “Nigeria does not recognize Polygamy. Twelve (12) out of thirty-six (36) Nigeria States recognize Polygamous marriages as being equivalent to monogamous marriages”. They allow for a man to take more than one wife. (online source).

Pros and cons of Polygamy.

We are of the opinion that Polygamy may enable a male to desire more offspring but monogamy can, in certain circumstances represent a more successful over all reproductive strategy. By sticking with the same female, a male is able to ensure that the female’s offspring are also his and prevent this offspring from being killed by male rivals’ intent on returning the female to fertility (breast feeding being a natural contraceptive).

Because of the influence of modernity in contemporary societies, polygamy exposes individuals, families and even the entire society to:

1. Gender inequality among the co-wives: Since there is the tendency for the husband not been able to treat the wives equally, there is the tendency for one to feel inferior/superior to the other and potentially subordinated to their husband. Although the husband ought to treat his co-wives equally, in practice he will almost inevitably favour one over the others-most likely the youngest most recent one.
2. Experience has shown that polygamous unions by its very nature, foster jealousy, competition and conflict, with instances of co-wives poisoning one another’s offspring in a bid to further their own. It is doubtful if there could be a way out of this situation.
3. While Polygamy may benefit the men involved (which is doubtful because the pains are far more than the gains), it denies wives to other men, especially young low status men who like all men, tend to measure their success by their manhood that is by the twin parameters of social status and fertility.
4. Polygamy also tends to disadvantage the off springs. On the one hand, children in polygamous families share in the genes of an alpha male and stand to benefit from his protection, resources, influence, outlook and expertise. On the other hand, their mothers are younger and less educated and they receive a divided share of their father’s attention, what may be directed at his latest wife, or at amassing resources for his next one.
5. They are also at greater risk of violence from their kin group, particularly the extended family. Overall, the infant mortality in polygamous families is considerably higher than in monogamous families.

The Writers’ view about Polygamy.

Two Yorùbá play texts are analysed. They are Ògúnníran’s Ààrẹ̀ Àgò Aríkúyẹ́rì and Ọmọ́táyọ̀ and Ògúnníran’s Abinúẹ̀ni both emphasizing the negative implications of Polygamy on individual families in particular and the entire society in general.

The theme in Ààrẹ̀-Àgò Aríkúyẹ́rì, center on the experience in polygamous families. Behaviours such as jealousy, envy, backsliding, backbiting and the likes. All these behaviours and even more, feature prominently in a polygamous family. Ògúnrindé Ajé (A.K.A. Ààrẹ̀ Àgò) is a warrior, a high chief, very popular, very rich and he commands respect from his people. But despite this, the author makes us to see that he loves marrying as many wives as possible but lacks the wisdom to coordinate them. It all started on his birthday when his wives were eulogizing him in turns. Fátólá outshines the other wives who were disgraced in public. Lágídò, Ògúnrindé Ajé’s servant starts it when he tells Aşıyanbí saying:

Bàbá ní o máa ké! Maa ké, máa gbó bí ajá..... Èẹ̀ m’éléyíí so! Yóó mò b’aré jẹẹ̀! Ta ló bẹ̀ ará oko ní rárà sun? Ajá a máa j’òbí? Pa ‘nu ẹ̀ mó ‘n’bẹ̀. (O.i.14).

Daddy says you should continue to shout, bark like a dog. You better tie her or else, she will spoil the show. Who asked this novice to perform. Do the dog eat kolanut? Stop your mouth. (Pg. 14).

Aṣiyanbí and Adépèlé become un-lookers as Fátólá performs. Aṣiyanbí decides to avenge the disgrace on Fátólá who outshines them during Ògúnrinde Ajé's birthday, an act believed to be typical of co-wives. Ògúnrinde Ajé does not help the situation either, he eulogizes Fátólá and this does not go down well with Aṣiyanbí, the eldest wife and probably, Adépèlé. This sparks off the rivalry between the co-wives. Lágídò (Ògúnrinde Ajé's messenger), jestly invite the duo to join in the celebration, but Aṣiyanbí declines the invitation saying:

Şe ká má jẹẹ k'àyò ó bá ọkọ rẹ jó ni? Kúrò l'ódò wa ọjàrẹ, iwọ ọbọ lásán, làsán yí. (o.i. 19).

