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Can Polygyny Be Avoided in Dakar?

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Polygyny is one of the main features of sub-Saharan African marriage systems. The frequency of polygyny is much lower in other parts of the world. Polygyny refers to the practice of men marrying multiple wives and is a more specific term than polygamy (the word usually used in French), which literally means "many spouses of either sex." If the agricultural mode of production in large part justified polygyny in rural areas (Boserup 1970), then according to a number of authors, urbanization and Westernization should have led to a progressive erosion of polygyny in the urban milieu. The organization of space, better education, the mode of production, and the diffusion of new ideas and ways of living should also have restrained the practice. But the expected disappearance of polygyny in the city has not occurred yet (Clignet 1987; Kaufmann, Lesthaeghe, and Meekers 1989; Marcoux 1991).

As early as 1960, Paul Mercier stated that in Senegalese cities such as Dakar and Thiès, urban life did not result in a rapid decrease in either the level of polygyny or in the proportion of polygynous marriages. Based on his observations in large cities in Zaire, I. Ngondo a Pitshandenge (1992) states that polygyny increases in urban settings. He emphasizes that the intrusion of polygyny can be considered revolutionary since it occurs despite the hostile structure of the urban environment, which includes

housing difficulties, legal discrimination, respectability associated with monogamy, and the interdiction of Judeo-Christian religions.

The practice of polygyny in Senegal is embedded in a different context than that of Central Africa, but there is a higher incidence of this type of union than in the predominantly Islamic Sahelian countries. In this chapter, we begin with those contemporary aspects of polygyny that exist in Dakar, the capital of Senegal. The urban context is complex, since different social categories and diverse expectations coexist there. More and more women are educated and subject to new influences. As a result, they are hoping to develop new ways of living and new relations with men—in the household as well as in society. At the same time, social and religious norms continue to locate women's destiny in marriage and motherhood. To be unmarried is still considered a secondary choice, and few people remain so. These social transformations, however, operate in a context of economic crisis and the deterioration of the standard of living, and such conditions prompt certain questions: What has become of polygyny in the current context, and what are its new configurations? What role is played by gender relations that maintain or reject this form of marriage? To answer these questions, we present the results of an IFAN-ORSTOM study on the residential and marriage histories of professionals, carried out in Dakar in 1989 and 1990.[1] We have published one part of this quantitative research, which is based on 1,557 biographies of men and women (Antoine, Bocquier, Fall, and Guisse 1992). The other part of the research was carried out with almost fifty people taken from that sample in the course of the following year (Nanitelamio 1995). This chapter follows up those results with an analysis of the two different studies.

Polygyny in Africa

Most explanations of polygyny are based on a perception of the "ruralism" of African societies in the grip of a particular mode of production: a weakly mechanized subsistence economy in which the role of women as producers of food for daily existence is important. Polygyny in this context is perceived as being a bit "expensive" and an "investment for the man" (Boserup 1970). The economic argument is contested by Jack Goody (1973), who emphasizes that the level of polygyny is highest in West Africa, and yet it is in East Africa that women engage more in agriculture. Goody perceives the causes of polygyny as sexual and reproductive rather than economic and productive. He cites the practice of postpartum abstinence as the principal factor that promotes polygyny.

Other authors advance more political explanations that emphasize the internal coherence of the marriage system and of social organizations where power is in the hands of the elders (Meillassoux 1975). Here, polygyny is perceived as a means of preserving the elders' power over the young men in societies where access to women is controlled by elders.

A. B. Diop (1981) suggests several factors that favor polygyny. It permits the alliance of various groups and confers a social and political advantage. It represents an economic contribution, because women by their work or personal farming contribute to the maintenance of the household. The "production" of children allows the increase of labor, and it is expected that the children will support the mother as she ages. Polygyny is also an element of ostentation and prestige for privileged people.

The social rules regulating marriage in certain African countries that have a high birth rate and elevated mortality rate are conducted in a demographic regime favorable to polygyny. The principal factors promoting polygyny in such societies are a relatively young marriage age for women, a significant age difference between spouses, the near absence of absolute celibacy regardless of sex, and rapid remarriage (Pilon 1991; Pison 1986; Goldman and Pebley 1989).

As men marry women from a much younger and larger group in these societies, one consequence is the appearance of a greater number of "available" women on the marriage market. This fact is accentuated by the rapid remarriage of widows and divorced women. In societies where marriage remains a necessity, the competition to marry among women is accentuated by their relatively larger numbers. If some women delay marriage, they risk remaining single or accepting marriage with an already married man.

Although polygyny remains important in Africa, it is statistically difficult to retrace the evolution of its frequency. However, we do know that according to the research results recently reported by DHS (*Demographic and Health Surveys: Final Reports* 1992), the level of polygyny differs little between urban and rural milieus (Table 6.1) particularly in West Africa. In certain cases, for example, in Niger, where the level of polygyny is even higher in urban areas,[2] polygynous marriage is characteristic of affluent members of society. This reversal of tendencies is also seen in Zaire, and Ngondo a Pitshandenge (1992) shows that contrary to all expectations, the practice of polygyny in Zaire is making real inroads in urban settings. He suggests that there is a ruralization of behaviors in Zairian urban areas.

