

**THE POLITICS OF POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGES IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD* AND ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S *THE VICTIMS***

**BY**

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**CERTIFICATION**

We certify that this project *The Politics of Polygamous Marriages in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Victims* was carried out by Shielar Oghenefejiro Eshabuko in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Father, God Almighty, who is the very source and essence of my life.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

All activities associated with decision-making or other forms of power relations between members of the family are centered on politics. This study aims to analyze The Politics of Polygamous Marriages in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Victims*. The study is essentially qualitative in approach in that it is text-based. This study employs a feminist approach to literary criticism with focus on the African concept of feminism. The works as reviewed have shown that both texts are rich in feminist ideas and concerns. This fact draws a connection between the previous studies and this present study as the causes of women's troubles are all that have been highlighted: patriarchy, polygamy, ignorance, motherhood, and colonialism. However, there is an aspect of the traditional African society that has been neglected in the reviewed scholarship. That is, The Politics of Polygamous Marriages which entails the interests of both sexes in marriage and the essence of marriage in African society. Therefore, with a feminist lens this study attempts to fill this gap by highlighting the politics involved in marriages especially in the Nigerian society and other related African societies. The finding of this essay is that polygamy is not an easy marriage to run. This essay therefore holds that *The Victims* and *The Joys of Motherhood* depict polygamy as an unhealthy marital union. Polygamy is a tasking family life which requires that a man is up and doing. If a man fails to handle his home well, his family will be in crisis that will eventually destroy it.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

The way men treat their wives in a polygamous home will influence how such women react to them. The action of the men and the women's reaction will eventually affect the entire family. This chapter explores the politics of polygamous marriages and its effect on the family. Feminist approach to literary criticism with focus on the African concept of feminism is employed in this study.

### **1.1 Purpose of Study**

This research explores how men, women, and the entire family are impacted by polygamous marriages in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Victims*.

### **1.2 Scope of Study**

Both Emecheta and Okpewho have several novels to their credit, but this essay is restricted to *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Victims* respectively because they focus on how men treat their wives, the women's reactions and the entire effect on the family as a result of politicized polygamous marriages in African societies.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The study is essentially qualitative in approach in that it is text based. The textual analysis of the novels is carried out with emphasis on feminism to underscore the politics of polygamous marriages. Secondary materials from the internet, textbooks, and library and print journals are used to complement the primary texts' examination and interpretation.

### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

This study employs feminist approach to literary criticism with focus on the African concept of feminism.

### 1.4.1 Feminism

Feminism advocates and emphasises women's rights and gender equality in society. In John Yeseibo's words,

The objective of feminism is to bring forth a fully integrated, gender-balanced society. Feminism's main goal is to eradicate from society all kinds of sex-based male supremacy, oppression, subjection, and marginalization of women in all spheres of life, including social, political, religious, economic, and intellectual ones.  
(137)

Marriage is one social institution that contributes significantly to the oppression, subjugation and marginalisation of the female folk in the sense that it expects women to give up their rights for men who in turn control their homes. Women's rights are also suppressed to the advantage of the men especially in the public sphere, such as workplaces and politics. Ann B. Dobie agrees with Robin Lakoff that women's language is inferior to that of males, citing the traits of women's language as frailty, ambiguity, and triviality. In other words, women need to adopt stronger male-like utterances if they wish to achieve equality (101). Language is important in the construction of the human world. Those who can use language often have their way. For this reason, Lakoff suggests that women should adopt assertive language in order to achieve equality with men.

M. H. Abrams observes that for two centuries, feminism was concerned with how women should be recognised culturally and politically. Some generations of political feminists are still fighting for social, legal, cultural, and equality in present times (93). Put differently, women have been battling with patriarchy that has hindered their development as members of the human race and they are making concerted efforts to end female subjugation. A additional claim made by Abrams is that "feminist literary criticism continues to be intertwined with political feminist movements for social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality in our time" (110). This consciousness accounts for their quest to achieve a good place in male-dominated societies.

"Feminist scholars have observed that much of what passes for knowledge of women's (or men's) nature has historically been constructed from the point of view of men social group, who benefit most from women's continued subordination," (141) Yeseibo writes, referencing Larry Johnston.. Men control what is obtainable in societies and whatever they put in place is what women are expected to follow. Women fight from different angles with the view to achieving equality or near equality with men. At this point, it is important to state that there are different types of feminist movements. There is the liberal, socialist and Marxist, as well as radical feminism, among others. Liberal feminism places a strong emphasis on achieving gender equality via judicial and political change. In order to provide women the same opportunities as men and address the limitations of their independence, it tried to remove the legal, political, and other structures that discriminate against them. Liberal feminists strive to change society's structure so that women are treated equally. Socialist and Marxist feminism, on the other hand, ties female dominance to Marxist concepts of exploitation, dominance, and labor. According to socialist feminists, women are held back by their unequal status both at work and at home. Prostitution, domestic work, marriage, and childrearing are all seen by socialist feminists as forms of oppression by a patriarchal system that devalues women and the important labor they undertake. Marx believed that until class oppression is eliminated, gender oppression will follow; this is known as Marxist feminism. Radical feminists are more likely than other feminist groups and ideologies to adopt a more combative approach. It views the patriarchal capitalist system, which it decries as sexist, as the primary factor in the oppression of women. According to radical feminists, women can only be liberated once they have abolished what they see as a fundamentally controlling and governing male-controlled society. Each of them uses a different strategy to advocate for women's rights.

According to Dobie, "They seek to expose patriarchal premises and the prejudices that patriarchy creates, and hope to change the world so that everyone is valued as a creative, rational being. This makes them, as a group, highly ideological, even visionary" (104). Dobie is of the

opinion that literary writers and critics are very important in the feminist struggles of women. Literature has the task of changing society and this is or ought to be the goal of every feminist writer or critic. According to Yeseibo, "A feminist play is one that makes the case more forcefully and moves toward a more radical conclusion, exposing patriarchy as a controlling force and the culture defined, determined, and shaped by men, thereby restricting women's development and range of life's choices" (141). In other words, feminism is a movement that seeks redress for women. In all spheres of society, women have a poor representation in spite of their numbers and roles to ensure the survival of many homes. Joy O. Ogbonnaya makes the case that the roles men and women play are not purely a function of their biology which attributes unequal physical strength to them. The society imposes all negative attributes and perceptions as to the roles of the woman. Society upholds and reflects the believes of male domination over women in family and national matters, resulting in a struggle by both parties to maintain or change their positions (83). Women have been dominated from time immemorial and society is responsible for this. Men under the influence of patriarchy have marginalized and exploited women in various ways especially in marriages. This results in gender inequality that renders women helpless. Feminism aims to tackle male domination of women. Women try to challenge all forms of biased treatments that endanger their identities as humans.

#### **1.4.2 African Perspectives on Feminism**

Feminism has been established as a women oriented movement which fights for women's freedom. Feminism, according to H. Oby Okolocha, entails epistemologies, methods, ideas, and ways of doing things that are used to stop the marginalization and oppression of women in all spheres of life (33). This idea that "women's resistance to perceived social, political, and economic injustice led to the formation of women's groups with the goal of fighting for women" is shared by Yetunde Olukemi Akorede. (10). This group's ideology is to overthrow male domination. Stella K. Kpolugbo is of the opinion that feminist struggles have been fruitful.

Congratulating all women especially those in Africa, she observes that the flicker of hope for “women living in modern day Africa faintly seen some two decades ago, has brightened into a full sunshine of hope: no more are they to cower behind the oppressions of their men-folks but have earned themselves some measure of freedom that has put them on the pedestal as men” (57). This suggests that women have not laboured in vain. Most civilized societies do not regard women as second citizen or appendages of men anymore. Hence, feminist supporters can rightly say women have been able to assert their voice in a males’ world.

African feminism is quite different from western feminism in terms of approaches. Both of them fight for freedom and liberation of women from men’s domination. They, however, differ in their approaches. Besides, feminism is still regarded as a western concept and movement for women’s emancipation; and African scholars look at it with suspicion as it does not fully capture the predicaments of women in the African context. In Okolocha’s words, “It remains essentially a western doctrine which cannot find affinity with many areas of African life. Even in this area of extreme westernization and globalization, some scholars male and female reject the term entirely, while others display various degrees of acceptance and tolerance and support...” (34). In reality, African feminism is different from western feminism because African women still observe certain aspects of culture to some extent. In the light of this, this essay adopts the concept of feminism as advanced by African scholars and critics, such as the female figures in literature that negotiate with patriarchy for the role of women in the society. They redirect the men’s attention to the subjugation and marginalisation of women, challenging them to see why this should not be the case. This affirms the literary representation of African women as “... not antagonists of... men, but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation.” This indicates that the essence of feminism in Africa is to extract concession from the patriarchal structures of society for women (Carole Boyce Davies quoted in Okolocha 33).

African traditions do not allow women to relate with men without a worthy or reasonable level of respect. It is for this reason that African feminism is far different from western feminism. Okolocha agrees with Davies that, “there is little link between the Nigerian woman’s experiences and the experiences of those western women” (35). African feminism does not support the use of radical persuasion to achieve their goals, but rather does through negotiation, persuasion, peaceful advocacy, and argumentation. This conforms to women’s dispositions for peaceful and progressive society. African feminism, in the words of Yeseibo, "advocates for a complementary position between the sexes for a more harmonious existence and for social development." In fact, African feminism seeks to bring men and women together in harmony to create a society that is progressive and at peace. Its teachings are non-confrontational because of this. African feminism, according to G. Steady, "fosters parallel autonomy, communalism, and cooperation for the preservation of life rather than the fireworks of dichotomy, individualism, competition, and opposition, identifiable with western feminism" (3). African feminism is a movement that aims to put men and women on an equal footing rather than serving as a platform for radicalism. This brand of feminism does not allow women to create tension in the course of fighting for a better place in society; rather, it advocates for peaceful co-existence between men and women. In other words, there must be peaceful change for progress to reign within family circles and the society at large.