Should we deny the favourite the chance to dance with her husband? Go away from here, you this ordinary monkey. (p.19).

This may not be enough evidence that Fátólá is the most favoured of the wives, but Ògúnrinde Ajé shows this in the way he eulogizes Fátólá. He says:

Obínrin tẹẹrẹ yẹ ọkọ rẹ ní'jọ ijó ọkọ Fátólá. Iwindámólá. Òsùmàrẹ yẹ'run dandan-an-dan. Orí ní kúkú şe'ni Táàà láya tó pa'wó, ọkọ Fátólá. Olówó orí Àmòpẹ. Orí nàà ló şe ọ pàdé mi. (Pg. 19).

A slim woman fits her husband when dancing, Fátólá's husband. Iwindámólá. The rainbow fits the sky. It is destiny that gives one a good wife, Fátólá's husband, Àmòpẹ's husband. It is destiny that makes us meet. (Pg.19).

This is no doubt a careless talk especially in a polygamous environment. It also serves as evidence that the husbands also contribute to the troubles experienced in polygamous families. As earlier said, women are opposed to having co-wives and they could go any length to fight against it. With this saying, Ògúnrinde Ajé has succeeded in igniting the rivalry that engulfs his household.

Although we are not specifically told, it is assumed that Aṣiyanbí is responsible for the poisoning of Adépèlé's children. Ògúnrinde Ajé ordered his wives to fish out the perpetrator, given them a time limit. Aṣiyanbí, being the eldest wife calls her co-wives to a meeting and says:

Ohun tí Bàbá sọ fún wa ni ẹ yáa jẹ ká tètè mú sà lóògùn. Ọrọ nàà gba àmójútó gan-an ni. Ẹ jẹ k'óníkálùkù ó gbọnà tí ó bá mò lẹ....(o.i. 22).

We should quickly address what Daddy instructed us to do. The issue deserves serious attention. Let each of us look for solution. (p. 22).

Adépèlé responds by crying, but a treacherous woman like Aṣiyanbí has a way of cooling her down. She says:

Pa'nu ẹkún mò. Orí rẹ kii şorí iyà. Mo ti rí'bi tí nnkan ti n şe ọ. Àà ẹni ẹni

ní şe'ni! Àà! Àà! Àà....! (o.i. 23).

Stop crying. You do not choose a bad destiny. I have discovered where your problem lies. Ha! One's close associate bedevils one. Ha! Ha! Ha! (p. 23).

And when Adépèlé asks who the enemy could be, Aṣiyanbí, the eldest (most senior wife) ironically replies:

Taa ni ó ha şe j'awọn 'Aya Baba lẹ? Ta ló kó 'tíjù nlá bá wa níjẹlòó tí Baba n bọrí? (o.i. 23)

Who could the person be other than Daddy's wife? Who disgraced us during Daddy's birthday celebration? (p.23).

Aṣiyanbí tells lies that Fátólá is behind the death of Adépèlé's children, she says:

Babaláwo mi gan-an ni mo tò lọ láti wádíi ọ̀ràn nàà. Ọ̀un ló sọ́ fún mí pé Ààyò Baba ló n pa ọ́ lómọ́ nípá gbígbe májèlẹ́ fún wọn jẹ́ nítorí pé kò bí ọ̀kúnrin. Şùgbón Babaláwo nàà sọ́ fún mí pé Bàbá wa kò ní fẹ́ ka ọ̀rò nàà kún nítorí pé “Ààyò” rẹ́ ni Obìnrin nàà í şe. (o.i. 24).

I visited my herbalist to inquire about the issue. He told me Daddy's favourite is behind the death of your children through poisoning because she has no male child. But the Herbalist told me Daddy will not take the issue seriously because the woman is her favourite. (p. 24).