In most African countries, Islam lends polygyny a sacred context. In traditional polygyny, the number of wives is not limited, and this system is one marriage option among others. Certain social practices, such as the levirate or sororate, conform to the system of polygyny. Islam, however,

TABLE 6.1 Percentage of Married Women Currently in a Polygynous Union

Country	*Rural Areas*	*Urban Areas*
Zimbabwe (1988)	19.6	9.4
Sudan (1990)	22.6	16.0
Burundi (1987)	11.5	16.2
Kenya (1989)	24.4	17.7
Ghana (1988)	34.5	28.3
Liberia (1986)	42.6	30.2
Uganda (1989)	33.3	31.0
Cameroon (1991)	42.7	32.0
Nigeria (1990)	42.9	33.6
Niger (1992)	35.5	40.5
Senegal (1986)	49.0	41.4
Guinea (1992)	50.6	46.4
Togo (1988)	54.4	47.1

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, National Reports of DHS (Columbia, Md.: Institute for Resource Development/Westinghouse, 1992).

limits the number of wives to four: "If you are anxious about unjust hardships for orphans, marry only a few women; two, three or four among those who have pleased you." However, the following verse is little cited by polygynists: "If you are still anxious about injustice, marry only one woman or one slave. This conduct will more easily aid you to be just" (Koran 4, 3).

Contrary to common opinion, the practice of polygyny is rare in the Arab countries and the Maghreb. In Algeria in 1966, less than 2 percent of married men were polygynists (Tabutin 1974), whereas 3 percent were polygynous in Egypt (Fargues 1987); and the frequency of the practice was decreasing in both countries. In Tunisia, polygyny was abolished. Given the higher levels of polygyny in countries with few Muslims, such as Zaire and Togo, and the weak level of polygyny in Islamic countries, notably in North Africa, we must question the real impact of Islam on polygynous behavior in Africa. For men who wish to marry polygynously, Islam provides an excuse and a support; for women who would prefer monogamy, Islam allows them to be resigned to their polygynous marriages. In sub-Saharan Africa, Islam seems to "regularize" older traditional practices.

If religion is only a pretext for polygynous behavior, then where can we find an explanation for it? Whatever its justifications, polygyny often has a legal status that underlines its legitimacy as a marriage system

with the same privileges as monogamy. Polygyny was abolished in Guinea (1962) and in Côte d'Ivoire (1964), yet in other countries such as Mali, Senegal, and Togo, legislation allows a choice of systems. But even in the same states where it has been abolished, the proportion of polygynous marriages remains high, at 24 percent in Côte d'Ivoire, for example (Klissou 1992).

Polygyny is widespread in West Africa and present in both the cities and the countryside, whatever the law. The case of Senegal is particularly interesting, as it is a country that is relatively urbanized and strongly Islamic, where the proportion of polygynous marriages in urban areas is among the highest in Africa (Table 6.1). The greater Dakar region therefore offers the researcher a rich source for observing the changes in sociodemographic behaviors. Dakar, one of the largest African cities, was the old capital of French West Africa and became the capital of independent Senegal in 1960. At 40,000 residents in 1926, the population rose to 132,000 by 1945. The greater Dakar region counted 1,310,000 residents in 1988, about 50 percent of whom lived in the suburb of Pikine. This concentrated area accounted for 19 percent of the total population of the country and nearly 50 percent of the urban population of Senegal. Economic activities such as administration, services, and industry are also concentrated in this area, which poses a number of problems. Housing, urban infrastructure, and jobs have not followed the increasing demographic pattern. Over one-half of those who are economically active work in the informal sector, and the level of unemployment was estimated at 18.6 percent of the active population in 1989. For a sociological study, Dakar's diversity of marital practices, despite significant local nuances, parallels the situation in many African capitals (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1991).

Marriage and Polygyny in Senegal

Polygyny is recognized in modern legislation, with the Senegalese family code offering three matrimonial options: monogamy, limited polygyny, and a form of polygyny in which the man cannot marry more than four wives. The option of limited polygyny restrains the number of wives that a husband can have simultaneously. If the man fails to subscribe to one of these options, the marriage is categorized as polygynous. The equality of co-wives is emphasized in the code, which stipulates "that in the case of polygyny, each wife should expect equal treatment with the others" (Senegalese Family Code 1972).

The family code is a compromise reflecting tension between customs, Islamic law, and the effort to respond to demands for better protection of

women's rights. But the compromise does not fulfill all of these objectives; even though the code has been in operation for twenty years (it was instituted in 1972), it continues to be subject to debates and demands for revisions. Islamists claim that the code does not reflect the concerns of Muslims, whereas feminists believe that it obstructs progress, supports the domination of women by men, and privileges polygyny to the detriment of monogamy.

Marriage is nearly universal in Senegal; according to DHS (1988), there are scarcely any single women over age thirty-five. Most are married, and the proportion of divorced women and widows remains relatively low. Thus, for women from ages forty to forty-four, 91 percent are married, 4.3 percent are widows, and 4.7 percent are divorced. Women, however, are marrying later than their mothers did, though they still marry at a relatively young age (the legal minimum age is sixteen years for women). A comparison of the results of two studies done in 1978 (L'Enquête Sénégalaise sur la Fécondité [ESF]) and 1986 (DHS) shows that in 1978 nearly 60 percent of women fifteen to nineteen years old were already married, whereas in 1986 the proportion was 43.5 percent for the same age group. An analysis of the median age at first marriage confirms these results: It rose from 15.9 years for the generation of 1937 to 1941 to 17.2 years for the generation of 1962 to 1966.[3]

The variation between urban and rural experience is increasing. Thus, for the generation of 1937 to 1941, whether these women lived in rural or urban areas, the median age at first marriage was 15.9 years. However, for the generation of 1962 to 1966 the median age at first marriage was 16 years in the rural areas and 18.8 years in the urban centers (DHS 1988). The elevation of the age at first marriage primarily concerns women living in urban areas, who in the space of twenty-five years saw that age rise nearly three years.

