



Vol. 23, No. 1, 2025

DOI: 10.14746/jpg.2025.23.1.3

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A Literary and Socio-Cultural Analysis of Polygynous Practices Among the Yorùbá Deities

ABSTRACT. This study examines the conflicting perspectives on polygyny within Yoruba culture, focusing on two Ifá oral genres: *Ọyèkú méjì* and *Ọsẹ̀ bàrà*, which one critiques polygyny as a source of societal discord and the other one endorses it. It argues that the pros and cons of polygyny practices in African society have cultural roots from African cosmology, particularly Yoruba mythology. The study also observes that existing scholarly works on polygyny focus on the problem as it contributes to marital instability and broken homes, to the neglect of the benefits. This research, therefore, fills an existing academic gap by analyzing polygyny's socio-cultural benefits as well as implications through Ifá orature, hence exploring its influence on modern marital dynamics and unintended outcomes like polyandry. This study adopts a mixed-method approach, using primary data from in-depth interviews with purposively selected Ifá priests and priestesses in Southwest Nigeria, recorded for accuracy. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and credible internet resources. Data were transcribed, translated, and analyzed within a socio-cultural theoretical framework to assess polygyny's impact on gender and social structures. The findings of this study reveal that *Ọyèkú méjì*'s critique aligns with concerns about marital discord, while *Ọsẹ̀ bàrà*'s endorsement perpetuates polygyny among kings and farmers. However, it marginalizes women, fostering resentment and family breakdown. The study underscores the need to re-evaluate polygyny to promote equitable relationships. By bridging traditional Ifá orature and contemporary practices, this research offers a nuanced understanding of polygyny's socio-cultural effects, advocating for alignment with modern egalitarian values and contributing to African cultural heritage discourses.

KEYWORDS: Polygyny, Yorùbá culture, Ifá orature, socio-cultural analysis, marital instability

Introduction

This study explores the contentious practice of polygyny in Yorùbá culture through the lens of two contradictory Ifá oral genres: *Ọyèkú méjì*, which highlights the societal discord caused by polygyny, and *Ọsẹ̀ bàrà*, which endorses it as a culturally sanctioned practice. These opposing narratives reflect a broader tension within Yorùbá society, where aphorisms like “*ọkan ọ̀so ọ̀pó ọ̀lọ̀nrin dún mọ́ ọ̀wọ́ ọ̀kọ*” (one wife is best for a man) and “*òrìsà jẹ́ kí n pé méjì ọ̀lọ̀nrin kò dénú*” (a wife cannot willingly request a second wife) underscore resistance to polygyny. Such sayings emphasize its detrimental effects, particularly on women, who often experience dissatisfaction and marginalization.

Polygyny profoundly impacts modern Yorùbá society, particularly in marital dynamics, often contributing to family discord and broken homes. This study examines how the mythical origins of polygyny, rooted in Yorùbá cosmology and the practices of ancestors and deities, are perpetuated through Ifá orature, shaping contemporary perceptions and practices. The endorsement of polygyny in traditional narratives, such as those found in Ifá texts, reinforces its cultural legitimacy, yet it clashes with modern egalitarian values, leading to unintended consequences. Notably, the marginalization of women in polygynous households fosters resentment, which can destabilize families and, in some cases, prompt reactive practices like polyandry. This research highlights how traditional beliefs, while culturally significant, exacerbate marital instability in present-day Yorùbá society, underscoring the need to reconcile these practices with contemporary social realities.

Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions: How do the contradictory narratives of *Ọyèkú méjì* and *Ọsẹ̀ bàrà* influence Yorùbá perceptions of polygyny? What are the socio-cultural benefits and challenges of polygyny as reflected in Ifá orature? How does polygyny's mythical endorsement contribute to marital instability or alternative practices like polyandry in modern Yorùbá society? By addressing these questions, the study aims to illuminate the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, offering insights into how cultural practices rooted in Yorùbá cosmology adapt or conflict with contemporary social realities.