Adépèlẹ́ starts crying, but Aşyanbí cautions her saying:

Àà!, O fẹ́ ba nńkan jẹ́. O fẹ́ k'ára ilé pé lé wa lóri! O fẹ́ k'ẹni à n perí gbọ́ k'á tó fẹ́jọ́ rẹ́ sùn? Wòó! Ọ̀rò ọ̀mọ́ yìí kò ká ọ́ lára jù mí lọ rára. Ohun tí Babaláwo wí yìí ní kí o jẹ́ kí a tètè pète lé lóri bá yìí. Èmi ní n ó gbé ọ̀rò nàà lọ s'ọ̀dọ́ Baba. N ó sọ́ fún un pé èmi àti iwọ́ ní a jọ́ lọ s'ọ̀dọ́ Babaláwo nàà kí iwọ́ lẹ́ jẹ́ ẹlẹ́rìí fún mí. Nu omijé ojú rẹ́ nù, ikúnlẹ́ abiamọ́ ọ́ níí jẹ́ kóo sòfò ọ̀mọ́ mó..... (o.i. 24).

Ha!, you want to spoil the show. You want people to gather here. You want the concerned to hear before she is reported? Look, you are not as worried as I am. Let us quickly discuss what the Herbalist says. I am to discuss the issue with Daddy. I will tell him we both visited the Herbalist so that you will be my witness. Whip off your tears, I pray you will never experience such again. (p.24).

This act is believed to be one of women antics to perpetrate evil act. It is commonly practiced within a polygamous setting. Unfortunately, out of ignorance, Adépèlẹ́ believes Aşyanbí, although, she may not have such intention. One can equally say that her sorrow mood account for why she could not think that Aşyanbí is planning a coop against Fátólá, her co-wife. Instead, she praises and prayed for Aşyanbí. In ignorance, she thanked Aşyanbí. She says: “Ó dára, kò burú. Ti yín nàà ó dara o”. Here, one can conclude that because of her state of mind, she could not reason that Aşyanbí is using her to punish Fátólá unjustly. She agrees to Aşyanbí's suggestion that she will lie to their husband that the two of them visited the Herbalist. She eventually tells Ọ̀gúnrindé Ajé that the Herbalist confirms that Fátólá poisoned the twins because she had no male child and that Adépèlẹ́ is her witness.

Displaying his insensitivity, Ọ̀gúnrindé Ajé becomes furious, and without hesitating, he kills Fátólá with his arrow despite all attempts by Fátólá to proof her innocence. This is to show women can go to any length to get rid of their 'rivals'. This is prominent among co-wives. Probably, this is one of the reasons why most religions are against polygamy. It also depicts that the husband has a vital role to play in making polygamy work. It requires patience and sense of reasoning.

Yorùbá say: “bí irọ́ bá lọ lógún ọ̀dún, ọ́jọ́ kan şoşo ní ọ̀títọ́ yóó bá a, meaning no matter how long the lie has travelled, the truth will catch up with it just in one day”. At the end of it all, the secret behind Fátólá's death is unveiled but the deed had been done. Fátólá has been unjustly killed. She pays the price for an offence she does not commit.

The truth is unveiled at Başòrun Ọ̀gúnmólá's chamber. During the interrogation, Aşyanbí confesses that all her claims are false and far from the truth. She confesses that all her claims are borne out of jealousy and insensitivity of Ọ̀gúnrindé Ajé their husband. Ọ̀gúnrindé Ajé on his part blames himself for his impatience. Yorùbá say: “Ọ̀gbón tí a fí n kọ́'lé kò tó èyí tí a fí n gbé inú rẹ́”, meaning that one requires a lot of wisdom to maintain a family especially, a polygamous family.