The current data come from a survey conducted in the late 1970s by ESF and suggest a low frequency of divorce. Yet the divorce rate was not insignificant. The probability of still being married after fifteen years was 71 percent, which signified that nearly one-third of all women had been divorced. The propensity to divorce was even larger among women who had married after age twenty, with urban, educated women being most likely to divorce (Lo Ndiaye 1985). Remarriage was frequent, thus 95 percent of widows and 89 percent of divorced women remarried within five years following the end of their marriage (Mboup 1992).

Early marriage and rapid remarriage after divorce or widowhood combine to bring about an elevated level of polygyny. Between 1978 and 1986, the level scarcely changed for all of Senegal. Sixty percent of women over thirty were in a polygynous marriage, with only a slight decline in the frequency of polygyny among women under thirty during the same period.

TABLE 6.2 Proportion of Women in a Polygynous Marriage According to Socio-economic Factors

	Percent of Women Under 30		*Percent of Women over 30*	
Socioeconomic Factors	*1978*	*1986*	*1978*	*1986*
Residence				
Urban	33	28	59	54
Rural	40	38	61	63
Education				
None	37	37	65	62
Primary	29	28	53	50
Secondary or higher	21	18	40	37

Source: G. Mboup, "Etude des déterminants socio-économique et culturels de la fécondité au Sénégal et partir de l'enquête démographique et de santé" (Ph.D. diss., University of Montreal, 1992).

However, the decline was more marked in the urban areas, especially among women over thirty years of age. Fewer women with a higher level of education were in polygynous marriages (37 percent of women over thirty in a polygynous marriage), and the decrease in polygynists between 1978 and 1986 declined proportionately with the rise in the level of education (Table 6.2).

Let us look more closely at the evolution of marriage and polygyny in Dakar. Although there are few relevant demographic statistics, according to Benoît Ferry (1977), in 1973 the mean age at first marriage was between 17 and 17.5 years. The author noted a steady delay in the age of first marriage, even though all women over 35 were married. The age difference between husband and wife was significant and increased with the age of the husband, especially in the case of polygyny. Thus, among women aged 20 to 24, the average age difference from their husbands was twelve years. Other studies confirm a progressive delay in the age at first marriage (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1991) and show different marriage patterns that vary according to residential districts. Marriage may be delayed more often, but it is not avoided. A recent study on male marriage experience shows that the consequences of economic crisis, including a lack of housing and unemployment, have deferred men's entrance into marriage (Djire 1993). This modification in the male marriage calendar accentuates the rising age of women upon their first marriage.

Remarriage for women is frequent. In 1955, women aged 50 to 54 had, on average, been in 1.71 marriages, a figure that decreased only slightly by 1989 (IFAN-ORSTOM study 1989–1990), when women had been in 1.63 marriages. According to the data from our study, 47 percent of women in Dakar aged 50 to 54 currently lived in a polygynous union. The proportion was highest in this age group and decreased if the women were widowed. Among men aged 55 to 59, the proportion of polygynists was about 30 percent in the 1955 census and 40 percent in the 1976 census, and it had reached 45 percent in 1989. In 1955, men of age 60 had been in an average of 2.6 marriages, a number that decreased to 2.2 in 1989. In 1955, men of that age had on average 1.45 wives. In 1989, the number increased slightly to 1.70. These figures show us that polygyny continues to remain intense in Dakar.

After we had situated polygyny in its proper context, we set out to investigate the dynamics of this phenomenon, collecting data on the marriage lives of both men and women in Dakar. Marital status there is not stable, and individuals can alternate between periods of monogamy, polygyny, divorce, or widowhood (Clignet 1987). Most analysts collect information only on the marriage in effect at the time of inquiry, but only a biographical approach can take into account the variety of lived experiences.

The Cycle of Life and Polygyny in Dakar: The Treatment of Data

Our statistical analysis draws on a detailed collection of data regarding residential, professional, and marital histories, which we supplemented with biographical questionnaires (Antoine, Bocquier, Fall, and Guisse 1992). Concerning marital life, the analysis of biographies divulged information on the entrance into first marriage and on divorce and polygyny. These data meant we could develop an overview of the dynamics of polygyny among men, since we had information on the succession of marriages and the date of their eventual dissolution. We could thus follow the progress of marital events. We also collected a marital biography for women, but that was less useful in the analysis of polygyny. In the case of a woman, even if we had information on each of her marriages and the marital situation of her husband at the time of the marriage, we still could not determine the outcome of the husband's marital situation, for instance, whether he went on to marry another wife or had divorced a previous one. It was difficult for a wife to know and date precisely the marital history of her husband. However, we could indirectly describe

the dynamic of polygyny that concerns women in the course of tracing men's marriages.

The methods of analyzing the biographies included survey tables and regression analysis. The most appropriate model for this purpose is the semiparametric model developed by David Cox, which permits the inclusion of a time dimension in the analysis of causality. The model measures transition, understood as the instantaneous recognized risk that an individual takes when passing from one matrimonial state to another. The risk is analyzed as a function of different independent variables, both fixed and fluctuating in time. One can thus disengage the modalities that accelerate or slow the passage from one status to another. In this type of model, one positive or negative coefficient signifies that the occurrence is more or less rapid according to the category of reference. The results are presented for each modality with "all things being equal" (Cox 1972; Courgeau and Lelièvre 1989; Blossfeld, Hamerle, and Mayer 1989; Bocquier 1992).

The analysis therefore considers the time elapsed between a point of reference common to all the research subjects and the date that observation began or ended. We present two models here: The first concerns the beginning of a polygynous marriage and the second deals with the end of a first marriage by divorce, because we feel a relationship exists between these two events.