This study examines the socio-cultural analysis of polygynous practices through the lens of Ifá orature, exploring how these contradictory oral traditions shape contemporary Yorùbá marital dynamics. By examining

both the benefits and challenges of polygyny, the research seeks to provide a balanced perspective on its cultural significance and modern implications. It investigates how mythical endorsements of polygyny, as articulated in Ifá texts, influence perceptions and practices among Yorùbá communities, particularly among kings and farmers who view it as a privilege or necessity. The study further explores the tension between traditional beliefs and modern egalitarian values, assessing polygyny's impact on gender dynamics and family stability in contemporary settings.

Polygyny in Yorùbá society often places women in a vulnerable position, leading to feelings of mistreatment and injustice within marital structures. The research elucidates how traditional endorsements of polygyny contribute to marital instability and family breakdown in modern contexts. It proposes solutions to address these challenges, advocating for a reevaluation of cultural practices to foster equitable marital relationships and mitigate the adverse effects on family cohesion in today's evolving socio-cultural landscape.

The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for the analysis of this work is socio-cultural theory, though we may be compelled or impelled to touch elements of other related literary theories in the course of our analysis. Socio-cultural theories provide critical lenses for understanding polygyny's impact. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cultural mediation, as applied by Peel (2016), frames Ifá orature as a tool that shapes Yorùbá social behaviors, including polygyny, by transmitting cultural values across generations. This perspective informs this study's analysis of how *Oyèkú méjì* and *Oṣẹ̀ bàrà* influence marital practices. Additionally, Fraser's (1998) perspectival duality theory, which balances economic redistribution and cultural recognition, is relevant for addressing polygyny's dual role as an economic strategy and a source of gender inequity, as discussed by Balogun (2022). These theoretical insights guide this research in examining polygyny's socio-cultural implications, advocating for interventions that align traditional practices with modern egalitarian principles to mitigate marital discord.

Sociocultural theory explains how literature protects the culture of the society. The concern of the critics should be the culture of the society as embedded in the literature. Abimbólá (1976) opines that:

In order to evolve an acceptable format for the appreciation of oral literature, we must blend our knowledge of the most up-to-date techniques of literary criticism and stylistics with a thorough understanding of Yorùbá culture. Without this, any critical work is bound to be sterile.

The above assertion indicates that there is no way we can eschew the culture of the society from Yorùbá literature. Thus, culture is a strong pillar that upholds Yorùbá prose, poetry, and drama. Taylor, cited in Ọpẹfẹyítímí (2014), sees culture as: “that complex whole includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Taylor here affirms that culture encompasses everything in society. That is why it connotes total ways of life.

Socio-cultural theory explains how individual mental ability functions within their cultural institutional and historical context. The focus of the socio-cultural perspective is on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing psychological development. Socio-cultural theory, emphasizing the interplay between cultural practices and social structures, provides a robust framework for analyzing polygyny in Yorùbá society, particularly through the lens of Ifá oral genres and their modern marital implications. Lev Vygotsky (1978) posits that cultural tools and social interactions shape individual behaviors and societal norms. In the context of this research, Vygotsky’s concept of cultural mediation applies to how Ifá orature, as a cultural artifact, transmits values about polygyny, influencing perceptions and practices across generations. Ọyẹkú méjì’s critique of polygyny and Ọṣẹ bàrà’s endorsement serve as cultural tools that mediate social attitudes, reinforcing or challenging gender roles and marital stability. Vygotsky’s emphasis on the historical and cultural context of behavior illuminates how Yorùbá myths and aphorisms, such as “ọkan ṣoṣo póró lobinrin dùn mọ lówọ ọkọ,” shape contemporary marital discord or acceptance of polygyny. This framework helps analyze how traditional narratives perpetuate power dynamics, particularly marginalizing women, as noted in the study’s findings on family breakdown.

Oyewumi (1997) offers critical insights into Yorùbá gender dynamics, challenging Western gender binaries and highlighting the socio-cultural specificity of Yorùbá practices. She argues that pre-colonial Yorùbá society was gender-neutral, with roles based on seniority rather than biological sex, complicating the application of Western feminist critiques to polygyny. Her work is pivotal for this research, as it contextualizes po-

lygyny within Yorùbá cosmology, where deities' practices in Ifá orature legitimize the institution, yet also marginalize women in modern contexts. Oyewumi's decolonial feminist perspective underscores how colonial influences exacerbated gender inequalities, aligning with the study's observation of polygyny's role in fostering resentment and polyandry. Her analysis supports the need to re-evaluate polygyny's socio-cultural implications, advocating for alignment with egalitarian values while respecting Yorùbá cultural heritage.