Unlike the present day, Başòrun's judgment does not pervert justice, even the chiefs are punished for attempting to pervert justice because they received bribe from Ọ̀gúnridé Ajé. The bribe is taken from them and in addition, they are fined a huge sum of money. The other offenders are equally punished accordingly. Some are sold into slavery while Ọ̀gúnrindé Ajé is ordered to take own life and let people give the report to Başòrun. Unfortunately, the brave man who can kill his wife runs away and defiles Başòrun's order. Nevertheless, the effects of polygamy manifest, the family has been ruined.

The case in Abínúḗni is not different. The effects of running a polygamous family are highly felt. Like Ògúnṛíḍé Ajé, Akíntáyò is an expert in marrying as many as four wives but he lacks the wisdom to deal with the situation.

The authors give us the reason why Akíntáyò, the main character choose to be polygamous. From the onset, we here him defending his decision to take another wife. His reason being the fact that he wants a male child who will be the heir (àróle). Conversing with Ọláfùmí, his senior wife, Akíntáyò says:

Ọmọ l'obínrin. Şùgbón b'ó ti wù k'ómọbínrin pé ní'lé bàbá rẹ to, yóó lọ sí'lé

ọkọ tirẹ ni. Şùgbón ọkúnrin ni àrólé, òun nàà ni yóó máa jẹ orúkọ bàbá rẹ tí. (o.i.2).

A girl is also a child. But no matter how long a girl stays in her fathers's house, she is going to end up in her husband's house. But a boy is the heir who will continue to bear the father's name for ever. (p.2).

When Ọláfùmí is proving stubborn, Akíntáyò's junior sister, Bólátító rebukes her saying:

Kí ló tilẹ́ ń gbóná orí ẹ gan an? Sọkọ rẹ fún ọ lórúka aláradè ní? Bàbá wa

kí s'olóbínrin kan soşo. Ọmọ aláşo kan ni ọ. Abájó tí o fí ń rabamù gbogbo nnkan ọkọ rẹ. Kò j'ọkọ ọ şe nnkan f'ẹbí. (o.i.3).

What is making you crazy in the head? Did your husband give you a white wedding ring? Our father is not for only one woman. You are a wretched person. No wonder why you are dominating all your husband's properties. You do not allow your husband to help his family. (p.3).

To Akíntáyò, marrying another wife because he wants a male child is like embarking on a laudable project. He therefore strongly warns his wives not to jeopardize his 'good gesture'.

As if that is not enough, Akíntáyò proposes to marry Ọlóládé, Abídákun's fiancé. This marks the beginning of jealousy. Adéọlá is opposed to the move, she implores Ọláfùmí to lead the protest against their husband but Ọláfùmí declined saying:

Èmi kọ. Ẹfọ ni mo jẹ. Ẹfọ ni gbogbo obínrin tó bá fẹ tẹlé mi. Ẹfọ kí lé ẹfọ láwo. (o.i. 11).

I disagree. I am like a vegetable. All women who intend to follow me are vegetable. A vegetable does not send another vegetable out of the plate.(p. 11).

Akíntáyò uses his wealth and position to oppress Abídákun. Abídákun is seriously brutalized for protesting against Akíntáyò who decides to marry his fiancé. Akíntáyò, like Ògúnṛíḍé Ajé in Ààrẹ Àgò Arikúyerí, ignorantly ignites the beginning of jealousy which as earlier mentioned, is a common phenomenon in most if not all polygamous families. When the news comes to him that Adéọlá (his new bride) is delivered of a baby, he says:

Ọmọ ti sọ ara rẹ lórúko. Adéşínà Oríşégún ni yóó máa jẹ nítorí pé òun ni àrẹmọkúnrin mi, ọjọ tí mo sì şégún Abídákun ni mo bí i. (o.i. 28).

The child has named itself. He shall be called Adéşínà Oríşégún because he is my heir and he is born on the very day I conquered Abídákun. (p. 28).