There are also some distinct features that define feminism in the Nigerian contexts. Emmanuel Okey Okwechime identifies liberal feminism, critical or radical feminism and socialist feminism (120). Liberal feminism seeks a non-violent campaign for change, and a holistic reform of key social, political, and economic frameworks to activate an egalitarian and a peaceful society. The division of labor may be changed to achieve gender equality through reshaping important institutions including the law, the workplace, family, and media, as well as by enacting equal opportunity laws. (Okwechime 120). Put differently, liberal feminists emphasise the need for

women to be economically empowered. Liberal feminists are also egalitarian in that they embark on a non-violent protest against the lower and sub-human roles they are assigned which make them second class human beings (Kola Eke 47). Part of the protest mantra is the question and challenge of men's assumed superiority. Radical or critical feminism is more forceful in approach because it seeks total abolition of male-controlled institutions. According to Eke, radical feminists move for total separation from men, and their culture or institution. Like all the forms of feminism, radical feminists locate the problems of the female folks in the society dominated by men. The radicals may need a separate society away from men's influence (56). Okwechime puts it thus: "Critical feminism like liberal feminism, is a rejection of patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labour and social life in general. In addition to a call for the abolition of patriarchy and sexism in the society, critical feminism calls for the abolition of language and expression that devalue or debase womanhood and perpetuate inequality between men and women. (120)

This form of feminism urges women to violently dismantle male domination which stands against women's happiness. The orientation of socialist feminism is quite different from radical and liberal feminism. According to Okwechime:

Socialist feminism accepts Marxian analysis of the oppression of women under capitalism but proceeds beyond Marxian analysis and solution. Socialist feminists see the ownership of the means of production by men under capitalism definitely places men at a higher leverage over women... socialist feminists do not work only to destroy capitalism but they also work to destroy patriarchy. They align with other marginalized members of the society to fight capitalism and its global nature and also fight to destroy patriarchy. (120-121)

Socialist feminism views both patriarchy and capitalism as the banes of women's happiness. They view patriarchy and capitalism as institutions which order society to favour men at the expense of

women. It therefore leans on Marxist orientation to fight and change institutions that relegate women. A close study of the female protagonists in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Victims* reveals that they are radical in their attempts to better their lots. According to Akorede:

Radical feminists unlike socialist and liberal feminists doubted the necessity of including men in their effort to fight patriarchy. They advocated that women must rise up to demand, if need be, forcefully their right to human space of existence. They emphasized the strategy of women only campaigns and demonstrations. They focused on the negative aspects of male-female relationships, including fighting against men's aggression, wrath, and pornography. (39)

Okwechime's and Akorede's assertion on radical feminism is valid. Our study centres on gender politics that runs in marriages and it is obvious that the women presented in the novels under study are radical in their quest for emancipation. Therefore, this essay focuses on how radical feminism plays out in the quests of the female protagonists in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Victims*. In the application of the feminist approach to the primary texts for this study, emphasis is placed on the following argumentative questions: who takes active decisions in the world or society as depicted in the texts? How are the female characters portrayed? Are the women treated compared to their male counterparts? Do the writers project patriarchy or reject it? Are the women given any chance to air their personal views on issues affecting them? Are female characters given or allowed to play leading roles in society? Moreover, the nature of radical feminism in the protagonists' quests is aptly pointed out.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Okpehwo's *The Victims* have received quite a number of critical and literary criticisms which we will review in this section. Joy O. Ogbonnaya carries out a comparative study of *The Joys of Motherhood* and Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*. She points out that Emecheta presents women as docile, weak, and almost incapable of standing

for themselves or to counter men's authority. She observes that Emecheta uses the character of Adaku to project the injustice of society against women with only female children (86). What Adaku lacks in the novel is gained in Penda of Ousmmane's *God's Bits of Wood* in the sense that Penda is determined to solve a problem created by men. Ogbonnaya makes this point, that a woman has only female children, does not make her less human. Oge A. Ikediugwu and Kola Eke also present a comparative study of African Women in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* based on the premise of tradition and marriage in Africa. They focus on the characters and roles of Adaku and Nnuego and point out that "Adaku does not follow tradition blindly as Nnuego does. She seems not to worry herself so much for things she has no power over. She breaks away from Nnaife when life becomes unbearable for her" (151). They submit also that unlike African women who endure the hardship in marriage, Adaku decides to bow out of a marriage that ties her freedom. They do not see Adaku as an extension of her husband but as an assertive mother who fights very hard for her children's survival. Even though she does not have a male child, she does not live at the mercy of her co-wives with male children. She is given a traditional role of a traditional African woman, that of a helpless mother, but she redefines her place in society. While Ikediugwu and Eke's study centres on marriage regarding the roles of the two characters in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the present study focuses on the predicament of Nnuego and her mother right from their homes up to the point of marriage and during their marriages. Marie A. Umeh is of the opinion that "Emecheta presents a far more, well-rounded, and multi-dimensional character, emphasizing the difficulties a woman faces due to her slavish adherence to tradition" (2). She comes to the conclusion that Emecheta is most concerned with the polygamy issue, the rivalry between wives, the unfairness of certain husbands, and the issue of a childless wife and widow in a culture that values fertility even in the weakest of men.

Women in the novels are presented as extensions of men. Daniel Henacho Eluke, however, highlights the problems of a woman in the African society: she is blamed for infertility or

barrenness; she is accused of possessing *Ogbanje* or *mammy water spirits*. He observes that African society does not blame men for infertility problem in any marriage that fails to produce children. This is the first challenge Nne Ego has to overcome in *The Joys of Motherhood*. In his words, “Emecheta captures the travails of Nnu Ego whose marriage to Amatokuwu fails because she cannot produce children. Invariably, the woman is blamed... This is a typical egocentric perception of patriarchy. Amatokuwu, full of pride, blames Nnu Ego for their childlessness. As God so designs it, Nnu Ego proves her ability to produce children in a later marriage to Nnaife” (111). Eluke sees tradition as blind because it sometimes blames people ignorantly. This wrongful indictment of Nnu Ego is a good example of this claim. Without any medical pronouncement, women are accused of infertility.

R. Siva and M. Ramesh explore the perception of motherhood in an African context specifically the Nigerian Igbo society. They explain that the author portrays the agonizing effects of colonisation and oppression and the existence of women in pre- and post-African society. They observe that the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* presents the story of a woman who is caught between traditional Igbo culture and colonisation. The narrative focuses specifically on topics related to marriage, parenting, and gender inequality in traditional culture and society (1167). A number of factors may have contributed to the protagonist’s predicament as Kristine N. Holmes has suggested. In his study, Holmes from the feminist lens highlights patriarchy, colonialism, and the effects of World War II as major issues or forces that work against Nnu Ego in the novel. He is of the opinion that Nnu Ego at some point contributes to her suffering; namely, her failure to come to terms with current realities of westernised Lagos city life and the changing parent-children relationships, as well as her faithfulness to Christianity and traditional African principles. He submits that the author purposely presents Nnu Ego as a limited character that has contributed to her own predicaments (iii). When Zahra Barfi and Sarieh Alaei look at the novel's feminist awareness, they find that the author is criticizing the negative impacts of racism and colonialism

on the lives of African women. Their research highlights the contributions of colonialism, patriarchy, marriage, motherhood, education, and polygamy to the issues facing African women, and it comes to the conclusion that Emecheta used western feminism to challenge male authority during pre- and post-colonial periods and to give voice to the oppressed and marginalized African women.

Onyemaechi Udumukwu and I. Chima Igbokwe examine the use of language in the construction of male's world. Linguistic power is employed by men to recreate women's world. They identify the functions of linguistic choices in the novel: to show preference for male over female children and to highlight the rivalry among co-wives in polygamous settings. They assert that:

The topic of desire for sons or male offspring is brought to the forefront in this social interaction between Adaku, Dumbi, Oshia, and Nnu Ego by Emecheta's linguistic choices at the lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical levels. Think back to the dialogue in which Adaku tells Oshia, "You are worth ten Dumbis" (142). Also take note of how Adaku becomes enraged at what would have been considered a foolish comment like (143) "I am a boy". (294)

The study concludes that language plays a role in the marginalization of women. It can rightly be said that men use language to assert their position in society. Language is an important element employed in shaping society. *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, and *The Joys of Motherhood* are three works by Emecheta that Ernest N. Emenyonu also analyzes stylistically. He observes that she effectively conveys the destiny of the African women stuck in a predicament and her own pessimism through the use of language, which is characteristically exact, deft, and sardonic. He claims that she appears to have philosophically motivated the ladies to reevaluate their positions and accept accountability for their woes and fates (137–138). He learns that the author shows off

her creative prowess through the use of imagery, figurative language, omniscient commentary, and irony, noting that "Emecheta's style is also much more secure and confident" (138).

R.O. Elaho has done a stylistic and comparative study of Dogbe's *La Victime* and Okpewho's *The Victims* mainly because of their similarities of thematic preoccupation and structure. Elaho's observation is that both texts stylistically use dialogue to develop their characters in terms of their emotional, moral, and social dispositions and to "add a touch of irony and humour to their narratives..." (48). According to him, *The Victims* and *La Victime* have a lot in common in that both are novels of protest and of condemnation of certain practices and prejudices in our society. Their characters are victims of polygamy, mixed marriages, racial prejudices and oppression (48). Elaho studies the characters in the novels as victims of societal institutions like marriage and patriarchy. He focuses on the use of narrative devices deployed in the realization of the novels' messages. Devices like suspense, irony and humour are used to point out the challenges of the victims especially in polygamous families. Also, Chinasa Ekekwe sees Okpewho's portrayal of polygamy as a harbinger of disaster for women, as it shows the unhappiness of women who are unlucky to get married to irresponsible men. The story revolves around "Nwabunor" whose husband, "Obanua", marries a second wife after three years of searching for a child with sadness and anxiety tormenting their lives. Their home had once been peaceful, filled with love and happiness until Obanua gets incited by his mother to marry a second wife since his first has only one son, "Ubaka". Ekekwe studies *The Victims* as a protest against the futility of polygamy. Traditional African society favours polygamy as a great and interesting type of marriage. It is depicted as a source of rivalry, jealousy and contention for women. Ekekwe is of the opinion that *The Victims*' portrayal of the problems of polygamy is didactic in the sense that men are advised against numerous wives, that is, they should marry within their limit. Again he explains further that aside rivalry and conflict, there are also problems of immorality as seen in

Ogugua's promiscuous acts with Gwam Odafe; poverty as seen in Obanua's inability to take care of his family rebellion, frustration, and hatred.