Additionally, Nancy Fraser's perspectival duality theory (1998), which integrates redistribution and recognition in social justice, enhances the analysis of polygyny's impact on Yorùbá marital dynamics. Fraser's framework highlights the need to address both economic inequalities (e.g., polygyny's economic justifications for farming) and cultural misrecognition (e.g., women's marginalization in polygynous households). This theory frames the study's findings on how Ifá orature's contradictory narratives perpetuate unequal gender roles, contributing to marital instability. By applying Fraser's dual approach, the research advocates for socio-cultural interventions that balance economic realities with equitable recognition of women's roles, addressing the modern challenges of polygyny. These theorists collectively provide a robust lens to explore how Ifá oral genres influence Yorùbá marital practices, bridging traditional beliefs and contemporary social realities.

Literature Review.

Mythology and Social Construction of Reality

It is a known fact that our beliefs determine how we react to issues, the way we perceive things in the society could either be reality or myths, but our beliefs constitute a domain or perception through which we view things. Myth is a repertoire of our beliefs. Meanwhile, oral tradition poses a generational mythological problem to our beliefs and perception of reality, because it is always based on personal memory and generational transmitted beliefs that do not subjected to questioning. Myths could be regarded as assumption when it is unchecked, but its construction is embedded in our culture. Thus, our culture is a watchword which our traditional beliefs hinged on. Myth has a complex relationship to social reality. Obviously because our social behaviours are tend to be emanated from our mythological ideologies which are generational in nature.

Myth, according to Irele (2001), has no acceptable definition. But in other words, there are as many definitions of myth as there are myth scholars. But, one of the functions of myth is that it provides a way of looking at the universe in any cultural space. Media scholars often view myths as foundational narratives that shape cultural understanding. McQuail (2005), for instance, conceptualizes myths as evolving stories that societies use to explain and adapt to their world. This aligns with a more philosophical definition offered within the African context. As Irele (2001) precisely argues:

Myth is a people's world view and the moral system that sustains that world-view as it is reflected in their stories of the origin of the world of god and man. The moral system here will lay down the norms and values which will guide the relationship between the people and how they relate to each other on the one hand, and how they should relate to nature and the work of nature on the other hand. Myth then attempts to explain nature by stating its origin, stuff with which it is made, as well as man and the place of man within the ambit of nature.

What we can deduce from the above assertion is that myth is beyond storytelling. It encompasses moral as well as how people relate with one another vis-à-vis their nature. The interaction of the people in the society over time, engendering their mental capacity and their conceptual behaviour, which translates to their habituated action often referred to as the social construction of reality. When traditional beliefs derived from the mythological concept is transformed and put into use by the member of the society, its habitual practices render it reality through the social construction.

Social construction of reality is when a personal concept of an individual or group through interaction with the people of society become the concept of that society and such concept eventually become habituated. A roles play by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to the other member of the society to imbibe it became reality. In the construction of social reality, language plays a vital role. Ajíbádé (2015) buttresses it that communication process is highly essential to the construction of cultural myths and a shared social reality.

Yorùbá Deities

Yorùbá people so much have value for their religion, that is why they have different divinities but considered God as the Supreme Being. This however, reflects in their words that: *A ò bá à fi eégún ilé ẹ̀ egbẹ̀je, kí á*

fi òòṣà ibẹ̀ ẹ̀ eḡbẹ̀fà, òrìṣà bí Olódùmarè kò sí (we may have one thousand four hundred masquerade, and one thousand two hundred divinities, there is no divinities like God). Yorùbá people believe in the Supremacy of God and they cannot have face-to-face contact with Him. Thus, they considered all their divinities to be an intermediary between them and the Supreme Being. Therefore, they request whatever they desire from God through their divinities known as Òrìṣà.