In the first model we examine the transition between the date of the first marriage and the entrance into a polygynous union upon the arrival of a second wife. The population studied consisted of men in their first marriage who lived in Dakar until the date of the marriage to the second wife. However, according to the rules of the model, the observation ended if the first wife died or if the couple divorced. If the individual remained in Dakar and was always monogamous (and was therefore still a potential polygynist), the period of observation ended with the end of the survey. This method of treating dissolved unions allowed us to take into consideration all the biographies, even those of younger generations who were observed until the end of the study, and contributed to the calculation of the regression coefficients.

To study the transition from first marriage to divorce among men living in Dakar, the target population consisted of monogamous men. The elapsed time is measured from the date of the first marriage until the date of divorce. In cases where a spouse died, the period of observation ended at the death of a spouse or, for currently married people, with the end of the survey. The arrival of a second spouse is recorded from the date of the second marriage. This method avoids transversal analysis and takes into consideration the different situations encountered by an individual during his residential, professional, and matrimonial histories. The results

are different from a classic analysis that only presents the static aspect of polygyny and reveals such information as the age at which a certain proportion of men are polygynous. Using Cox's model, in contrast, allows measurement of the time elapsed before becoming polygynous and opens the prospect of evaluating the discrete influence of different characteristics that will accelerate or slow the transition to polygyny. The Cox model does not produce the proportion of risk; instead, it reveals the probability of risk.

The dependent variables in our regressions are, for the first model, the immediate risk of entering into polygyny, and in the second model, divorcing the first wife. To simplify the presentation, we have combined the results from the two models (Table 6.3). Several other analyses were carried out. They are not presented here, although occasional reference is made to them.

Men: Potential Polygynists

Analysis of our data shows that few of the variables concerning men influence the possibility of becoming polygynous. In the section that follows, we examine these results in more detail with reference to the statistics presented in Table 6.3. A first series of independent variables deals with the characteristics that do not change over time.

The first retained independent variable concerns groups of generations, or birth cohorts, established by the date of birth. We concentrated on three generations of individuals: those born between 1930 and 1944, between 1945 and 1954, and between 1955 and 1964. Each generation faced different economic circumstances that pertained to matrimonial status. The younger generations appeared to enter later into polygynous relationships, but the coefficient is only significant for men born between 1945 and 1954. In any case, we can conclude that polygyny will decrease among younger generations and that polygyny generally affects men older than age forty. Furthermore, our results indicate a decrease in the rate of polygyny among young men.

Two series of modalities translate the timetable of the first union: the age of the man at the first marriage and the difference in age between spouses. These variables allow for modulations of generational analysis, while taking the variation of marriage age into account. We wanted to establish whether polygyny or divorce varied as a function of later marriages or as a function of a small difference in ages between the spouses. The results indicate that a later marriage age, all other factors being equal, slows the entry to polygyny. Moreover, if the difference between the ages of the couple is small, it is less likely the marriage will become polygynous.

TABLE 6.3 · Coefficients of Cox's Parametric Model: The Likelihood of Men Marrying Polygynously and Divorcing

Variable[a]	*Category*	*Polygyny*	*Divorce*
Generation (1930–1944)	1945–1954	.67*	1.22
	1955–1964	.56	1.00
Husband's age at 1st marriage (25–29 years old)	younger than 25	1.09	.98
	0–34	.53**	1.09
	35 and older	.36**	1.17
Difference between spouses' ages (10 or more years)	less than 3 years	.82	1.61
	3–5 years	.86	1.31
	6–9 years	.64*	1.32
Divorced father (no)	yes	n/a	1.09
Polygynous father (no)	yes	1.50	n/a
Related to first wife (no)	yes	1.42*	.54***
Religion (Muslim)	Christian	.18***	.38
Ethnicity of husband (Wolof)	Pulaar	1.04	1.68
	Serer	1.48	1.59
	other	1.52	.93
Ethnicity of 1st wife (Wolof)	Pulaar	.86	.55
	Serer	1.38	.75
	other	1.21	.80
Age at arrival in Dakar (born in Dakar)	younger than 12	.97	.65
	12–17	.93	1.02
	18–24	.75	1.28
	25 and older	.79	.56
Education of spouses (both husband and first wife w/o schooling)	H: no school, wife: any level	1.36	.90
	H: primary, wife: higher ed.	1.48*	1.43
	H: secondary, wife: no school	1.20	3.12***
	H: secondary, wife: any level	1.04	1.63
Child outside the first marriage (no)	yes	2.37***	1.04
Number of children from the first marriage (none)	varies with the number of children	n/a	.66***
No children in first marriage (no)	yes	.80	n/a
Employment status (unskilled work)	skilled work	1.19	.58
	unemployment	.46	2.70***
	retired	.68	.58

(*continues*)

TABLE 6.3 *(continued)*

Variable[a]	*Category*	*Polygyny*	*Divorce*
Housing status (renter or owner)	w/ parents	.71	1.46
	w/ immediate family	1.28	.94
	w/ extended family	.89	2.01**
Housing location (in the city)	suburbs	1.65***	1.18
Became polygynous (no)	yes	n/a	3.50***

Notes: a. The reference or baseline category is indicated in parentheses. *Significant to .01 percent. **Significant to .05 percent. ***Significant to .10 percent. n/a: not applicable.
Source: Authors' own survey, 1989–1990.

We also examined family history in order to determine what effect it had on marriage patterns of subsequent generations. The son of a polygynous father is 1.5 times more likely than the son of a monogamous father to become polygynous himself. Thus, there is a reproduction of family models that also surfaces in the interviews with the men themselves.[4]

The presence of a preexisting family connection between the spouses, if it slows the dissolution of a first marriage, can lead more easily to polygyny. However, the difference is barely significant.