Polygamy is problematic for women, as portrayed in both novels. However, men derive pleasure from it, therefore they fully embrace it. Sometimes, when their wives quarrel, they threaten to marry another wife. This informs the title of the novel, *The Victims*. Women who are caught up in the web of polygamy are described as victims of marriage. In the books *The Victims* and *The Last Duty* by Okpewho, Chimdi Maduagwu looks at the problems of ineffective and disempowered masculinities. He uses the terms "incompetence" to refer to internal forces that are developing from within, and "disempowerment" to refer to an external force that is the result of an unfavorable socioeconomic condition (26). Men are created by and for the society in which they perform a socially produced script, according to him. He asserts that "men operate in societies where there are prescriptions as to what they are, who they are, and the roles they must play" (11). It is against this background of social prescriptions and scripts that men are declared (in)competent and (dis)empowered. In other words, the patriarchal society laid down some expectations for men, so that whatever men turn out to be, they are fulfilling societal expectations. Successful ones are competent and empowered whereas some others fail to meet up with the expectations. In his words, "Okpewho depicts men who, for reasons based on irreparable flaws, fail to meet up with norms or societal prescriptions (masculine qualities), and appear as potentially tragic figures" (12). He comes to the conclusion that the guys in the two books are unable to live up to society expectations for masculinity because of their seeming disempowerment or self-perceived inadequacy (26).

The works as reviewed have shown that both texts are rich in feminist ideas and concerns. This fact draws a connection between the previous studies and the present study as the causes of women's troubles are all that have been highlighted, such as patriarchy, polygamy, ignorance, motherhood, and colonialism. However, there is an aspect of the traditional African society that

has been neglected in the reviewed scholarship. That is, the politics of polygamous marriages which entails the interests of both sexes in marriage and the essence of marriages in African society. Therefore, with a feminist lens this study attempts to fill this gap by highlighting the politics involved in polygamous marriages, especially in the Nigerian society and other related African societies where polygamy flourishes.

### **1.5 Thesis Statement**

This essay focuses on how radical feminism plays out in the quests of the female protagonists in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Victims*. It therefore demonstrates that politics in polygamous marriages as depicted in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Okpewho's *The Victims* result in unfair treatments of some wives by their husbands over their cowives, leading to unhealthy reactions from these women, which ultimately lead to adverse effects on the entire family, which plague the society as a whole.

## CHAPTER TWO HUSBANDS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CO-WIVES

### 2.0 Introduction

Polygamous homes in African societies are clouded with unfair or biased treatments to some members of the family. Those considered special are given better treatments by their husbands; thus leaving those who dare to challenge their unfair treatment to severe punishments such as beatings, sexual starvation, and etc. Favouritism and onslaught on daring wives lead to constant marital conflict between partners in polygamous homes.

### 2.1 Favouritism

Favouritism is an unfair or biased treatment given to a person who is considered special. It is very common for husbands in polygamous marriages to favour one wife over others. Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Okpewho's *The Victims* embody instances of favouritism in polygamous marriages. Husbands discriminate against wives who cannot produce male children. The failure of Nnu Ego to bear children at all makes Amatokwu, her husband, to despise her. He gives her co-wife, Adaku, unlimited attention. This discriminatory act is stated in Amatokwu's remark:

I wasn't like this when I first visited you. Oh, how I wish I had the same level of pride as my mother. Yes, when he realized he had enough boys to carry on his line, your father could afford to have an Ona as his treasure. And as for your mother, you are not at all like her. To serve you, I'll do everything I can. As soon as my wife starts breastfeeding our infant, I'll come to your hut. But now, if you are unable to have boys, at least you may assist with yam harvesting. (32-33)

Children are highly prized in African marriages. A woman who fails to bear children is considered a failure and, sometimes, she is reduced to the level of slavery. This is the situation of Nnu Ego in Amatokwu's house. Amatokwu lowers her because of her infertility. Her spouse sends her to his farm to work hard labor rather than spoiling her. Amatokwu's family members completely reject

Nnu Ego after the birth of his kid by a fertile bride. She goes back to her father's house in response to this new event. "Nnu Ego sobbed inside the entire way home. When they arrived home, they were informed that Amatokwu had given birth to a son: "Father, my position as senior woman of the house has been taken by a younger woman, Nnu Ego would lament on her visits to Agbadi's court yard" (32). For being fertile and productive, Amatokwu's latest wife is given a superior right to rule over other wives. Nnu Ego decides to pull out of such a politicized marriage because she has lost her precious place as the first wife. Besides, her husband does not love her any more. Personal interest is thus a phenomenon that rule in polygamous marriages as this example illustrates.

Most husbands give undivided attention to their new or latest wives. This hurts the ego of the old wives who feel cheated and ditched. In Okpewho's *The Victims*, Obanua grows tired of his first wife and as a result, he marries a new one. This unexpected act turns his home and life into a battle ground. He lives with his new wife in such a way that his first wife Nwabunor is reduced to a butt of joke. It is said that where two women are involved in a man's life, politics of favouritism is inevitable. At a point, it is obvious that, "Obanua had brought on something he could scarcely control. Besides, he could hardly conceal his partiality for his new and much younger wife. The arrogance, jealousy, fear, and suspicion gnawed at the household as mice on a human sole..." (9). Like most men who practise polygamy, Obanua cannot share his love equally among his wives. He openly makes it known to his first wife that his new wife, Ogugua, is his favourite. This sets fire on his once peaceful home and in the end, all members of his family become victims of jealousy and hatred.

Similarly, in Emechata's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnaife marries a new wife who has to be with him in his old wife's room. The thought of her husband having intercourse with another woman under her nose shakes Nnu Ego. This is put thus:

Nnu Ego sometimes sat rigidly erect while staring at the shadows of Nnaife and Adaku. She didn't need to imagine what was happening since Adaku made sure she was aware of it. When Nnu Ego could take it no longer, she yelled, "Oshia, stop snoring!" at Oshia, who strangely was sleeping through it all. From the bed, there was a brief moment of stillness before laughing broke out. The comment Nnaife made, "My senior wife cannot go to sleep," made Nnu Ego want to bite her tongue off. Adaku, you need to practice taking joy in silence. Your elderly wife is like a white lady in that she despises noise. Nnu Ego bit her baby's nightgown with her teeth in order to prevent herself from screaming." (124-125)

Nnaife is cruel for taunting the emotion of his first wife with what he does with his second wife. Ideally, he ought to respect her psycho-emotional state; but as a selfish man, Nnaife explores his new wife without any consideration for Nnu Ego's feeling. Having sapped the juicy part of Nnu Ego's life, Nnaife abandons her for a new and fresh woman. The union of Nnaife to two women is so heavily politicized that Nnu Ego observes that "whenever it comes to sacrifice then everyone reminds me about being the senior wife, but if there is something to gain, I am told to be quiet because wanting a good thing does not befit my situation" (124).

A careful study of Nnu Ego's personality shows that she is crafted to reflect submissiveness which African patriarchs or husbands demand of their wives. Her character fits that of an African woman who believes that desires of men must be respected and protected. Her character is in contrast to that of Nwabunor in Okpewho's *The Victims*. She makes way for Obanua to take a second wife; however, she does everything possible to frustrate him. This is contrary to Nnu Ego's reasoning despite complaint: "Nnu Ego accepted her fate, finding solace in the knowledge that her boys would one day become men. However, having her standing diminished to the point that she was almost a maid to a junior wife—and an inherited junior wife at that—dampened her spirit. (161). Her resignation shows that she has given in to patriarchy and

its full force which her husband symbolizes. Feminist movement treasures wife like Nwabunor who stands shoulder to shoulder with her husband and new wife. She disagrees with the reasoning that a new and latest wife should be adorned at the expense of the old one. Just the way husbands have favourites among their wives, fathers sometimes have preferences for a particular child and gender. This kind of preference increases a wife's ego. Nnaife has many sons and daughters, but he considers the education of his first son as paramount. He believes in male children's dominancy. That is, a situation where the first son of a man inherits him. His preference for Oshia is stated thus:

As a proud father, she overheard Nnaife say, "You will go to Hussey. I'll invest my cash in paying for your college education. I still have a hundred pounds in here, he said as he pulled out a little pass book and waved it about. I held off on using any of my money until I arrived in Nigeria. Your college tuition should be covered by this. The other kids won't have their turn until you've finished, though. (186)

Oshia receives his father's sole attention because he is a male child and the first one for that matter. This is against feminist thinking. Feminists believe that all children, either males or females, are equal. Nnaife does not agree to this thinking hence he puts all his savings into his first son's education. His female children are discouraged from going to school because in no distant time, they will be married off. Somehow, Adaku suggests that the twins (females) should be married off quickly so that their bride price can assist Nnaife in educating the male children. There is no form of politicking in marriage that is more unfair than this. A husband or father becomes a marital politician whenever he shows preference for a child over another.

Seen from another way, Nnaife's passion is ruled by his selfish desires. He switches his commitment from one wife to another. Whenever he wants emotional satisfaction, he turns to Adaku, his favourite wife. He considers Nnu Ego as an old stock who should be laid aside for something more refreshing. This passion, however, changes when he needs to make a tough

decision. Upon his enlistment as a combatant soldier, he is requested to name his next of kin. When it matters most, he ignores Adaku and refers to Nnu Ego instead, saying, "When queried about his next of kin, Nnaife supplied the name of his wife, Nnu Ego. He was informed that she will receive the significant quantity of money—twenty pounds—(146). It's not that Nnaife has lost affection for his most recent spouse. Even if he does, he "reckons that by taking the risk, his sons, Oshia and Adin, would be well educated." The three kids of his brother who lived at home in Ibuza would also profit (146). His one-sidedness has shifted from Adaku who bears him only daughters to Nnu Ego who gives him two sons who can continue his name. Nnaife acts like a contemporary politician who decamps to a party that suits his personal interests. He deploys a kind of manipulation used in politics to control his flair for his wives and children.

