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The Modern Opinions Regarding Polygamy of Married Men and Women in Dakar

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The Modern Opinions Regarding Polygamy of Married Men and Women in Dakar

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction and Historical Context	3
Methodology	9
Findings/Interviews	11
Monogamy	11
Polygamy	13
Results and Analysis	21
Misgivings	24
Challenges	25
Conclusion	25
Works Cited	27
Interviews Cited	29
Appendix A: Questionnaire	30
Appendix B: Time Log	31

Abstract

Polygamy is the practice in which a man takes multiple wives. While it is no longer legal in certain countries, it is still allowed both legally and religiously in Senegal, and is still practiced today. Traveling to Senegal from the United States, one might find that the opinions toward the practice vary by country. This study was conducted for three purposes. The first purpose was to define polygamy in a Senegalese context and discover how married men and women in Dakar regard the practice. The second was to determine whether these opinions vary based on gender, length of marriage, ethnicity, and whether subjects were in monogamous or polygamous marriages. The final goal was to ascertain whether western ideals or Islam practices and traditions have a stronger impact on these opinions, and how they are influenced by each. Over the course of this research project, fourteen men and women were interviewed and answered questions about their marriage and thoughts on polygamy in Senegal. In this study, they are used as representations of the general married population of Dakar, Senegal.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Anthropology, Religion, Ethnicity

Introduction and Historical Context

In order to study the current situation and opinions of polygamy in Dakar, it is important to first understand its history and how it has evolved over time. Before the arrival of Islam, polygamy was much more prevalent in Senegal, in that there was no limitation on the amount of wives a man could have. Keba Mané, a language teacher in Dakar, explains that “the primary activity of our ancestors was agriculture. In order to cultivate the land, you need a lot of hands. So the more numerous your family is, the easier it is to exploit the fields, to produce a lot...and to feed and support your family.”¹ In this way, having more wives and more children allowed for a man to be more successful.

It was not until Islam became an overwhelming presence in Senegal that men could only marry up to four women and rules were established in order for a man to keep these four wives in healthy marriages. This version of polygamy is modeled after the prophet Muhammad in the Qur’an. Ndiaya Ndiaye explains that “when Islam came, the prophet, Muhammad, saw—Islam saw—that there were injustices. People were killing women, women were thought to almost be slaves. And he...tried to regulate it.”² The limit was set to four wives, and men were commanded to treat their wives equally. Barbara Stowasser explains that Muhammad was never lustful, and the reason for his taking multiple wives was neither for pleasure nor for material luxuries. She explains that the “clearest proof of the Prophet's freedom from base instincts (especially lust)...are the historical facts of his celibacy until his twenty-fifth year and his monogamous marriage with a woman fifteen years his senior to whom he was completely devoted until she

¹ Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 22, 2013.

² Ndiaye, Ndiaya. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 15, 2013.

died.”³ She also notes that the marriages that followed his first wife's death were due to the necessity of political alliances and to protect women who were struggling to stay safe.⁴ With this, the Senegalese learned through the Qur'an that the reason for taking another wife would not be because of lust or desire.

Mané thinks the way polygamy was regulated was done very effectively. He compares it to quitting smoking: It is easier to tell a man to switch from a box of cigarettes a day to five cigarettes a day, than to suggest he immediately cuts himself off from cigarettes completely. The man will struggle much more to complete the process of quitting if he tries to quit on the spot. Similarly, if Muhammad had asked men to stop practicing polygamy altogether and marry only one woman, it would have been much harder than it was to have a set limit of four wives. At the time, men may not have followed Muhammad, and polygamy would have continued to thrive as it did then. Mané notes that limiting men to only one woman would have been disadvantageous to women as well. Islam does not allow for women to have sexual relations outside of marriage. Since at the time of the prophet, women were much more numerous than men, this would have left women unmarried and unable to fulfill their natural needs.⁵ In this way, limiting men to four wives, rather than merely one, worked for both men and women. It helped regulate the practice, but did not leave men frustrated or women without the opportunity to marry.

Today, at the time a couple presents themselves in front of a civil state officer for a marriage certificate, the husband chooses whether he would like to be monogamous or polygamous. Once the decision is made by the man, it is set for life. Therefore, if the husband

³ Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. (1994) *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press. (122)

⁴ Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. (122-123)

⁵ Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 22, 2013.

originally chooses to be monogamous, he cannot later decide to marry more wives. In choosing polygamy, a man can opt for two, three, or four wives. Having four wives is known as *integral polygamy*. If he chooses to eventually have two wives, he may never seek three or four wives. If he tries to take another wife when he is not supposed to, he could be fined between 20 000 CFA and 300 000 CFA (equal to approximately \$40 to \$600), imprisoned, or asked for a divorce.⁶ He does have the option to marry fewer times than he originally chooses.