There are varieties of divinities among the Yorùbá people; some are believed to have ascended from the invisible world (òrun) to the planetary world, while some are believed to be hero-deity who has once be human being or famous individuals deified as gods or goddesses after their death in recognition of their supernatural deeds, outstanding wisdom and perseverance (Akintúndé, 2013). In the same vein, Olupona (1993) notes that there are hundreds of divinities in traditional Yorùbá religion (the number is variously given as 200, 201, 400, 600, 1060, 1440) he further argues that approximately two dozen overshadow the others in the Ibadan area. He further classifies them into two nature gods and function gods. Nature gods are Šàngó, Ọṣun and Šànpònná, while functional deities, including Ọrúnmilà, Ọ̀gún and Ọ̀bàtálà. There are gods and goddesses among the Yoruba deities, and they are all related to one another. Some are related in terms of function, some are naturally related, while others are related by marriage.

Polygyny in Yorùbá Content

Polygyny is a marital situation whereby one husband marries more than one wife. It is otherwise known as plural marriage or polygamy. Polygamy is a marital relationship involving multiple spouses and occurs in several forms. The most common form of polygamy occurs when a man has more than one wife at the same time, known as polygyny. Less frequently, it occurs when a woman has more than one husband (polyandry) and when more than one husband is married to more than one wife (polygynandry) (Goodwin, 1999; Valsiner, 2000).

Polygyny is practiced in most countries all over the world. Thus, it is not only peculiar to Africa. Al-Shamsi & Fulcher (2005) note that: Polygyny is legally practiced in various countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, although not practiced by all. Factors affecting the occurrence of polygyny include social, economic, and religious factors. The Yorùbás did not prac-

tice polygamy following the Western system as we understand it today as a means of oppression to women. The hegemonic patriarchal design of Yorùbá culture does not place women on a lower pedestal than men. Yorùbá men have utmost respect and honour for their women. Besides, they have a keen sense of protecting their women and providing for them. By and large, they do not discriminate against women's participation in decision-making. But a man has the privilege of marrying more than one wife. This privilege was not culturally designed to humiliate women. But they had more than one wife usually because of their position or office in the society, for instance, the king married more than one wife because of the position of kingship. While successful farmers take on more than one wife for reasons of manpower to keep up the workload on the farms. Also, a brother can inherit their deceased brother's widow, because she remains a member of the family. Thus, *adiẹ ò ní kú ká da ẹyin ẹ nù*—we cannot because of death of hen wasted its eggs. More so, Yorùbá culture encourages polygyny in other to curb adultery among the people of the society, because there is every tendency for a man who married more than a wife to do away with adultery. Polygyny exercise has prone women of the present generation to wage war against patriarchy. They believe that is the only thing that gives their husband grace to play upon their intelligent and marry more than one wife. Despite the precarious notion some people may have against polygyny, it still remains part of Africa culture. It is allowed within the confined of African culture, particularly Yorùbá for a man to marry more than one wife.

Data Analysis. Analysis of Ifá Corpus and Mythical Narratives

The desire of the Yorùbá people to establish mythical origins for their beliefs and practices led them to formulate various myths, legends, and stories surrounding their traditions. These narratives claim inheritance from their numerous deities, collectively known as *Òrìṣà* or *Irúmolẹ̀*. The practice of polygyny among the Yorùbá can be traced to their deities, ancestors, and kings, with accounts preserved in myths, legends, divination poetry (*odù Ifá*), and praise poetry (*oríki*). Thus, mythological stories associated with polygyny among Yorùbá deities serve as the foundation for its societal acceptance.

In studying the myths of any Yorùbá deity, it is essential to consult the *Ifá* corpus. This aligns with Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá's assertion that "any myth

of a Yorùbá deity that cannot be found in ẹṣẹ-Ifá is not authentic” (Ìṣòlá 1991, p. 95). Supporting this claim, *Odù Qṣẹ̀ bàrà* recounts how *Ọ̀rún-mílà* married multiple wives. Conversely, *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú méjì* describes how *Ọ̀rún-mílà* rejected polygyny, highlighting the challenges of having multiple wives and noting that these difficulties increase with the number of wives. Additionally, *Ọ̀kànràn méjì* reveals that *Ẓàngó* practiced polygyny, as documented in his praise poetry. These examples illustrate that all Yorùbá divinities have distinct origins, personalities, attributes, marital lives, taboos, and observances, which are preserved in their *oriki* (praise poetry) derived from the *Ifá* corpus.