Statements like this are dangerous to utter within a polygamous set up. It is dangerous because it breeds envy, jealousy, hatred and the likes. It is therefore not surprisin,g that this is what Adéjísólá, the fourth wife who happens to be Ọláfùmí's sister, capitalizes on when she reports Akíntáyò to her guild of witches with the support of Ìyá Lójú Ọjà who had earlier enrolled her into the guid of witches.

Further still, the news that Ọkánlǎwọ̀n, the controversial child excels in his studies further aggravated the jealous in Adéjísọ́lǎ. Akíntáyọ̀ is severally warned to keep the good news to himself, but he would not listen. Yorùbá says: “gbogbo aláńgbá ló da’kùn dé’lẹ̀, a kò mọ̀ èyí tí inú n ń run” literally meaning “not all that blister is gold. It is not every person who appears to be friend is a friend” Akíntáyọ̀ defies the warnings, he tells Ọlǎwùmí:

Ọmọ rẹ, Ọkánlǎwọ̀n ló gba ipò kìn-ín-ní ní kíláàsì wọ̀n. Bẹ̀ẹ̀ náà lǎwọ̀n ègbọ̀n rẹ̀ obínrín yọ́rì gedegbe ní kíláàsì ẹ̀nikẹ̀ọ̀kan wọ̀n. Şùgbọ̀n àwọ̀n ọmọ̀ iyàwọ̀ méjèjè kò şe dádàdàrà tó. Èyí Adéşínà gan-an ló r’ówọ̀ mú diẹ̀ şùgbọ̀n ó n tọ̀ Ọkánlǎwọ̀n lẹ́yìn nì.....Bó o bá mọ̀ bí ọrọ̀ Ọkánlǎwọ̀n ti jẹ̀ nì, ojoojúmọ̀ lò ó máa bọ̀ mí bí ọ̀rìşà. Wọ̀n ti sọ̀ fún mí tẹ̀lẹ̀ pé, ọkúnrín kan tó wà nínú ọmọ̀ rẹ̀ náà, àrólé nì, olú ọmọ̀ nì. (o.i. 32).

Your son, Ọkánlǎwọ̀n took the first position in his class. It is the same with his senior sisters in their respective classes. But the children of the other two wives do not perform to expectation. Adéşínà tried but not as good as Ọkánlǎwọ̀n. If you understand how I feel about Ọkálǎwọ̀n, you will offer sacrifice to me every day like the gods. I have been told earlier that, your only male child would be the heir. He is a major. (p.32)

This claim is confirmed by Ọlǎwùmí through a passer-by who meets her on the way and gives her the same message but with the warning that they should not make the revelation public to avoid bad happening because the mind of man is full of evil but Akíntáyọ̀ will not listen.

Adéọ́lǎ further makes the situation worse when she has a little misunderstanding with Akíntáyọ̀ and she starts boasting that she bears the heir and so, she deserves more respect from Akíntáyọ̀ than he is giving. She says:

Èmi nì mọ̀ bí àrẹ̀mọkúnrín fún un. Kàkà kí ó máa kẹ̀ mí lójú kẹ̀ mí ní’ mú, iyà ló fì n jẹ̀ mí. (o.i. 39).

I gave birth to the heir for him. Instead for him to pamper me always, he punishes me. (p.39).

This marks the beginning of the trouble that later evolves. Akíntáyọ̀ marries Adéjísọ́lǎ as against the Yorùbá tradition which forbids marrying two girls from the same family. Oníkẹ̀pọ̀, Ọlǎwùmí’s daughter confronts and warns Adéjísọ́lǎ against this but Adéjísọ́lǎ makes her to understand that she is doing it to save her life. This implies that Akíntáyọ̀ threatens Adéjísọ́lǎ and forces her to consent to his demand. Adéjísọ́lǎ says:

Kò wu èmi náà bẹ̀ẹ̀. Şùgbọ̀n kí obínrín fẹ̀ ọkọ̀ kò tọ̀ kí ó wà láyè sàń jù kí ó wà láyè bíi wèrè lọ. (o.i. 55).

It is against my wish. But it is better for a woman to marry a forbidding husband and live than to be alive like a mad (insane) person. (p. 55).