As for religion, we only made a distinction between Muslims, whatever the brotherhood, and Christians. In principle, Christian churches forbid polygynous unions, and the Catholic Church is opposed to divorce. Thus, it is not surprising to note that Christianity constitutes a major impediment to polygyny in Dakar, reducing entry into polygynous marriages by 82 percent.

In order to observe the influence of cultural factors, we retained ethnicity as a variable, distinguishing between the dominant Wolof ethnic group and two other major groups, Pulaar and Serer, thereafter grouping other ethnicities together. These distinctions applied equally to men and women. According to the 1986 DHS results, the largest proportion of women, countrywide, live in polygynous unions. The ratio is 50 percent among Wolof, 45 percent among Pulaar, and 38 percent among Serer. However, we did not find any discernible effect of ethnicity in Dakar.

The age of arrival in Dakar sheds light on migration patterns and allows a distinction to be made between men born in the capital and different types of migrants. We did not note a distinctive type of polygynous behavior among migrants. We also examined the difference among natives of Dakar, those with other urban roots, and those with rural backgrounds and once again did not find any significant differences.

As a measure of education, we used the last school year completed by individuals. We chose to examine the level of education of the husband

and the first wife. We distinguished five modalities: a husband and wife without education (baseline category); a husband without education and an educated wife; a husband with a primary education, regardless of the wife's education; a husband with a secondary or higher education and an uneducated first wife; and a husband with a secondary or higher education and a wife with a primary, secondary, or higher education. A frequently advanced hypothesis suggests that a higher level of education is the principal factor in decreasing the rate of polygyny. In Dakar, highly educated men have the same rates of polygyny as illiterate men. However, men with a primary education have a higher rate of polygyny than men without any schooling.

The IFAN-ORSTOM survey of 1989–1990 produced a fairly exhaustive collection of matrimonial, residential, and professional biographies. This collection allowed us to examine economic activity, professional occupation, housing, the number of children, polygynous marriages, and divorce as independent variables that change over time.

We distinguished between children born after the first marriage (but outside of that union) and children of the first marriage. Polygyny is often associated with the sterility of the first wife. Contrary to frequently offered hypotheses, the absence of children in the first marriage does not, in Dakar, accelerate the arrival of a second spouse. However, the fact of having children out of wedlock did increase marriage to a second wife twofold. The same phenomenon is noted in Benin, where F. Donadje's 1992 survey indicates that one married man in two would marry a woman "accidentally" made pregnant (Klissou 1992).

We categorized the following types of economic activity: bureaucrats and employees with particular qualifications, workers without qualifications, the unemployed, and those not active due to illness or retirement. We chose the type of lodging to serve as an approximation of the economic independence of a given individual, classifying according to whether a person was housed by a parent or other immediate family member, was living with an extended family member, was renting on his own, or was the owner of his own house. But the results show that polygynous behavior does not vary according to these social categories.

Two modalities were retained to characterize the place of residence: the city of Dakar and the suburb of Pikine, where housing is generally less expensive and often larger than that in the city itself. Living in Pikine favored the arrival of a new wife. In this case, the effect of the location variable is clear, as other variables such as religion, economic activity, and level of education were controlled for.

Factors such as migration patterns, ethnicity, economic activity, the type of housing, and even the absence of children with the first wife do not seem to play a role as predictors of polygyny. So few characteristics

are decisive that one could suppose that, in Dakar, all men are potential polygynists. Similar results have surfaced elsewhere. Education, economic activity in the modern sector, and even ethnicity do not seem to affect the practice of polygyny in African cities (Clignet 1975, 1987). We completed our statistical investigation with a series of in-depth interviews that permitted us to capture the diversity of polygyny as well as the perceptions of this situation by each sex.

Men: Largely in Favor of Polygyny

During the course of the interviews, men in general declared themselves to be in favor of polygyny, regardless of their level of education. They have, according to the remarks of an interviewer, the mentality of a polygynist and want to marry as many women as desired, since society and the Islamic religion support them in these attitudes. Men continue to perceive polygyny as one of their "privileges." Occasionally, they advance social justifications such as the belief that polygyny discourages prostitution or that it allows all women to be "settled."

Polygyny remains a social statement, a proof of success, an ambition to satisfy as soon as one has the means. It is, for some men, a method of control and subordination, especially in light of the strong competition polygyny can engender among co-wives. As a result of the interviews, we can distinguish the following four types of polygyny:

- imposed polygyny, in which the parents "give" the husband another wife;
- the polygyny of poverty, which characterizes the behavior of men who do not have the means to take in another wife but who marry a women who has a remunerative activity, thereby acquiring the social prestige without having to assume the responsibilities of her economic well-being;
- the ostentatious polygyny of the nouveau riche, a visible manifestation of social success; this is generally the most comfortable form of urban polygyny, in which the husband has the means to guarantee separate lodging and an easy material life for each wife;
- the "return" to polygyny seen among intellectuals; they acquiesce to monogamy early in their marriage but later turn to polygyny for various reasons, including a more devout practice of Islam, with polygyny justified as a return to religious values and monogamy rejected as an external imposition not adapted to "African realities."

All the same, one finds an awareness among certain men of tensions and problems encountered in a polygynous household, particularly among those who had difficult childhoods in a polygynous family and who do not want to make their children relive the experience. They are particularly sensitive to the consequences of polygyny for the education of the children and regarding issues such as inheritance. As one interviewee, a forty-year-old married man commented,

> My father separated from my mother when I was young. I lived in a polygynous family, which meant I lived with my father's wives. This is not at all appealing. With monogamy one is more tranquil, and I want to have unity among my children. . . . You don't have time to bring up the children. You see, for example, children who loiter in the streets in front of the cinema. If you ask to see their father, they say he is at the other house.