For instance, *Ẓàngó*, the Yorùbá thunder deity, is one of the most powerful divinities who took multiple wives. Evidence of this is found in *Odù Ọ̀kànràn méjì*, where his praise poem states:

Agbéná genge
Afidí-olóòṣà wọnlẹ
Ọ̀kọ̀ Ìyàwó
Ọ̀ré Ìyálé

(The one who displays fire on his head
The conqueror of other deities
The husband of the new wife
The friend of the senior wife).

The above extract from *Ẓàngó*'s praise poem confirms that he practiced polygyny. Lines three and four (“The husband of the new wife, the confidant of the senior wife”) demonstrate his commitment to maintaining equity and harmony among his wives, showing affection to both the newly married and the senior wife. Further evidence appears in another praise poem: “Obinrin méréndínlógún ni Oya bá lóṣẹ́ Ẓàngó Gbogbo wọn ni Oya fi ẹyẹnjú lé lọ.” (Sixteen wives were with *Ẓàngó* when *Oya* arrived, and with a single glance, she sent them all away).

This verse explicitly states that *Ẓàngó* had sixteen wives before *Oya* (his most famous consort) joined him. As a fellow deity, *Oya* possessed the supernatural power to dismiss her co-wives effortlessly. For devotees of *Ẓàngó*, this mythological narrative serves as both justification and precedent for polygyny. Followers who marry multiple wives often cite it as an act of emulating their deity's divine example, embedding the practice within religious doctrine. The stories of *Ẓàngó*'s marriages and *Oya*'s dom-

inance reinforce the idea that polygyny is not merely a social custom but a sacred tradition rooted in the lives of the òrìṣà

The above data, drawn from primary interviews with Ifá priests and priestesses in Southwest Nigeria and secondary sources like Abímbólá (2008) and Ìṣòlá (1991), reveal that Yorùbá polygyny is deeply rooted in mythical narratives preserved in Ifá orature. Ọṣẹ bàrà depicts Ọrúnmilà marrying multiple wives, such as Onípélé and Alábàjà, legitimizing polygyny as a divine practice, while Ọyèkú méjì critiques it, detailing escalating marital challenges based on the number of wives, from jealousy with two to chaos with ten. Similarly, Ọkànràn méjì's praise poetry (oríkì) portrays Ẓàngó as a polygynous deity who married sixteen wives, yet maintained justice among them, though Ọya's displacement of these wives highlights conflicts. These narratives, as Ìṣòlá (1991) asserts, are authentic only when traceable to Ifá, serving as cultural tools that shape societal perceptions. Qualitative analysis of these texts, transcribed and translated from interviews, shows that myths of deities like Ẓàngó and Ọrúnmilà provide a cultural pedestal for polygyny, influencing kings and farmers to emulate these practices as symbols of prestige or economic strategy.

Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Gender Implications

The practice of polygyny among the Yorùbá finds divine precedent in the marital life of Ọrúnmilà, the Orisa of wisdom and divination. The *Odù Ọṣẹ Bàrà* explicitly documents his marriages to two women, Onípélé (daughter of Onímogún) and Alábàjà (daughter of Onímogbòṇ)—despite his initial poverty. This narrative not only validates polygyny but also illustrates its inherent socio-religious complexities in Yorùbá cosmology. The *Ọṣẹ Bàrà* corpus recounts:

Ọṣẹ ba	(Ọṣẹ ba)
Ọlọbàrà ba	(Ọlọbàrà ba)
A díá fún Ọrúnmilà	(Cast Ifá divination for Ọrúnmilà)
Ifá ó lẹ lẹ fẹ Onípélé ọmọ Onímogún	(Ifá wants to marry Onípélé, daughter of Onímogún)
Ọṣẹ ba	(Ọṣẹ ba)
Ọlọbàrà ba	(Ọlọbàrà ba)
A díá fún Ọrúnmilà	(Cast Ifá divination for Ọrúnmilà)
Ifá ó lẹ lẹ fẹ Alábàjà ọmọ Onímogbòṇ	(Ifá wants to marry Alábàjà, daughter of Onímogbòṇ...)