Favouritism blinds true sense of judgment. In Africa, male children are considered immortal assets for a man. Such adorable children are the parents' beloved choices or jewels, especially fathers; hence a wife who has a male child for her husband is favoured over the one with only female children. It is on this account that Nnu Ego is exonerated over Adaku, her co-wife. They have a misunderstanding caused by Nnu Ego's weakness and frustration about life. The case was ill-decided when it is brought before a clannish council. Adaku is maltreated and this is stated thus:

They were informed of the situation, but instead of placing the entire blame on Nnu Ego, they persuaded Adaku that she had no right to criticize her senior's behavior because the family didn't have a boy. Don't you realize that you, Adaku, the daughter of whatever you are, are breaking an unforgivable offense according to the traditions of our people? She was reminded by Nwakusor. "Immortality is the beginning and the conclusion of our lives. Nnaife's existence on this trip to earth would have ended if he had been wedded to you alone. I am aware that you have kids, but they are females who will go assist another man become eternal in a few

years. The only woman who is immortalizing your husband you make unhappy with your fine clothes and lucrative business.” (166)

Men, either as husbands, relative or in-laws, show tendency of unfair preference. In the absence of her husband, Adaku invites his clannish men to settle a dispute between her and her co-wife. Rather than being fair, these bias men show prejudice in their judgment. Emecheta deploys irony to reveal the twist in the character of men who believe that one woman should be honoured over another. The use of irony reveals the nepotism that has been going on in Nnaife’s marriage. Adaku is certain that she will get justice, but ‘politics’ prevails, and she is denied fair play. This unfair act drives her away from Nnaife’s house. African men value their patriarchy-given position as the sole heads of their family. It is very difficult to see an African husband who is willing to gamble with his right to control his wives at will. Some daring wives, however, challenge their husbands’ rights and this leads to confrontation between husbands and wives. Nnaife and Obanua use domestic violence to check their audacious wives.

## **2.2 Onslaught on daring wives**

Women who dare their husbands, especially in African polygamous homes, are often attacked by their husbands. African men value male children so much that they worship any woman who can give them one. This is the thought pattern of Nnaife. He criticizes his first wife for giving birth to a set of two girls. He describes them as burdens. Nnu Ego cannot refute his rebuke but his daring co-wife does. This hurts Nnaife. The narrator notes that:

Nnaife laughed aloud as he would when confronted with an impossibility, "Nnu Ego, what are these? ", when he learned that his wife Nnu Ego had two girls at the same time upon his return in the evening. Couldn't you have performed better? Where are we all going to sleep, huh? What food will they have? You will start singing a different tune in twelve years, when their bride prices start coming in,"

Adaku adds, grinning widely as though she didn't want to offend anybody. Nnaife did not admire the audacity of this woman. (127)

Nnaife sees Adaku as a young wife with unrestrained audacity. He is a patriarch who maintains that husbands should lord it over their wives. Nnaife beats any of his wives that offends him, especially through confrontational acts. Obanua cannot be compared to Nnaife because he wields less patriarchal power on his wives. Alcohol abuse weakens Obanua such that he cannot control his personality. Whenever he wants to beat his wife, it ends up in a case of 'two fighting'. During a brawl between Obanua and Nwabunor, the reader is told that Obanua:

Felt his manhood insulted and angrily made to force his way through the door. She lost her stance and was startled into fury, and in anger grabbed his shorts tightly, breathing hard, eyes a glare. He tried to force her hands away and in the process two buttons snapped off, and his bristles showed. At this moment a neighbour greeted and in anger and shame he pushed madly back into the room and they both landed with a thud. The shorts were down to the knees and he was almost naked. (11)

Okpewho uses humour to satirize Obanua's failure to thrash his wife as he promises to do. The physical entanglement between the duos reveals the absence of peace and orderliness in Obanua's household. Subsequently, neighbours are entertained by their constant quarrels. Somehow, Obanua's attempts to use force in controlling his household fails.

Patriarchy is a powerful force that makes a man a lord over his wife. Traditional African men do not want their wives to challenge their authority. Any courageous woman who attempts to check her husband's excesses receives severe punishment. This claim is affirmed in the conversation below in which Nnaife beat Nnu Ego for daring to talk him into getting a job. By this time, Nnaife loafed lazily about doing nothing to their want for money to feed. Nnu Ego takes it upon herself to push him to go look for money (91). When Nnu Ego has the gall to challenge

Nnaife's manhood in the family, Nnaife feels threatened: "If you don't stop that screaming, I'll hit you." Nnaife became enraged and struck her in the head with the guitar he was holding. He was being yelled at by Nnu Ego. (91)

Nnaife, though poor, sees himself as a man who should be honoured by all, especially his wives whether or not he is able to cater for his home. Nnu Ego attempts to encourage him to get a new job at all costs but Nnaife picks offence in her approach. Her threat to report him to soldiers if he hits her becomes a foreshadowing of him getting a space in the army. It is ironical that both Nnaife and his wife fear the military such that they distance themselves from soldiers. But circumstances work out so that Nnaife joins the army when he least expects it. He is sent out to serve in World War II against his family's wishes. "If you hit me again, I'll call the soldier in the street," Nnu Ego said. (91) comes into manifestation. Rather than fighting his wife, the government invites him to fight at a worldwide scene of war. Emecheta uses irony and foreshadow to project into Nnaife's future career.

Nnaife's constant use of force produces a negative effect on his wife, Nnu Ego. She is caught up in a web of city life where husbands receive less respect compared to their counterparts in Ibuza village. Being a stubborn man, Nnaife beats her so often that her personality is altered. Outsiders eventually catch on that Nnu Ego has become more pliable due to her husband's cruelty. Iyawo Itsekiri observes that Nnu Ego has "mellowed by the constant beatings from her husband, she had become apathetic and she was always cautious and doubly sensitive" (105). Nnaife's deployment of domestic violence boosts his supremacy as the head of his home and tames his wife's ego.

Okpewho's *The Victims* reveals that there is a constant marital conflict between partners in polygamous homes. This fierce competition in a polygamous home is not between co-wives alone but also between stubborn wives and their husbands. Having gone through the torment of marital relegation for a while Nwabunor stands up to defend her rightful place as the first wife in

Obanua's house. She confronts her husband in order to challenge whatever it is that gives him the right to marry another wife. This results in an onslaught that nearly claims her life. Her horrible experience is stated thus:

And when he and his first wife fought, tonight every blow carried with it all the abandon that defiance and despair could put into their hands. The storm outside increased in its fury. There was no other noise around, except for the helpless crying of Ubaka. 'You will have to kill me tonight,' she gasped back. The struggle took them through the length and breadth of the room, under the bed, against the door, legs up, heads down, hands on the groin and against the throats, eyes upon wife as death. When they felt tired again they retired, threatening, swearing, cursing while the rain shot down its darts as though it meant to pierce the thatched roof. (9)

Obanua enjoys relative peace with his first wife Nwabunor, but the moment another woman is brought in, Nwabunor constantly tackles her husband's authority. The novelist deploys climatic imagery to reveal the force of Obanua and his wife's quarrel. The raging storm symbolizes trouble in that home. The intensity of their physical combat is reinforced by the storm which seems "to pierce the thatched roof" (9) of their house. Traditionally, African women are known to be submissive to their husbands. Nwabunor is, however, a deviant. She fights to hold her place in her husband's house. As a radical feminist, she sees her husband as her equal, so she engages him in marital duels. Their individual character traits show that they as husband and wife do not share the same view about polygamy.

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo enjoys a great authority over all his wives. The fear that he can kill at will throws his wives into eternal fear; hence, they are cowed by his headship. Okpewho, on the contrary, dwells on a type of polygamy where a wife can challenge her husband's audacity to marry another wife at will. Okpewho's *The Victims* is therefore an

indictment on polygamy in Africa. It reveals that a radical wife can tackle her husband where necessary. Nwabunor always confronts her husband whenever he exhibits a strange or bias behaviour. Her characterization depicts her as a storm which can withstand any tree, no matter how huge and tall it is. Elaho notices that Okpewho's *The Victims* is written in contrast to many African novelists' stand on polygamy. He explains that "unlike some African writers before and after him who have tended to rationalize and idealize the institution of polygamy, Okpewho set out in *The Victims* to show and dramatize what he considers to be the dangers associated with polygamy. Right from the beginning of the novels, the reader is given an insight into the ugly situation in Obanua's household" (46). Elaho's claim is valid because the portrayal of polygamy in the narrative is disheartening.

The primary purpose of polygamy is to foster unity and to boost the productivity of a family. This purpose has, however, been defeated due to constant conflicts and failure of patriarchs to uphold their households firmly. Obanua makes mockery of polygamy because he shows that he is not capable of managing it. Contrary to Nnaife who makes effort to support his family, Obanua displays a high level of irresponsibility which portrays polygamy as a child's play. At the height of his patriarchal control, Obanua beats his wife and she almost passes out. Upon his return from work, he is shocked to see his wife lying helpless. This scenario reveals the extent of Obanua's onslaught on his wife:

And I say you are a very shameless man. You almost beat your wife to death and leave her fainting behind you, and you have the mouth to ask me to tell you what is wrong with her. I am quite satisfied taking care of myself and my own children and God bring fire upon whoever wants me to put my head into what does not concern me. I say you should be ashamed of yourself. (171)

Obanua beats Nwabunor to a point of death and this earns him a disrespectful remark from his younger wife. She, unlike her co-wife, resists any act of violence against women. Okpewho

deploys her character to react to the battering of women. She is a feminist force crafted to fight against patriarchy which Obanua represents. Okpewho adores her with a revolutionary spirit which makes her radical.

### **Conclusion**

While Obanua and Nnaife stand for typical African patriarchal heads that lord it over their wives, Adaku and Ogugua depict radicalism. They battle their husbands so as to assert their individual freedom. It is revealed that husbands in polygamous homes have soft spot for particular wives. This increases conflicts between disapproved wives and their husbands. It is equally noted that biased husbands use violence to check daring wives. Okpewho's *The Victims* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* reveal husbands' attitudes and treatments of co-wives in polygamous homes.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REACTIONS OF WIVES TOWARDS POLYGAMY

#### 3.0 Introduction

In polygamous homes, the seeds of jealousy and rivalry are most often planted in the hearts of the wives. which later become the foundation of bringing up their children. A set always feel oppressed, cheated and disfavoured; thus, they are always envious of those they feel are favoured by their husband. This envy clouds their sense of judgement, making every act and achievement a competition amongst them.