Polygyny is strongly established for many reasons that are simultaneously religious, psychological, and economic. Currently, no one is immune from the situation; men are potential polygynists and women are subjected to a latent risk. In fact, polygyny is sometimes involuntary, according to the men. One forty-year-old man explained,

> I had a wife at home, we got along very well. She had problems with my sisters all the time, up until the day my mother intervened. So she preferred to return to her home because she did not want an argument with my mother. I told her I could not live outside my own home and if she left it would be for the best. She left and we didn't see each other for three months. After that, I met another woman who had character and charm, and we got along. She worked and did not have material wants. But if my wife had not abandoned our conjugal hearth, I would not have gotten involved with her. Her brother [the second woman's] came to see me, to ask if I wanted her as a wife. I said yes. Her mother also intervened, and I told her yes as well. Since the other had left, I took her as a wife. This all happened very quickly, but the other went to see the *imam* [religious authority] of the neighborhood, and he is close to my father. The woman told the *imam* that she still loved me. We finally resolved the problem, and I found myself polygynous. But I was always against polygyny.

Women: Marry Above All Else

Women's attitudes concerning their own matrimony stem from their dependent status in society. The socialization of women leads them to privilege marriage. Their upbringing leads them to overvalue the status of wife and the importance of a husband to support them, protect them, and validate their social status. They fear solitude and social judgment,

TABLE 6.4 Women's Marriage and Husband's Matrimonial Status

	Husband's Status			
	Single	*Already Married*	*Divorced or Widowed*	*Total*
Woman's first marriage	68%	24%	8%	100%
Woman's second marriage	31%	55%	14%	100%
Woman's third marriage	10%	72%	18%	100%

Source: Authors' own survey, 1990.

which is little tolerant of single women, even in the city. Yet in the current economic crisis, there are an increasing number of women assuming the primary responsibility of supporting a household (Bocquier and Nanitelamio 1994); except in the case of a small minority, this change in responsibility is not producing a challenge to the notion of female dependence.

Social pressure for marriage is such that some unmarried women are prepared to enter into a polygynous union. According to our survey, among women who marry between twenty-one and twenty-four years old, 21 percent arrive as second wives and 9 percent as third or subsequent wives. When marriage or remarriage takes place after age thirty, 41 percent take the rank of second wife and 44 percent accept the role of third or subsequent wife. Even for the first marriage the proportion remains high; if marriage takes place after age thirty, 70 percent of women enter a polygynous union.

One implicit criticism of polygyny from the female point of view depends on a specific situation—when the husband takes a young girl as a second wife. Other configurations exist, notably for women who seek to remarry and who can enter a second, polygynous marriage when still relatively young. In the case of remarriage, women join a polygynous household in 55 percent of second marriages and in 72 percent of third marriages (Table 6.4).

The difference in age between spouses gradually diminishes in successive marriages. In a woman's first marriage, the difference in age is nominally ten years in a monogamous marriage and twenty years in a polygynous one. In the case of remarriage, the age difference decreases to five years for monogamous marriages and to ten years for polygynous unions. For a third marriage, the union is likely to be polygynous, with the age difference at fourteen years.

Life as a single person is experienced and perceived as a period of waiting, which women hope will be as short as possible; the indispensable prospect of marriage is held up before them by religion, family, and social pressure, as are the material advantages attributed to marriage (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1991). This urgency of marriage for women means that prolonged waiting is anguished and often brings a downward revision of marriage ambitions, since certain single women would rather be in a polygynous household than remain unmarried. A twenty-three-year-old single woman in Dakar said, "Monogamy or polygyny—it makes little difference as long as it is a marriage. Everything that follows is good." For the majority of single women, unmarried life brings only inconvenience and has few advantages. Certainly the necessity of marriage is also valid for men; however, this urgency is not felt in the same way. Being unmarried is a more serene state for men, who do not feel "rushed." They wait to have the material and financial means necessary to support a household.

Women married to polygynists justify their preference by citing the benefits of mutual aid in reducing their numerous domestic chores and social obligations and by the possibility of having a large family in which the children can flourish. For example, one respondent said, "I like polygyny. I get along well with my co-wife; we help each other with the housework" (thirty-three-year-old migrant woman in a polygynous household). Another commented, "One woman in the house is not enough. Between two it is better, since you share the daily work. I come from a big family, I have half brothers and our mothers get along well. We don't differentiate between our mothers" (twenty-five-year-old migrant woman in a polygynous household). The sharing of tasks between co-wives gives women free time to devote to remunerative activities such as trading. However, the results of our survey do not indicate a different level of economic activity among women according to matrimonial status. Forty-two percent of monogamous wives between forty and forty-nine years old work outside the home, as do 40 percent of wives from polygynous households. The acceptance of polygyny is facilitated, above all else, by the approval of Islam.

Among certain divorcées—women with regular income and their own housing—the necessity of marriage is less pressing. It is important above all for form, religion, society, and the children, who would benefit from being raised under the "authority" of a father. The urgency of marriage also diminishes for women over forty who have grown children who can provide for them. For some divorced women, the approbation of polygyny benefits their marital experiences and their current situation. Given their age and the number of children from previous marriages, they have fewer reasons than others to insist on monogamy. Some of them previously lived in monogamous marriages, others did not. The fact that they

divorced gives them greater tolerance of polygyny, the only possibility if they are to remarry: "You can have a co-wife and get along with her. You can also not have a co-wife and not get along with your husband; anything can happen" (thirty-five-year-old unmarried woman in Dakar).