Wón ó ká a lẹ ẹbọ ni ó ẹ...	(He was asked to perform a sacrifice...)
Lílẹ: Ó ní ọsẹ ba, ọbàrà ba	(Lead: ọsẹ ba Ọbàrà ba)
Ni wón n pẹmí nímogún	(They call me from Onímogbúns' house)
Ègbè: Ọsẹ ba, ọbàrà ba	(Chorus: Ọsẹ ba Ọbàrà ba)
Lílẹ: Ni wón n pè mí nímogbòn o	(Lead: They call me from Onímogbòns' house)
Ègbè: Ọsẹ ba, ọbàrà ba	(Chorus: Ọsẹ ba Ọbàrà ba)
Lílẹ: Èmi ò mò èyí tí n ó rẹ o	(Lead: I don't know which one to go)
Ègbè: Ọsẹ ba, ọbàrà ba...	(Chorus: Ọsẹ ba Ọbàrà ba)

The verses reveal Òrúnmìlà's dilemma when simultaneously summoned to bury both fathers-in-law, a cultural obligation requiring financial and physical presence. Unable to divide himself, he consults his priests (*Ọsẹ ba* and *Ọbàrà ba*), who prescribe sacrificial rites (*ẹbọ*) that resolve his crises.

The *Odù Ọsẹ Bàrà's* account of Òrúnmìlà's marriages to Onípèlé and Alábàjà transcends mere mythological storytelling—it encapsulates the intricate interplay of gender, power, and cultural obligation in Yorùbá society. This narrative reveals three critical socio-cultural dimensions:

Divine Sanctioning of Patriarchal Structures: By portraying the Orisa of wisdom as a polygynist, the text sacralizes a system where male spiritual authority parallels domestic authority. The very need for Òrúnmìlà to “consult Ifá” about marital decisions (“Ifá wants to marry...”) mirrors the Yorùbá practice of seeking elder/divine approval for plural marriages, reinforcing a hierarchy where male agency is divinely endorsed.

The Gendered Burden of Ritual Labor: While Òrúnmìlà struggles with financial obligations to *both* fathers-in-law, the wives' roles are conspicuously absent in the narrative. This silence reflects a cultural paradigm where:

- Women's lineages serve as conduits for male alliances (through marriage)
- The emotional/domestic labor of co-wives is rendered invisible
- Ritual-economic burdens fall disproportionately on men, as seen in Òrúnmìlà's crisis

Polygyny as Social Safety Net The text subtly critiques romanticized views of polygyny. Òrúnmìlà's poverty (“he could not divide himself into two”) exposes the system's material pressures, yet the resolution through sacrifice (*ẹbọ*) suggests polygyny's sustainability depends on:

- Institutional support (Ifá priesthood)
- Shared cultural codes (burial obligations)
- Collective problem-solving

Gender Paradox: The *Odù* simultaneously empowers women (as wives whose lineages demand spousal accountability) and marginalizes them (as unnamed actors in their own marital narratives). This duality persists in modern Yorùbá polygyny, where women navigate both systemic disempowerment and matrilineal authority.

The *Ọ̀yèkú Méjì* corpus presents a crucial counter-narrative to Yorùbá traditions that valorise polygyny through divine examples. When Òrúnmilà's disciples sought guidance about ideal marital arrangements, his referral to this *Odù*—traditionally associated with longevity and life wisdom—reveals profound tensions between cultural ideals and domestic realities. The text's numerical cataloging of wifely conflicts offers a rare gendered critique from within the Ifá literary canon.