#### 3.1 Jealousy

Maturity and experience do not prevent a wife from jealousy, especially if she sees that her husband's new wife is better than her. Upon her arrival, Nnu Ego dislikes her husband's new wife. Her hatred for the new wife is strong such that her son perceives it. As stated in the narrative,

Nnaife was ecstatic with his luck. He led Adaku, his new bride, around the yard while beaming like a child given a new toy. To celebrate her safe arrival, he purchased some palm wine and showed her several things. He claimed her daughter as his own and made a promise to care for his family as if it were his own to his deceased brother. He dialed Oshia and identified the young child as his sister. When will they return to their origins, Father? wondered Oshia, who thought that his mother disliked his new sister and her mother. (121)

Nnu Ego's resentment for her co-wife is shown the very moment they meet. She is jealous of her prime or youthful body which greatly appeals to their husband. Worse of all, Nnaife shows an unstrained affection for this new wife. This provokes Nnu Ego to be jealous and her son does not fail to see it and rebuke his stepmother. In her reaction to Nnu Ego's jealousy, it is stated that, Adaku chuckled, allowing herself to laugh for the first time since coming that morning. It was a very persuasive sound that informed Nnu Ego that they would work together to find a spouse as

sisters. As Mama Abby entered the room, she entered the kitchen while still giggling. (123). As earlier mentioned by Adankwo, Adaku is very ambitious, hence, she was prepared for Nnu Ego and whatever it was that her envy would translate to. The jealousy of Nnu Ego gets to its peak when duty demands her to lay bed for her husband and his new wife:

She quickly entered and kept herself occupied by entertaining guests who had been coming all evening to visit the new wife. As Nnu Ego made her own bed for Nnaife and Adaku, she had to hold back her emotions. It was a good thing she was set on portraying the older wife because she wasn't going to cause herself any emotional pain when it was time for Adaku to sleep on that bed and they were all ready to go to bed. (123-124)

The psychological effect of sharing her husband with another woman, under her nose, turns Nnu Ego into a bitter woman. She sees Adaku as an emotional blade that fate has sent forth to cut off the bond between her and her beloved husband. Hence, the stage of rivalry is set for Nnu Ego, and she is to works very hard to get rid of her new threat.

Okpewho in his narrative, *The Victims*, does not fail to point out the danger of jealousy that exists among co-wives. There is relative peace between Obanua and his wife Nwabunor but the moment Ogugua, a new wife, joins them, things go wrong in their family. Nwabunor sees Ogugua as a rival who has come to pull down her happiness. This shoots up her jealousy for the new wife and hatred for her husband. Normally, there are things Nwabunor does for her son without bothering her husband. She, however, requests him to do these things, so as to reduce how much he spends on his new wife and the children she brings from a previous marriage. Obanua is stubborn; he refuses to yield to his wife's demands. This leads to a new dispute between them:

The fight attracted considerable attention. Ubaka had woken and he caught sight of the fighting. He ran to the scene of the struggle, watching helplessly as the familiar fury took its course. In fright he burst into tears and ran this way and that for help.

He ran into the room of Ogugua, Obanua's young wife, but she warned him not to bother her saying that the trouble has nothing to do with her. The fight dragged on.

Their clothes were practically in shreds and there was shame on their bodies. (12)

The jealousy between Ogugua and Nwabunor is strong so much that they seek each other's downfall. Ogugua wants Nwabunor out of her husband's house; hence she does not care if she is killed in a dispute. Nwabunor's son, Ubaka, runs to Ogugua for help but she does otherwise. Her personality and reaction to Ubaka's plea portrays her as an archetypal wicked stepmother. Stepmothers are generally known to be wicked towards their co-wife's children. Ogugua's behavior towards Ubaka confirms this claim.

The wave of jealousy is not between Adaku and Nnu Ego alone, Adankwo, Nnaife brother's senior wife also hates Adaku. She knows her to be over ambitious, while they both share Nnaife's late brother as husband. She does not trust Adaku, consequently she incites Nnu Ego thus:

My daughter, that is accurate, but are you there to inform him of it? What if Adaku stole the money and all the items he brought from abroad? Remember that she wants a boy badly and that you already have three. You ought to be present to see that everything he brings back is used effectively. You are the father of the boy who grew up to be a man. Adaku's folks, not those of her husband, will come for her body if she passes away today. With you, it's different. (159)

While Adakwo and Adaku are sharing the same husband in Ibuza, the former has known the latter as an overambitious wife. She, therefore, incites Nnu Ego to tackle Adaku who is now sharing her husband, Nnaife, with her. Inspired by Adankwo's incitement, Nnu Ego uses her sons to taunt Adaku who has none. According to the narrator:

Nnu Ego started behaving in this manner as the months went by. She exerted all of her efforts to make Adaku envious of her boys. She actively sought out opportunities to use her children's full names, convincing herself that she was

getting even with herself. When the two ladies got into small fights, Ubani, Nwakusor, and their other friends were generally brought in to mediate. (162)

Male children are very dear to African patriarchs; hence any wife who can produce them for her husband is worshipped. Nnu Ego has two for her husband and this automatically sets her above her co-wife Adaku who does not have any. Nnu Ego parades her sons before Adaku so as to reduce her self-worth. This increases the fire of their jealousy and the hatred that finally tears asunder their relationship.

Okpewho and Emecheta use their narratives to expose the ills of polygamy, that is, co-wives' reaction to sharing a husband's affection. Jealousy is portrayed as an emotional disorder that drives a wife to hurt her co-wife with whatever comes to her mind. The two narratives reveal that a polygamous home is not safe for all the parties involved (husband, co-wives and children). From time to time, all the parties engage in cold war or sometimes, open confrontation. The conflict in the narratives revolves around the undue competition between co-wives. The novelists are able to sustain the theme of jealousy through the narratives' conflict. A relationship that starts in a simple way becomes complex such that the husbands, Obanua and Nnaife, cannot manage their homes again. Moreover, the novelists assert that marrying many wives does not bring happiness. Irony is used to explore this. It is ironical that Obanua and Nnaife get disappointment instead of the happiness they seek by marrying more than one wife. Unknown to them, more wives mean more troubles. In the case of Nnaife, he dwindles financially such that he cannot take care of himself let alone his large family. He becomes frustrated to the point of severe depression. Nnaife's sense of reasoning is beclouded by his financial woes and in the end, he makes an attempt to kill his daughter's lover. This lands him in jail. In the case of Obanua, he becomes a drunkard to the extent that he can no longer reason well. Under his nose, his younger wife, Ogugua, cheats on him. He becomes a psychological victim of polygamy. Upon the exit of his first wife and the death of his second wife as well as children, he becomes a loser of everything.

The jealousy that exists between Nnaife's wives spreads to his children. They are jealous of one another, especially any lucky child who gets a good deal of their parents' attention. This is revealed thus:

Mother, why though? Don't I also merit assistance? Is being a second son a fault of mine? Oshia owns everything in this home. The best of everything must be his. Mother, you yield to his every whim. Sometimes I think we the rest of your children don't exist for you at all. Adim sobbed with frustration. Without Nnu Ego uttering a thing, his rage then returned as fast as it had come. He appeared to be conversing with himself. I'm planning to attend a secondary school. Even more than that, I'll train to become anything other than a foolish railroad mechanic. You'll see, mother, that I will. I will. (190-191)

Sibling rivalry makes children, either from the same parents or different parents, envy one another. The progress of the one favoured by parents' turns others into paranoids. Adim and Oshia are children of the same father and mother, but Adim perceives that he is being cut out of their parents' attention, which he reacts to. He accuses his mother of favouritism and this strains the cordial relationship of all the family members. At a point in their relationship, Oguagua almost creates discord between her son and his stepbrother. This is put thus:

Ubaka snatched the stick away and the little boy began to cry. From somewhere in the back of the house came the stern voice of Bomboy's mother warning Ubaka to leave her child alone and not molest the poor thing this morning. This rather hurt Ubaka who, used though he was to the domestic warfare, endeavoured with all juvenile purity to keep his fraternal love above the storm. God knows I meant no harm, he thought. And bending down over his weeping brother he tried to clean his eyes. (55)

For Ubaka's maturity, tension would have been created between the two step brothers. Co-wives' jealousy and rivalry spread to children, especially those from separate mothers.

### 3.2 Contentious rivalry

Co-wives always contend with one another for so many reasons. This is simply one of the effects of politicizing the affairs of a home with different wives. Okpewho and Emecheta depict the horrible effects of rivalry in their narratives. In *The Victims*, Nwabunor and her co-wife, Ogugua battle themselves on a daily basis:

All days are for the thief, but one day is for the owner of the house. Will all this trouble not get settled the day I see this mischief maker with my own eyes? We shall see. God knows that my son will never be found doing a thing of this nature... the other sprang up with theatrical agility, 'Let me make this clear to you this morning. You have been trying to make all kinds of subtle references to me and my children and trying in your usual way to drag us into guilt over your sardines. Let me-' 'Did you hear your name?' retorted Nwabunor. 'Did you hear your name?' (61)

They squabble over domestic affairs which can be simply solved if they were not co-wives. This goes on to confirm the notion that co-wives see polygamous home as a battle ground. Okpewho carefully crafts Nwabunor and Ogugua such that they have opposing personalities. They hardly agree on a common decision; as a result, they look for a way to quarrel at all times.

Emecheta also reveals that co-wives are mortal enemies; therefore, they struggle over their husband's attention and resources. Nnaife returns from the war with a fortune which further adds a feather to the cap of his patriarchal authority. So he decides to marry a new wife apart from the ones he inherits from his late brother's harem. The reaction of his first wife is stated thus:

Nnu Ego did not attempt to conceal her disgust this time. She objected to sleeping in the same space as this new female and all of their kids. She had seen her doctor

and the hospital nurse who always assisted her while she was pregnant, and they both concurred that it appeared as though she was carrying another pair of twins. The question is, "Where are we going to put them all?" She yelled at her husband and the girl since she believed that both of them would soon begin reproducing. You have brought another person despite the fact that my five children and I only have one room to share and I'm expecting two more children. (184)

Nnu ego is annoyed that her husband brings in a new wife who may likely compete with her. She complains of limited space, but it goes beyond that. Okpo, the new wife, is just sixteen years old and with her youthful charm, she can easily displace Nnu Ego. The fear of this increases her psychological tension. In a traditional African society, old wives see new ones as help mates, so, they welcome them. They promote clannish harmony which boosts polygamy. Nnu Ego's cold reception of Okpo denies the above assertion. It reveals hostility that goes with polygamy. Going by Nnu Ego's attitude towards Okpo, it is obvious that no woman likes to share her husband with another woman who is always seen as a threat to existing happiness.