Despite the warnings from Akínkúnmi, Akíntáyọ̀ proceeds in his plan and marries Adéjísọ́lǎ but his action later boomerangs as Adéjísọ́lǎ turns to be the most dreadful enemy of Ọkánlǎwọ̀n showing the real picture of a co-wife as we shall see later in this paper.

The prediction that Akíntáyọ̀’ s wives would leave him come true. Ọlọ́ladé leaves and marries Abídákun, her former fiancé. Adéọ́lǎ also leaves. Ọkánlǎwọ̀n on the other hand, heeds the warnings given to him. He is very cautious of what to eat, what to say, where to sit and so on. All predictions about him later come true. Akíntáyọ̀ on the other hand continues to bluff the several warnings given him especially about the person of Ọkánlǎwọ̀n. He boasts of spiritual power and believes nobody can dare him, no, not on this earth. The more he is warned, the more he displays acts of stupidity even with Adéjísọ́lǎ the dreadful enemy of the family. Akíntáyọ̀ discloses everything about Ọkánlǎwọ̀n to Adéjísọ́lǎ especially on the pronouncement of Ọkánlǎwọ̀n as the heir to Akíntáyọ̀. This no doubt makes Adéjísọ́lǎ to be more jealous and she eventually displays this act. It makes it easy for Iyá Ojú Ọjà to introduce her to the guild of witches. Hence, she begins to think evil

As earlier mentioned, selfishness, jealousy can also result into killing or murder. In Abínúẹ̀ni, the authors expose those vices believed to be common in polygamous families. Adéjísọ́lǎ proceeds to report her husband to her guild of witches. She exclaims:

Ọkọ wá ti yan àrólé..... Ẹ máa gbọ o, ìyá rẹ ni ìyálé pátápátá. Èmi ni ìyàwó kékeré pátápátá. Ìyá rẹ lògá isẹ, èmi lomọ isẹ, ó di méjì. Ìyá rẹ ló bí ọmọbìnrin tó kọkọ kẹkọ jade ní Yunifásítì. Gbogbo àwọn ọmọbìnrin tí ìyá rẹ bí ló yàn tó yanjú. N se làwọn ọkùnrin máa n dù wọn wàràwàrà bí àkàrà gbígboná. Ẹ máa gbọ o, Ìyá rẹ ló rí ẹ jùlọ nínú gbogbo ìyàwó tókọ wa fẹ..... Ọmọ ẹni a wí yìi lẹkọ wá fí ẹ àrólé....Ọlórùn kíi ẹ ọba nìkanso. Kò jẹ tò ó bèẹ rárá. Àfí kí a tún un tò ló lè tẹ mi lórùn. (o.i. 74).

(Our husband has chosen his heir... Listen to this. His mother is the most senior wife. I am the most junior wife. His mother is the master, I am the servant. His mother is also the mother of the first female graduate. All his mother's daughters are successful. Boys do run after them like the hot cake. Listen! his mother is the most prosperous of all our husband's wives... this woman's child is chosen as the heir by our husband. God is not for only one person. He will never arrange it so. Except we re-arrange it, I cannot be satisfied). (p. 74).

The universal unconscious in Adéjísólá wouldn't have allowed her to bewitch Ọkánlàwọn but the fact that she is jealous, she carries out her threat to deal with Ọkánlàwọn.

Adéjísólá requests that Ọkánlàwọn should be killed so as to have her own son as the sole heir. She is a lion archetype. The lion is the king of the forest and leaders of all animals. The lion hates any surrogate and always make sure that no one compete with it or else, that animal would die. The impulse to kill is always in the lion whenever it is hungry. Adéjísólá has the impulse to kill anybody that stands on her way or her son's way.