The arguments for permitting polygyny also contain the weight of a certain religious discourse that, ironically, legitimates a matrimonial regime that exists in other, non-Islamic African societies:

> Everyone should opt for polygyny, at least I would not personally refuse polygyny. We must realize we are Muslims and the religion permits men to have as many as four wives. We must accept it. There are women who say, "I will not join anyone with her husband, it's not normal." All women who think like that should not get married. If you find a husband, thank God and content yourself with what comes afterward. The important thing is to have a good household. (Thirty-five-year-old unmarried woman in Dakar)

Women in monogamous marriages who fear the arrival of a second spouse have the most unfavorable opinions of polygyny. They justify their choice by the greater "tranquillity" offered in a monogamous marriage, and they invoke fear of quarrels as a negative element of polygyny. In fact, quarrels between co-wives can take a dramatic turn, and they fill the "general interest" columns in the press.

> I chose monogamy because there are good and bad women. When you share your husband with these bad women, they will create all sorts of problems: They can stab you with a knife, they can embroil you in all kinds of scenes. I had a half sister who was burned like that, she was the first wife. When the second one came, she didn't want to see the first wife, and didn't tolerate her. She waited until the husband went to work. She heated the oil until it was hot and she poured it on the first wife. She was healed, but her arm no longer straightens. The husband kept both wives; he didn't divorce either one. (Twenty-five-year-old monogamously married woman in Dakar)

The other advantage claimed for monogamy is economic. Too many domestic expenses arise from the fact that the husband must treat his spouses equally. "If you are with your husband and your children, you don't have a heavy burden. In contrast [from a husband's point of view] if you have two or three wives and you want to do your duty as husband in each house, you must satisfy them. With the current situation that's not possible" (thirty-seven-year-old monogamously married migrant woman). Finally, there is widespread confirmation of a refusal to "share a husband."

There are even accommodations of polygyny within radical intellectual discourse. Some women have reappraised the institution that permits them to have a husband and a validated social status at the same time

that it allows them a certain autonomy. They say they have negotiated the material conditions of the polygynous contract in their favor.

Polygyny: A Factor in Divorce

The statistical analysis of divorce biographies gives results with starker contrasts (Table 6.3). Two factors slow the separation from a first spouse: family connections and the number of children. Preferential marriages break up with difficulty, which favors polygyny. Also, having children impedes the dissolution of a first marriage. In contrast, precarious economic circumstances favor divorce. Thus, unemployment increases the risk of divorce by 2.7 times. The fact of living with extended family members, such as an uncle, doubles the likelihood of divorce. In theory, the husband must assume financial responsibility for the upkeep of the household, but when economic circumstances deteriorate, the marriage often proves fragile. Default on the husband's financial obligations is often cited as a cause of divorce.

Furthermore, a great difference in the spouses' level of education accentuates the possibility of divorce. When the husband has at least a secondary education and the wife has no schooling, the risk of divorce is three times higher than among couples without any formal education. However, there is no difference among other levels of education.

In our study on divorce, we took into account periods of polygyny in order to verify the hypothesis that the arrival of a second wife accelerates the departure of the first. The creation of a polygynous union markedly increases the risk of divorce for the first wife. The model only considers the unfolding of events as related by the individual interview subjects. However, our method of analysis is close to lived experiences, since it is becoming more common for the first wife to be presented with a fait accompli.[5] Sometimes she is not even informed until the second wedding has already taken place. Following this transition to polygyny, divorce results after a phase of observation and conflict. The amplified coefficient (the potential for divorce increases by 3.5 times) shows that polygyny often engenders a reaction and a reply from the first wife, as our interviews confirmed.

> The existence of a co-wife brought me to divorce. My husband married a second wife without letting me know. He finished his army duty. I told him that with what little money he had he should open a boutique; with the money he would make we could meet our expenses. He went to rent a boutique in Tilène [a market in Dakar]. He stayed at the boutique and married another woman. One day I went to see the shop and I was told he was no longer there, so I went to see one of his friends. The wife of that friend told me,

> "Your husband married another woman, but he is not happy with her." That is how I learned he had another wife. I left him a note to say he should come home because our child was sick. When he arrived, I told him, "I wanted you to succeed, but you don't want to. I made sacrifices and suggested that you open a boutique so that we could benefit from the profits. Since you prefer another wife to success, give me a divorce. I will go work." That was the reason for my second divorce. I took custody of the children. (Forty-nine-year-old divorced woman)

Polygyny can be perceived as betrayal not only by the first wife: "When my husband died, I married another man. I was the third wife. I found two other co-wives. Soon after he married a fourth. I divorced him because he took a fourth wife" (fifty-year-old widow).

Polygyny, Divorce, and the Status of Women

Women, generally not in favor of polygyny, have ambivalent attitudes and behaviors that nevertheless reinforce the institution. They submit to polygyny for reasons of status and justify their behavior by relying on arguments that only underline their dependence on men: "If you sign up for monogamy, your husband takes many mistresses and you don't see him. But in polygyny, he marries another woman, you know her, you are at ease, and you are calm" (thirty-eight-year-old divorced woman).

The urgency to marry felt by many women adds to the strong pressures of family and society, which present the female "destiny" as one of marriage and motherhood. In Dakar, there are other types of relationships; however, those that are outside of marriage remain clandestine, which contrasts with other African capitals where such behavior is tolerated.

The reasons for accepting polygyny are clear, even though the problems it engenders are recognized. Polygyny meets individual needs, since it is better to be part of a polygynous marriage than not to be married at all. It conforms to religious convictions, since both marriage and polygyny are seen as religious duties.