A polygamous home is a battlefield for wives, so every wife looks for a way to nail her co-wife. Nwabunor and Ogugua's quarrel takes a new dimension. Nwabunor discovers her co-wife's infidelity and uses it to spite her. She confronts her thus:

Are you telling me that? The other lighted up. Are you saying that to hide yourself? So you think the whole town does not see how you go about putting yourself on hire because your husband's house is not big enough for you? Please don't let me unfold my tongue on you- I don't want to say anything. Me? You think I have the time to waste watching you while you go about your journeys? Not me! Envy and jealousy! That is what has left you in the state you are in today. (62)

Obanua's irresponsibility forces his younger wife, Ogugua, to seek extra-marital affairs. Nwabunor seizes the knowledge of this to taunt her. This fuels the anger of Ogugua and increases

her hostility towards her co-wife. Thus, the household of Obanua is depicted as a political entity where one party looks for the fault of the other and uses it against its progress. Ogugua heightens her hostility for her co-wife and this leads to a bloody game. While Ogugua merely increases her hatred for her co-wife, Nwabunor goes spiritual. She consults a medium with the view to ending the life of her co-wife. She represents the spiritual side of a home, while Ogugua represents the physical side. The contention between them shows that they live like light and darkness within an enclosure. Okpewho uses Nwabunor's character to reveal the extent a woman can go just to protect her interest in a marriage. Nwabunor takes her battle to her stepchildren. She verbally assaults them by calling them thieves. That is, after her confrontation with their mother, she battles with her children whom she sees as dangerous allies their mother uses against her economic progress. They recount the abuse thus:

‘Have you done what I asked you to do? Ogugua asked. I was getting ready to put water on the fire when Ubaka's mother started accusing us of stealing her sardines. Now don't let me see you again wasting your time on a useless argument when you should be doing what I asked you to do. If anybody calls you a thief you should call that person a thief also and do what you are doing, and let the person direct her attention to me. Now go ahead and do what I asked you and don't let me hear your voice again both of you. The two girls exchanged glances, feeling more vindicated than reproached. (83)

Under a normal circumstance, Nwabunor is also the mother of Ogugua's children but the hatred between her and their mother separates them. She treats them like forbidden humans or condemned criminals. Ogugua dares Nwabunor to direct her attack at her. High tension revolves around the wives and children of Obanua yet he cannot control it. Patriarchy and polygamy as social institutions empower a man to be in charge of his household. Perhaps Obanua thinks he can take charge of his large family, but he fails however, since there is a daily occurrence of quarrels

in the household. Nwabunor holds that Ogugua's arrival is the cause of her distress in Obanua's house, as she says "for over one year now I have borne alone the burden of his upbringing in spite of the suffering that this has brought upon me. Why I should be subjected to all this torture just because of the presence of some other woman in this house?"(16). A Polygamous home is always contentious and this has been fully demonstrated by Okpewho's *The Victims*. It is common for wives to trade abuses. In reaction to Nwabunor's insinuation, Ogugua responds thus, "let no one mention my name this morning, or else she will have her fill of all the trouble she has been asking for. Do you hear me? I don't want my name brought into this matter; otherwise we shall all see fire with our eyes this morning" (16). It is sad that Obanua's wives cannot live in peace and harmony. They set fire of quarrel on the house and this keeps Obanua away. From their conducts, it is obvious that wives in a polygamous home are more of rivals or opponents than helpmates.

Clearly, the wives of Obanua are portrayed as political opponents contesting for the attention of their husband. In contemporary politics, opponents go to the extreme to achieve a goal. Similarly, Nwabunor's jealousy translates into open confrontations between her and her co-wife Ogugua. When it becomes clear to her that she cannot continue in the struggle, she resorts to spiritism. Her seer gives her a dangerous portion that ends her rival's life. This is stated thus:

Nwabunor had been breathing fast, poised motionless over her enemy's pot of soup, when she saw that all was quiet again she sighed briefly in relief. Then quickly she loosened the fold of her wrapper and brought out the calabash phial. She untied the cork, removed it, and emptied the contents of the phial at once into the soup. She quickly replaced the phial under the fold of the wrapper. Then she picked up the pot's metal lid and covered the pot again. (178)

Without a second thought or regard for humanity, Nwabunor poisons the food of her co-wife. She can, hence be described as a ruthless politician who believes in do-or-die affairs in her polygamous marriage.

As it is in tensed political settings, Nwabunor eliminates her co-wife and her children just to retain her place as the first and only wife of Obanua. Ma Nwojide visits her son's home and it shocks her to see almost an entire family wiped out. The effect of the poison is put thus:

She laid a hand on the woman's arm. Cold as a fish. She felt her breast. No beat. A sudden shock ran through her. She stared in dumb silence. As a last test she pushed one of Ogugua's eyelids up with anger. The cold piece of flesh slid passively back. 'What am I seeing?' She screamed, as she stepped back in terror. She shook all the children one by one. Their bodies merely rolled back and forth in lifeless response.

(190)

This evil act is abominable, but Nwabunor considers it the best way to eliminate her opponent. Without doubt, Nwabunor's action shows that polygamy is a kind of political ground where wives see themselves as opponents.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

As argued, the novelists employ the subjects of jealousy and contentious rivalry to elucidate that polygamy can pollute the minds of those involved, to the extent that they lose themselves to anger. Emecheta and Okpewho's treatment of polygamy shows that it sometimes harbours unhealthy rivalry. The type of polygamous families the novelists present differ from traditional type of polygamy. The settings and occupations of Obanua and Nnaife reveal that they are city dwellers, therefore, their type of polygamy runs in contrast to that of traditional or village setting where husbands actively take control of home affairs. A good example of this is described in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where Okonkwo and his friend successfully run polygamous homes. Emecheta and Okpewho portray polygamy as a tragic marital system.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **EFFECTS OF POLITICIZED POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGES ON THE FAMILY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The act of irresponsibility on the part of most polygamists towards their wives and children is usually their undoing, leading to catastrophic consequences in the home. Failure to man up to their responsibilities always leave their families dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction often leads to the disintegration of the family.

#### **4.1 Irresponsibility**

Men in politicized polygamous marriages end up being irresponsible. Polygamy is a tasking family life and this requires that a man is up and doing. At a point, it becomes obvious that Obanua and Nnaife can no longer manage many wives due to financial constraint. It becomes difficult for them to cater for the needs of their several wives and children. This results to tough time and constant quarrel. When it becomes clear that Nnaife is less responsible to his wife, Nnu Ego challenges him thus:

What source do you want me to use, exactly? What about the beverages you purchase? We could all have a supper for the price you paid for a keg of palm wine. "I would have given you a lesson this evening if you weren't the mother of my sons. Don't push me though, or I could end up doing it. Who pays for this space? How did you get here? You believe that being rebellious is OK simply because you sell a few awful cigarettes. What does the conflict have to do with me? I didn't start it. Nnaife, I won't respond to your insult. You're hungry, and it's believed that a guy who is hungry is also furious. I won't say anything further; except to remind you that the money we are asking for is to feed your children not to buy ourselves lappas." (135)

Most times, men with many wives push a good part of their responsibilities to their wives. Each wife is expected to fend for her children, though any one lucky gets a little support from her husband. This heightens the politics that controls such a home. Nnaife hates the audacity of Nnu Ego who authoritatively asks him to live up to his responsibility as the bread winner of his home.

The setting of the narrative is in a city; hence Nnaife's financial strength fluctuates as prices of goods change. A comparison between his type of polygamous home and those of his counterparts in villages shows that polygamy somehow thrives better in a traditional society, where houses are cheap and farm produces are surplus to feed unlimited number of people.

In traditional societies, polygamists are dependable and bold such that they do not run away from family challenges. It is disappointing that the polygamists Emecheta and Okpewho present in their narratives fail to uphold their homes because they cannot overcome their weaknesses. In *The Victims*, Obanua also behaves like Nnaife. He abandons the upkeep of his son to his wife because he feels that every wife in a polygamous home ought to look after her own children. This is expressed thus in an argument with his first wife:

You can think what you like; she replied, 'but you are not stepping out there until I have your son's fees in my hands'. 'I told you last night and I am telling you again this morning I have no money.' 'You lie!'

'Well, come and strip me then and take the money, since you think I'm lying'. 'To tell you the truth, 'she said, 'rather than that I should continue to bear alone the burden of bringing up a child that you call your own, I am going to strip you naked this morning whatever that will cost.' (10-11)

Obanua is portrayed as a useless husband who does not know the role of a responsible father. Subsequently, his wife tackles his failure as a husband and father. By avoiding responsibilities, it means that he is not fit to run a home with many wives and children.

Circumstances beyond Obanua's control compelled him not to cope with his polygamous wishes, thus subjects his son to child abuse or forced labour. His son, Ubaka cannot afford to pay his school fees, so he goes out in search of a daily job. His step brother, Bomboy's curiosity reveals how Ubaka intends to spend his pay when it comes. He asks,

Ubaka, will they pay you a lot of money today?, asked Bomboy. No, not today. But they will pay us a lot of money...What will you do with the money? I will... I don't know. I will give it to mama. Will you give her all of it? Yes. Will you not take some of it? She will probably give me some. She will pay my school fees with it. Will papa not pay your school fees? Papa says he has no money. But papa buys many clothes. I don't know. There was a brief pause. (68-69)

It is not bad for children to support their parents' effort to educate them. It is good, but it should not result into force labour. Ubaka is made to act in the capacity of a mature adult. He is not like his father who lacks focus; he works very hard with the view to empowering himself with education. He sees education as a weapon and he fights vigorously to acquire it. Okpewho uses his character to contrast his father's. He can be likened to Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Like Okonkwo, Ubaka works very hard so that he does not end up miserable like his father.