He buttresses his point with *Ọ̀yèkú méjì* that:

Ọkan soṣo póró lobìnrin dùn mọ lówọ ọkọ,

Bí wọ̀n bá di méjì,
Wọ̀n a dòjòwú,

Bí wọ̀n bá di mẹ́ta,
Wọ̀n a di ẹ̀ta òtúlẹ́,

Bí wọ̀n ba di mẹ́rin,
Wọ̀n a di iwọ lo rín mi ni mo rín ọ,

Bí wọ̀n bá di márùn-ún,
Wọ̀n a di lágbájá ní ó run ọkọ wa tán lóhun

Bí wọ̀n bá di mẹ́fà,
Wọ̀n a díkà,
Bí wọ̀n bá di méje,
Wọ̀n a dàjẹ́,
Bí wọ̀n bá di méjọ,

(A woman is only sweet in her husband's hands when she is the only one.)

(If they become two,) (They become rivals, "jealousy ensues").

(If they become three,) (They become troublemakers (literally, "three that scatter the home").

(If they become four,) (They become "you saw me, I saw you a state of mutual accusation").

(If they become five,) (They become so-and-so is the one who has finished our husband)

(If they become six,) (They become wicked.) (If they become seven,) (They become witches.) (If they become eight,)

Wọn a di iyá alátàrí bàmbà,	(They become the “mother with the big head”)
Ló ti kó irú èyí sẹ ọkọ wa lówó.	(Who has brought this kind of trouble to our Husband)
Bí wọn bá di mèsàn-án,	(If they become nine,)
Wọn a di iyáálé wa ò nísẹ kan,	(They become our senior wife is jobless,)
Kò lábọ kan,	(She has no work to do,)
Bó bá ti jí,	(As soon as she wakes up,)
Aşọ ọkọ wa ní máaa sán kiri,	(She is always gossiping about our husband)
Bí wọn bá di mēwàá,	(If they become ten,)
Wọn a di ilé ọkọ wa jókòó,	(They become our husband is at home and)
Ni wọn wá ọkọ wa wá...	(They go looking for him...)
(Abimbólá, 2008, p. 27)	

The above corpus of Ifá has explained the categories of problems associated with the number of wives a man marries. Even though Ọ̀rùnmílá pinpoints out the problems that may be the aftermath of marrying more than one wife. *Ọ̀yẹ́kú Mèjì* here serves as Ifá’s institutional memory, preserving hard-won wisdom about the limits of cultural practices. Its preservation demonstrates Yorùbá cosmology’s capacity for self-regulation and nuanced social commentary. One wife is good for a man thus emerges not as cultural heresy, but as elder wisdom—a call to balance tradition with human flourishing.

Thematic analysis of the data, framed within socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), indicates that Ifá orature mediates Yorùbá attitudes toward polygyny, perpetuating patriarchal structures. Ọ̀şẹ̀ bàrà’s endorsement of polygyny aligns with cultural sayings like “olóbinrin kan kò kúrò ní àpọ̀n” (a man with one wife is a bachelor), framing polygyny as a mark of masculinity. However, *Ọ̀yẹ́kú mèjì*’s warnings, such as “òkan soşo póró lobinrin dùn mọ lówó ọkọ” (one wife is best), highlight women’s marginalization, with priests noting jealousy and financial burdens as common issues. Secondary sources (Oyewùmí, 1997) corroborate that polygyny, while historically non-gendered, now exacerbates female suppression in modern contexts. Interview data reveal that women in polygynous households often feel repressed, with some resorting to polyandry as resistance, aligning with Nyanzi’s (2019) findings on reactive marital practices. This tension between mythical endorsement and modern realities underscores polygyny’s role in marital instability.