In this context, what other alternatives are open to women? An uncomfortable single status perceived as less desirable than a polygynous marriage? A monogamous marriage perceived as provisional, awaiting the menace of a second wife? It is difficult to live as an unmarried woman in Dakar, just as it is difficult to resist polygyny.

Despite the weight of social and religious convictions, the city allows women a certain autonomy. The rate of divorce is relatively high in Dakar, but a divorce is generally followed by a rapid remarriage. The desire for independence is more often manifested in divorce than by women remaining single. Women play an active role in divorce, which is often used as a

response to an imposed marriage, a husband's infidelity, polygyny, inadequate financial support, verbal and physical abuse, or meddling in-laws.

> Men are not frank, which causes many divorces. He marries a first wife and they have many children. He goes to look for a second wife, and she benefits at the expense of the first, which was my case. When he brought home the second wife, he went two years without spending the night with me. During those two years I did not get any attention, he was always with his second wife. Always. The woman let me know that I was nothing in the house, that she was the beloved wife of our husband. She and I always fought, and he was always on her side. I cooked when it was my turn, but he spent every night with his other wife. Despite all this I resigned myself to my fate. There were always fights. When the children fought the mothers also took it up, each on the side of her child, and our husband on the side of the second wife. Finally he sold the furniture from my living room, but that did not keep me from staying. . . . But when he sold my bed, then I knew we no longer had a marriage. Not even God likes that type of marriage, so I told him to give me a divorce. He refused. I took him to court, where they gave me custody of the children and I received Fr 54,000 three times each year.[6] I don't know what he did after that, but next I received only Fr 12,000 in each payment. Twelve thousand francs for seven children. That's not much, but I am tired of him and I won't even bother to return to court. I thought it would be better for me just to find work. Now I have temporary work, I'm the head of a team, but I would like to be taken on permanently. (Thirty-seven-year-old divorced woman in Dakar)

Adherence to traditional norms concerning the social position of women is firmly anchored in Dakar. There is, however, a dichotomy between the discourse of women regarding their status and the reality of their behavior. In Dakar, divorce, more than other manifestations of change, reveals new attitudes. It demonstrates the creation of a status for women detached from the ideology of dependence. However, for strategic reasons, social diplomacy, or simply in the name of older norms, the solid core of the pedestal that upholds the models of womanhood is little shaken. Still, the changes currently taking place nibble away at certain aspects of status. These aspects are located in specific areas and are couched in terms of individual aspirations: the choice of husband, divorce, attitudes toward polygyny, and a greater participation in managing household affairs.

Conclusion

Few socioeconomic factors stand out in our analysis to explain differential male behavior regarding polygyny. Only certain demographic features—such as marriage age, the age difference between spouses, and the conception of children out of wedlock—seem to play a role. Women have

diverse attitudes toward polygyny, ranging from resignation through realism to hostility. Women's reactions, however, are rooted in a latent opposition to the institution. The analysis of divorce shows a higher probability of a first marriage breaking up after the arrival of a second wife.

As paradoxical as it may seem, there is evidence of diversification of polygynous situations in Dakar. The link between the city and polygyny is not as "negative" as generally believed. It is not surprising that polygyny is maintained in Dakar, in an environment where that institution is supported. Polygyny benefits from official, religious, and social legitimation. It plays a social and demographic regulatory function. It enjoys a popularity and normality that make the existence of the institution seem banal, especially to men. For men, polygyny remains a privilege they may grant themselves, an ambition that allows them to advertise their social success, and a means of controlling and dominating women. The meaning of polygyny is found in the process of redefining relations between men and women.

The psychological form assumed by the modification of women's status is specific to each context. It depends on apparent compromise, on discretion, and also on the acceptance of masculine preeminence. In the face of polygyny, women's strategies range from resignation to contestation. But the autonomous will of women in Dakar struggles against the resistance of men, for whom polygyny remains the bastion of their domination.

Notes

1. This research was conducted jointly by IFAN (Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire) and ORSTOM (French Institute of Scientific Research for Development in Cooperation) and was funded by the French Ministry of Research. The research team was composed of P. Antoine, P. Bocquier, A. S. Fall, Y. M. Guisse, and J. Nanitelamio.

2. The results of DHS Niger confirm those of the 1988 census (Klissou 1992).

3. The median age at first marriage is the age at which 50 percent of women were already married.

4. The reference, or baseline, category is indicated in parentheses.

5. In an extreme case, a front-page story in the Senegalese newspaper *Le Soleil* reported the death of a woman who suffered cardiac arrest when her husband announced his plan to marry a second wife (4 October 1993).

6. The currency is CFA francs. In 1989, $1 was worth approximately CFA francs 300.

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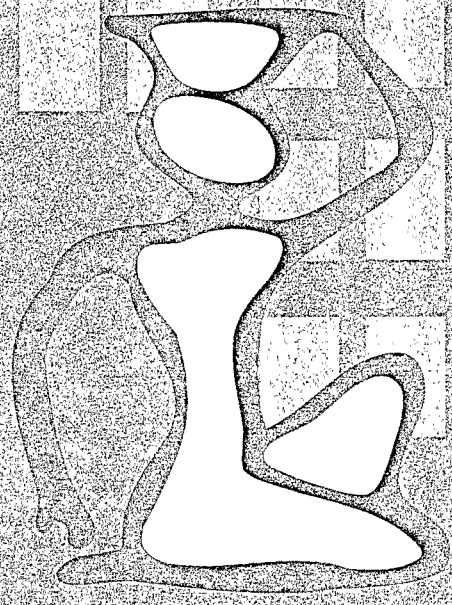
Courtyards, Markets, City Streets

Urban Women in Africa



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