Ideally, men ought to work very hard and provide basic needs for their families. If this is put in place, no husband will be sent out of his house by his wife to look for food outside his home. Obanua suffers this for being an irresponsible man. A barmaid insults him thus over his irresponsible life, "... Have you got something for a hungry stomach? He made an effort to say. Come, what have you got wives for? How can a big bull like you be scrounging food every time? I have never seen a shameful thing like this. She sat down on a chair and yawned away listlessly. 'Please let us not talk about that now,' Obanua pleaded. 'Can't you give me something to bite?'" (30) This is a low life for anyone to live. Obanua is depicted as a scavenger that feeds from leftovers in people's wastebins. At the brink of death occasioned by hunger, he is offered a leftover, 'bring the yam here with a little oil and salt. It is better than nothing' (30). There is nothing noble about this type of life. What this reveals is that Obanua does not have what it takes to keep two wives. Okpewho writes this narrative to show that polygamy goes beyond marrying many wives to boost patriarchal ego. Most times successful polygamists plan to take new wives as

their wealth increases. On the contrary, Obanua cannot do this because he has little or nothing to support himself how much more two wives with children. His failure reveals that running a polygamous home requires a high sense of duty. In addition, it is important to note that patriarchy goes beyond being a man. In other words, it is not all men who can control women. Obanua's wives do not respect him because his personality is nothing to reckon with. His constant drunkenness makes everyone around to despise him.

Obanua's irresponsible life makes him a butt of joke to both his wives and neighbours. His character reveals that any man who fails to control his appetite for alcohol may lose his sense of reasoning; hence his personality will be demeaned by people around. It can be said that Obanua is a victim of alcohol. Nnaife also takes pleasure in hot drinks. He relieves his tension by spending whatever he has on alcohol. For example, when he is informed that Nnu Ego gives birth to twins; two girls, Nnaife's reaction is put thus, "He cleansed himself before joining his buddies for drinks. He said, "We are asking for is to feed your children and not to buy ourselves lappas." He didn't even offer their names. (127). Children are gifts from God, so it does not lie in the power of any woman to determine the gender of her unborn fetus. Nnaife's alcoholism destroys his reasoning power such that he abandons a core duty he owes his newly born children. Nnaife fails to see reason in living a healthy and responsible life. He spends all his savings on drinking and he also keeps late night. Instead of taking good care of his family, he spends his life catching fun in bars. Emecheta uses humour to satirize Nnaife's worthless life. The guitar he plays symbolizes distraction, which makes him lose his sense of reasoning.

#### **4.2 Dissatisfaction**

Women in most politicized polygamous marriages are dissatisfied. The two polygamous homes shown in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Okpewho's *The Victims* experience restlessness and frustration which make their patriarchs to lose interest in their marriage. The same

goes to their family members. At the height of Nnaife's discontentment, he expresses regret for ever marrying many wives and having many children. It is expressed thus:

She was reminded by Nnaife that the kids were her kids. "Will they still think about me when I'm old? No, all they'll recall is their mother. Additionally, have you not observed that women live longer than males do? Why therefore should I forego finishing my day's work to please a son who has spat in my face? Nnu Ego sobbed heartbroken tears. But she received no response. It was not transferable. "When I see my coworkers, I occasionally regret having so many kids. Now I question whether it was all worth it, she reflected to herself. She saw that Nnaife had started referring to them as her offspring, whom she had given birth to in order to murder him before his time. (202)

Nnaife's unhappiness stems from his inability to cater for his family needs. Perhaps he did not know that having many wives and children means greater challenges and responsibilities. Now that he knows, he deeply regrets what he has gotten himself into as a man, without the means to fulfil his manly duties materially speaking.

In traditional societies, polygamists are dependable and bold such that they do not run away from family challenges. It is disappointing that the polygamists Emecheta and Okpewho respectively presents in their narratives fail to uphold their homes because they cannot overcome their weaknesses. Obanua also behaves like Nnaife. He abandons the upkeep of his son to his wife because he feels that every wife in a polygamous home ought to look after her own children. This is expressed in his arguments with his first wife who constantly has to fight him to get money for their son's fees.

Obanua is portrayed as a useless husband who does not know the role of a responsible father. Subsequently, his wife tackles his failure as a husband and father. By avoiding responsibilities, it means that he is not fit to run a home with many wives and children.

The minute Nnu Ego loses interest in their position in Nnaife's home, their friendship begins to deteriorate. Then, "as the months went, Nnu Ego started to behave in this manner. She exerted all of her efforts to make Adaku envious of her boys. She actively sought out opportunities to use her children's full names, convincing herself that she was getting even with herself. When the two ladies got into little arguments, Ubani, Nwakusor, and other acquaintances were typically brought in to mediate the conflict (162). Nnu Ego makes life unbearable for her co-wife and this erodes her happiness. The essence of being a wife in Nnaife's house is defeated by their clannish elders. Unimpressed by the elders' judgment, Adaku decides to abandon Nnaife's house. She puts it thus to her co-wife:

"So Adaku, what are you going to do?" What I've been waiting to do for you. Leave this vile space. Why should I continue to put up with this when Nnaife and his followers don't want me? He was upset with me when he returned from leave because I had gone to bury your father. He was offended to learn that you valued your father more than he did, and he blamed me of failing to stop you. He thus just came to my bed as a backup plan. (168)

Somehow, Adaku has a good reason for leaving her marriage. Traditionally, African women are always enjoined to bear whatever happens to them in their husband's house. Adaku can no longer bear the thought that she means nothing to her husband and his Ibuza people. Nnaife alongside his people politicized their perception of her; hence she opts to abandon her matrimonial home. This is a classic example of radical feminism. Radical feminism encourages women to abandon their marriage if it does not suit them again. Adaku acts in line with this revolutionary idea. She has a

prosperous business which enables her to emancipate. She leaves oppressive patriarchy behind so that she can enjoy her freedom. There is a close link between characters and setting. The setting of Lagos does not resemble that of Ibadan that has the power to curtail a woman's freedom. In Lagos, Adaku meets different women who have successfully achieved a lot in life without husbands. This radical thinking propels her to excuse herself out of Nnaife's house. She lives independently the very moment she becomes tired of her marriage to Nnaife.

Cooking and eating together is one of the hallmarks of communal life in Africa. No matter the size of a family, everyone ate together. This communal habit fosters unity and it enables heads of families to study each wife and children. Obana's failure to provide for his family forces his wives to cook and eat separately. It is noted that "the children are eating what food their mothers had managed separately to organize for them" (84). The word "separately" connotes disunity in the family. Cooking and eating separately stand in contrast to what African polygamous families are known for. In traditional African societies, patriarchs ensure that all wives and children eat and drink together. Such acts prevail over individual selfishness and they give heads of families the power to rule over the interests of different parties. Obanua cannot understand why his family members should eat separately:

He is dissatisfied with this. He rose from bed and went to where Ogugua was busy with her machine. He called her and asked her to follow him into the house. Reluctantly, she complied... 'Ogugua', he began. The other merely listened. 'Starting from today, I want you to resume cooking for the whole house for the rest of this week. After that Nwabunor takes up. Let it all be as before. Do you hear that?' She waited for him to finish and then she turned her head slowly towards him. 'Have you finished? If you have, tell me, because I'm busy... Please don't worry me this evening.' She walked away. Obanua rose angrily after her. 'Do you think this house can contain you and me?' He fretted. (85)

Obanua is unhappy about the crack in his family. That is, the fact that his wives cook and eat separately worries him. His attempt to reverse this fails. The same problem is also present in the house of Nnaife. This troubles Nnu Ego the most:

Even while Nnu Ego attempted to resume their previous practice of having everyone dine together—including her children, Adaku, and her two daughters—she realized that it would no longer be possible. Adaku was suddenly extremely wealthy. She spoke about sending her two girls to private lessons to learn their alphabet even though she had not yet done so and they were not enrolled in any school because she only had two daughters to support. Beans, pepper, dried fish called egusi, and other spicily prepared items were piled high on Adaku's stand at the Zabo market. She would spend the entire day in the market. Coming in late at night, it was pointless for Nnu Ego to wait for her; also, Adaku did not request food when she returned, indicating that she and her children most likely ate at the market. (161)

Nnu Ego fails to amend the crack in her family because her co-wife is tired of sharing food from the same pot with her. Her financial emancipation gives her the independence she needs; hence she cooks and eats her own food. Emecheta and Okpewho call attention to the assumption that praying together is not the only force that binds a family. Eating together does this too.

As a concerned mother, Obanua's mother is dissatisfied with his marriage. Without consulting his son, she dissolves his marriage with Nwabunor when it becomes obvious to her that nothing can be done to save his marriage from terrible collapse. She addresses her son thus over her decision to send Nwabunor away:

'Well,' she continued, 'you may carry on as you and your spirit have decided. You can run your own life into fire if it suits you, let it be upon your head alone. You

shall not have the chance to take somebody else along with you. Your wives have been fighting each other and Nwabunor is now laying half-dead. I have warned her that I will not want to see her with my eyes tomorrow morning if God gives her the strength to rise from bed. If she is going to die she deserves to die in better hands. You may do what you like with your own life.' *Ifuah!* She spat again. (173)

Obanua is a failed husband because he loses his sense of control over his own life and those of his wives. As a responsible husband, he ought to take charge of his home by ensuring relative peace reigns among his wives. He does not possess any form of control over them because he has failed them. His mother is dissatisfied with his low form of life; therefore, she takes a firm decision over the fallen state of Obanua's home. Most of the people involved in polygamy, especially the wives and children, are dissatisfied with the happenings in their homes.