Adéjísólá's action is an archetype of the senior wife in the Yorùbá folk story titled “ìgbáko orogún mi” meaning “my co-wife's calabash”. In the story, the senior co-wife for jealous reasons went to the stream to wash her utensils. When the stream refused to carry away her calabash, as it was the case of the junior wife, she threw the calabash into the water herself and followed it. Contrary to expectation, her co-wife's fortune turned misfortune for her. Instead of becoming rich, she was bitten to death by snakes.

Adéjísólá fails in her bid to kill Ọkánlàwọn. Although, Ọkánlàwọn is involved in a ghastly motor accident, he is presumed dead and his obituary already announced. But the cat is let out of the bag when Ọkánlàwọn suddenly appears after ten years, Adéjísólá's antics are exposed and she is utterly disgraced, and in the words of Akínkúnmi, all Adéjísólá's children also turn to be ‘good-for-nothing children’. Akínkúnmi says:

Gbogbo ọmọ tó bí kò níláarí. Ọmọ pọ bí ọsàn bó ni wọn. Ọmọ lásán èkejì ajá. Àánú ẹ wá pé ègbọn wa fowó sòfò ni. Ọlátẹjú tóo bèèrè, isẹ akólẹ ló n ẹ lábẹ Ijoba.... Àwọn ọmọbìnrin rẹ yòókù kò mọwé rárá. Èyí tó n ló ẹsẹ ẹsẹwó ló tẹlẹlẹ wà. Ọmíràn yarọ tí kò le rìn. (o.i.103).

(All her children are unsuccessful. They are good-for-nothing children. We pity our brother for wasting his money. Olátẹjú now works as refuse parker with the government. Her other female children are dull. There is one who takes to prostitution in the hotel. There is another one who is crippled). (p.103)

With this, the authors make us understand that as dangerous as polygamous family is, the perpetrators of evil sparingly go scot free.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have tried to examine the usual dangerous situations in polygamous homes. Our findings reveal that a number of factors have affected the laudable ideas behind polygamous living. The meaning people now give polygamy is at par with what it used to be. Today, polygamy means hatred, envy, jealousy, back biting, murder, backsliding and the likes as presented by the selected authors..

It is discovered that it will amount to total injustice to put the blame on the woman alone. Most if not all men do not possess the wisdom to cope with more than one wife, hence they unnecessarily commit themselves by their utterances as shown in both texts. This further aggravates the hatred and jealousy in co-wives.

We also discover that if not totally impracticable, it is very difficult for a man to treat his many wives equally, hence, the selected authors are of the opinion that marrying one wife is more pleasurable than marrying many wives. Probably, this accounts for why most religions advocate the practice of monogamy. This is not to say that monogamy does not breed jealousy, but it is in a different dimension and it is not as pronounced as it is in polygamy.

Many people (father, mother, and children) have lost their lives to rivalry as a result of polygamy. In a polygamous family, the wives and even their children will be suspecting each other. No iota of trust exists within the family.

The paper recommends as follow:

1. That, going by “the nature of women” and the effect of civilization on the society’s culture, all efforts should be made to discourage polygamy in our society. Polygamy have wrecked many families. Many people have lost their lives dying untimely as a result of belonging to a polygamous family. We therefore recommend that monogamy should be encouraged instead of polygamy.
2. People should be educated on the dangers involved in the practice of polygamy. We should understand that the condition under which polygamy thrived in the past is no more on ground. Yorùbá says “bí ayé bá n yí, ó yẹ kí a máa bá a yí” meaning “as time changes, we should also move with time”. We should not remain stagnant.
3. as earlier mentioned, Yorùbá say “ogbón tí a fí n kọ ilé kò tó èyí tí a fí n gbé inú rẹ” meaning “the wisdom one needs to build a house is not as much as the one needed to live in it”. Husbands are advised to be diligent in the running of their homes. They need to possess the wisdom required for the management of their homes.

Experience has shown that in contemporary society, the interpretation given to polygamy is different from what it used to be in the past. In the past, co-wives do not see themselves as rivals but rather as partners in progress. The paper therefore concludes that polygamous living is a bane to the sustenance of the family and the development of the society as a whole; therefore its practice should be discouraged.

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