Conclusion

This study analysed polygyny's socio-cultural benefits as well as implications through Ifá orature, hence exploring its influence on modern marital dynamics and unintended outcomes like polyandry. The comparative analysis of primary and secondary data highlights a cultural disconnect between traditional Yorùbá philosophy and modern critiques. While Ifá narratives legitimize polygyny as a divine and voluntary practice, Western-influenced Christian perspectives, as noted in interviews, label it taboo, creating societal friction. Priests emphasized that polygyny's challenges, such as Ọrúnmìlà's financial struggles in Ọṣẹ̀ bàrà, can be mitigated through Ifá divination, suggesting cultural solutions to modern problems. However, secondary sources indicate that urbanization reduces polygyny's economic viability, intensifying marital discord. The data suggest that while polygyny contributes to population growth and cultural identity, its patriarchal design, as Fraser's (1998) duality theory posits, misrecognizes women's roles, necessitating socio-cultural interventions to align with egalitarian values. The synthesized data reveal that Ifá orature's contradictory narratives—endorsing polygyny in Ọṣẹ̀ bàrà and critiquing it in Ọyẹ̀kú méjì—reflect Yorùbá society's ambivalence toward the practice. While myths legitimize polygyny as a cultural ideal, interview responses highlight its adverse effects, including family breakdowns and women's suppression, aligning with Balogun's (2022) findings on gender inequities. The analysis underscores the need to move beyond Western critiques, as suggested by priests, and embrace African philosophy to address polygyny's challenges. This study advocates for culturally sensitive interventions that respect Yorùbá heritage while promoting gender equity, contributing to discourses on balancing tradition with modern social realities.

In conclusion, it's important to recognize that polygyny is not a new or selfish concept in **African society**, despite being viewed as a taboo by some in the present generation. These modern criticisms often fail to consider the practice's deep cultural roots and its role within African philosophy. The text argues that polygyny should be examined within its own cultural context, as it serves societal functions like population growth and can be seen as an alternative to adultery. It also highlights the contradictory views of monotheistic religions, with Christianity advocating for monogamy while Islam permits polygyny. Ultimately, polygyny is presented not as a mandatory practice but as a cultural choice, with its origins found in the myths and traditions of African societies, particularly among

the **Yoruba**, where having more than one wife is traditionally considered a sign of a complete man.

In conclusion, it must be noted that the practice of polygyny in African society is never a new thing, a selfish ideal, though we cannot deny the fact that people of the present generation would have regarded the practice of polygyny as taboo, inimical, and unpalatable. They not delve deeply into the culture of the people of Africa before the criticism.

Even if we are to fault the practices of polygyny, we should not forget to ask ourselves the following salient questions: What is the role of monogamy in the fabric of society? How do we intend to eschew the contribution of the polygyny or polygamy system from the development of the society in terms of population? How does adultery damage the very fabric of the society? Can polygyny practice replace the adultery practices? These and many more are the likely questions that the polygyny practices stand to wave. Therefore, in quest for answer to the above-mentioned questions there is need to go beyond Western thinking and embraced Africa philosophy and worldview, because we can only use the Africa philosophy to solve Africa problems.

It is of no gainsaying that Africans today are disconnected from the truly that polygyny or polygamy practices is part of our culture. In theology of monotheistic religions, Christians believes in “a man is for a woman”. While Muslims agreed with polygyny or polygamy system, and this is always reflected in their words that “*mẹ ni Ọlórún wi-God encourages more than one wife*”.

In the course of unraveling the mythical origin of polygyny exercise among the Yorùbá deities vis-à-vis their contradictory stand, it is discovered that African society, culture encourages a man to marry more than a wife. Having pinpointed out the likely problems such a man could face, yet it is allowed within the confined of African culture as it is revealed in the corpus of selected Ifá oral genre treated above. Polygyny practice depicts man who practices it as a complete man. That is why it is commonly found in their saying that *olóbìnrin kan kò kúrò ní àpọ̀n*—a man with one wife is more or less a bachelor. But, on a contrary view, Western culture and monotheistic religion particularly known as Christian sees it as taboo. Thus, polygyny system is worrisome to women, it represses and suppresses them by hegemonic patriarchal designed mainly by African culture, especially Yorùbá society.

The construction and reconstruction of myths, legends, and divination poetry and praise- names create forms through which one stands in the

society. The polygyny practices among the people in the society arise as a result of their beliefs in the existence of their deities, ancestors and kings who had once upon a time practiced it. There is a need to understand that polygyny practice is not taboo in African society, especially among the Yorùbá, and at the same time, it is not mandatory. The choice of the number of wives to marry depends on the individuals.

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