### **4.3 Disintegration**

In politicized polygamous marriages, the family members suffer disintegration. A man as a husband is the head of his family. As a head, he has the duty of keeping his home together. Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Okpewho's *The Victims*, however, display polygamists who cannot sustain the unity of their homes. Under their noses, their family oneness crumbles. Obanua's children love each other but their parents' quarrel dissolves their bond. Bomboy and Ubaka are stepbrothers, in fact, their father's only sons. They live under the same roof but live separately due to their mothers' endless hatred. This hatred is very strong such that they could not share anything together without being reprimanded. This is put thus:

If a morsel fell off Bomboy's hand onto the ground, Ubaka would screw his face at him in a playful mockery. But then he would seek to relieve the little boy's frustration by offering him a morsel from his own plate. Before Bomboy stood up to accept, he would first look towards his mother and she would merely return a brief and unhelpful glance that seemed to say, *I Won't* ask you not to, but whatever

happens to you will be your *own problem*. Yet Bomboy would be unable to resist the temptation, and after a brief hesitation, would walk up to his brother and accept the kindness. (85)

Ubaka and Bomboy believe they are one so they share everything together. Their relationship, however, hits the rock due to their mothers' differences'. Children have free minds and this selfless quality makes them live and play together despite disagreements. Eating and playing together strengthen children's bond. It is ironical that it is eating together that will end Ubaka and Bomboy's lives for Ubaka's mother poisons Bomboy's food which both brothers eat. Constant quarrel brings disintegration in a family. Nwabunor and Ogugua are forced to live apart and this affects their children's relationship. At the point of departure, "Bomboy tried to hide his sobbing. But it finally burst open and he cried until he was finally whisked away to be by his mother who beats some more weeping out of him because he could not leave other people alone to mind their business" (176). Parents ought to bind children together but in Okpewho's *The Victims*, parents are shown as agents of disunity. That is, co-wives' rivalry affects their children's relationship. Okpewho's message is that parents, especially co-wives, must unite to raise their husband's children. They will all be victims of their own wickedness, especially if they expose their children to it.

The bond between Obanua and his second wife, Ogugua, tears apart and she distances herself from him. The marital space between them forces her to seek extra-marital affair. As gleaned from this gustation stated thus, "She was anxious to finish off all the work in time to get away from the house and go out. She was now increasingly spending most of her time outside. Her house could not contain her and she had discovered that she could very well obtain her happiness elsewhere: so now she was hurrying her stuff with determined urgency, thinking, I told him I would come this afternoon. I hope I can finish off all this in time and be able to get off" (58). Ogugua and her husband's constant misunderstanding further expands their relationship gap. At

the peak of this, Ogugua entangles herself with another man. Infidelity destroys the sanctity of marriage. Ogugua, however, takes to it when she becomes tired of her husband. That is, his irresponsibility drives her to seek love and care from another man. The separation between Nnaife and Adaku and the unfairness she encounters in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* push her into the sex trade. Unexpectedly, Adaku says, "My chi be damned! I intend to engage in prostitution. I won't be visiting Ibuza. To make some of our guys who return from the battle happy, I'm going to move in with those women on Montgomery Road. (168). This is a marital sacrilege because it insults the sacredness of marriage. One of the effects of dissatisfaction in marriage is infidelity or separation. Much as it is abominable to justify Adaku's actions, Nnaife too can be blamed for her decision to go into prostitution. On the contrary, her fellow Ibuza people blame it on Lagos:

Adaku's decision to abandon her responsibilities and assume a public role quickly became known across Lagos. The unfaithfulness of women was celebrated by Ibuza males; "leave them for ten minutes, they transform into something else." Many others blamed Lagos, claiming that it was a fast-paced city that could corrupt even the most innocent of females. Women trembled at the thought of such a terrible scenario. They traveled to Nnu Ego to get the latest information about it. Most people were shocked when she said there had been no argument and Adaku had just chosen to go. (170).

The departure of Adaku from Nnaifa's house severs all the ties that bind her to him. She lives an independent or free life which enables her to choose what suits her most. Sometimes, radical feminism encourages women to go to the extreme in their bid to earn freedom from patriarchal control. Adaku displays immoral radicalism in the quest to overcome discrimination and subordination.

The departure of Nnaife to jail signals the final fall of his family. He over-reacts when he hears that a Yoruba man is courting his daughter. He attempts to butcher the secret lover and before he knows the next line of their action that awaits him:

Nnaife's nightshirt, which had been loosely wrapped around him, was ready to come off and expose his nakedness as they were loading him into the waiting police vehicle. "Please, please, wait!" Nnu Ego yelled while trembling with passion. Nnaife stood still while Nnu Ego securely knotted the lappa, adding an extra knot to ensure that it would not fall off no matter how much he was pushed or jostled. We'll constantly make an effort to conceal your nakedness, Nnaife; may your chi help you. Nnaife watched in silence as the Black Maria was slammed shut before being driven away. (211)

The separation that follows Nnaife's shameful departure to jail is terrible. Kehinde leaves home for good and Oshia who travels abroad goes without a thought of coming to his father. The family members split with hatred in their minds. Obanua makes a bold attempt to reunite his family but this meets a stiff resistance. This is revealed in the conversation between him and his second wife. Although he tries to make her resume cooking for the entire family, this is impossible because he is unable to make financial provision for the meals. Ogugua is not ready bulge. This is really insulting, that is, for a wife to treat her husband like trash. Ogugua's treatment of her husband shows that he has lost whatever respect he commands from his wife. His poor commitment to his family affairs brings about disagreement and this in turn dissolves his family's oneness. Okpewho uses the cooking together to commend on the place of sharing together in a polygamous home. A polygamous home is a mini community headed by a patriarch. In a communal society, everybody does everything in common. The home of Obanua is however, devoid of such oneness that binds a community. He fails to uphold the unity that is central to running a polygamous marriage. Nnaife

too is guilty of this. He treats his children and wives with a high level of unfairness. This ruins his home and drives him into deplorable state of mind.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

No home can survive when the head is irresponsible. This irresponsibility shatters the home and pushes the victims to make impulsive and unwise decisions. Naife and Obanua's irresponsible acts finally crumble their homes and destroy the lives of their wives and children.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

There is an element of politics in man which he transfers into his daily activities. Marriage is one institution that has been heavily politicized. The study examines the portrayal of politics in the polygamous homes presented in Emecheta's *The Joys of motherhood* and Okpewho's *The Victims*.

Most African men, especially the polygamists among them, deploy political strategies in running their home affairs. Obanua in *The Victims* and Nnaife in *The Joys of motherhood* run polygamous homes for different reasons. In their respective capacity as heads of their homes, they resort to partiality and assault when dealing with their wives. Nnaife for instance often favours his young and exciting wife and thrusts burden on the old one. Nnu Ego is Nnaife's eldest wife and he assigns sacrificial roles to her, while he pampers Adaku. In fact, he sometimes hits Nnu Ego in order to drive fear into her. Thus, his onslaught depicts him as a ruthless politician or patriarch who believes coercion is a possible way of getting people under control. Obanua is a husband with limited financial power; as a result, he lacks the economic strength or what it takes to be partial towards one wife over the other. He cannot provide for his needs let alone his wives.' This turns his home into a battle ground. He fails to realize that sometimes a man may need both physical and economic power to affirm his patriarchal authority. He is, therefore, always at logger heads with his wives. Ogugua, his younger wife, has to cheat on him so as to satisfy her needs. Nwabunor loses out on Obanua's favour and from time to time he beats her. It is this horrible situation that forces her to quit her matrimonial home.

A close reading of the two novels under study shows that jealousy and rivalry are some of the reactions of co-wives in a polygamous home. Adaku and Nnu Ego compete for Nnaife's attention. Their unhealthy rivalry drives peace out of Nnaife's home. The moment Nnu Ego discovers that she cannot easily attract Nnaife's attention, she uses her sons as baits to get Nnaife. With this strategy, the politics in Nnaife's marriage takes a new dimension. Nnu Ego has two sons,

Oshia and Adim; while Adakuh has only girls. She uses her sons to hook and control Nnaife. For example, Nnaife is compelled to invest the entire money he brings from war into Oshia's education. This development is meant to spite Adaku. In the case of Obanua's wives, Nwabunor and Ogugua, self-destroying jealousy and hatred rule each wife's heart. Their relationship as co-wives is built on arguments, quarrels and bitterness. At the peak of their rivalry, the daughters of Ogugua are enlisted to fight against their step mother. They loot Nwabunor's grocery store until she goes almost bankrupt. Most times, they enjoy watching Obanua beating her. In her surprising reaction, Nwabunor poisons their food and an entire family is wiped out. This ironically affects Nwabunor because her son, Ubaka, eats from the food his stepbrother Bomboy gives him.

It is discovered that the failure of men to handle their homes well leads to crisis. Obanua and Nnaife politicize their marriage which results to irresponsibility, dissatisfaction and disintegration. Just to punish an erring daring wife, Nnaife and Obanua abandoned their wives and children. They indulge in heavy drinking and other forms of merry making that put holes in their pockets. In the case of Obanua, he becomes a butt of jokes wherever he finds himself. His irresponsibility makes his wives not to cook for him nor share his bed with him. Most times, he eats leftover in bars where he drinks on credits. Nnaife also leaves his household in wants, while he roams the street of Lagos in the company of any lay about like him. Obanua's and Nnaife's irresponsibility create dissatisfaction in their marriages. Their wives like Adaku and Ogugua, prostitute to make ends meet. At this point, separation is inevitable. Nwabunor out of malice causes a permanent separation between Obanua and Ogugua. She poisons her and her children before she returns to her parents' house. The household of Nnaife also shatters, while he goes to jail for attempted murder.

It is necessary at this point to underline the point that a significant finding of this essay is that polygamy is not an easy marriage to run. Obanua and Nnaife seem to be groaning under the weight of polygamy which they consider to be a remedy to their marital challenge. The latter part

of their lives indicates that they are weak. One striking thing that is noted is that there is a difference between polygamous homes in rural areas and the ones in the city. For instance, there seems to be harmony and stable family life in the polygamous homes presented, for example, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. They are set in rural areas and the husbands live up to their marital responsibilities. The polygamous homes in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Okpewho's *The Victims* are set in cities and husbands are presented as failures.

Rivalry is a common problem in a polygamous homes but one does not think it should degenerate into consuming jealousy. The wives of Nnaife destroy his home with their jealousy. They quarrel over every little issue and this depicts polygamy as an unhealthy marital union. Obanua's case is the worse. His wives permit resentment to rule their passion and in the end they all become victims of their reckless thinking and misguided actions. It is equally noted that parents' disputes, especially co-wives', affect their children. The children of Obanua and Nnaife see themselves as oppositions; hence they compete unnecessarily. If the two polygamous families presented in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Victims* are placed on the scale of feminism, it is obvious that feminism is against polygamy and patriarchy. This essay therefore holds that *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Victims* depict polygamy as an unhealthy marital union.

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