The wife may refuse to sign the marriage certificate if she does not like her husband's decision, making it difficult to make the marriage official. Even so, the civil state officer does have the ability to override this refusal. If no decision is made at this time, polygamy up to four wives is still an option for the man.

In Senegal, polygamy is more popular in rural areas.⁷ For the sake of this study, only the opinions of those in Dakar will be discussed, where polygamy is not as common as other areas.

Family Code

The Senegalese Family Code was passed on January 1st, 1973. In addition to Islam, the Family Code also regulates the practice of polygamy. The Family Code limits the number of wives a man can have to four. It also states that the man is the chief of the family. An imam⁸ of Dakar explains that “it is the husband who buys the house, it is the husband who supports his family. All of these reasons are to say that the husband is the chief of the family.”⁹ While this is true, the imam mentions that things are starting to change as well. Women are starting to work as well, but

⁶ CECL. (2002) *Guide des Femmes-Les Droits des Femmes Sénégalaises*. Point E, Dakar: Centre canadien de coopération internationale. (23)

⁷ Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 22, 2013.

⁸ Leadership position in Islam

⁹ Diagne, Abdoulaye. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 25, 2013.

they do still play a greater role in educating the children, cooking, and doing household work.

Marriage Today in Senegal

Comprehending polygamy also requires the understanding of why people feel the need to marry in the first place. In Senegal, a man can marry at age 18 and a woman can marry at age 16.¹⁰

Most subjects defined marriage as the union or link between two people. Mané added that “the concept is much larger in Africa, in the Senegalese culture...It is the union between two families, not simply two people. That is the definition of marriage...There is not a marriage between just a couple. Generally it is the whole family that is involved.”¹¹ Since Senegal is approximately 94% Muslim,¹² one should also look at the way Islam defines marriage. In Islam, there are four fundamental tasks a husband must complete for his wife. Imam Abdoulaye Diagne, explains that these four are as follows: A man is obliged to find lodging for his wife, he must provide her with food and other necessary items, he must satisfy her sexually, and he must assure her enough clothing.¹³ Given these two definitions, marriage in Senegal can connect families, but it also requires many responsibilities on behalf of the husband.

Divorce in Senegal today

One might wonder as to why a woman would accept sharing her husband with one to

¹⁰ Code de la Famille. “Code de la Famille Senegalais.” Accessed November 15, 2013. <http://www.justice.gouv.sn/droitp/CODE%20FAMILLE.PDF>.

¹¹ Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 22, 2013.

¹² Enquete Demographique et de Sante Continue au Senegal (EDS-Continue) 2012-2013. “Rapport final liere annee.” Last modified July, 2013. Accessed December 3, 2013. http://www.ansd.sn/publications/rapports_enquetes_etudes/enquetes/EDS-continue_2012-2013.pdf.

¹³ Diagne, Abdoulaye. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 25, 2013.

three other women. Based on the interviews conducted, there seems to be two major reasons a woman would not divorce her polygamous husband. First, in the Family Code, there are ten reasons a spouse may ask for a divorce. Since becoming polygamous is not listed as a justifiable reason, it is not legally recognized as a cause for divorce without consent. It is a different matter if the husband then mistreats his first wife, but simply taking another wife is not considered a reasonable enough cause for divorce. Second, women can be very hesitant to leave their husbands if they do not make their own means or if they have children. One polygamous woman, explained that, while she was deciding whether or not she wanted a divorce from her husband who had just married his second wife, her daughter's grades dropped and her desire to work was lacking because she thought her parents would no longer be together. She explains that divorce can have a very strong effect on children, and cases such as this can be a large part of the reason why women decide to stay with their husband in the end.¹⁴

If a husband and wife do divorce, but only in front of an imam, the divorce is not legally recognized. This means that “the wife, when the husband dies...can present herself and say she is still his wife, because there is no certificate of divorce, there was no judgment. In other words, the role the imam plays here, we did not give him the possibility to have complete control, because of Senegalese law.”¹⁵ In this way, there are times that Islamic laws and Senegalese law do not agree, but in these cases, Senegalese law must be followed.

Polygamy today

Although some men say that polygamy is commanded in the Qur'an, according to Islam:

¹⁴ Fall, Mariama. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, December 2, 2013.

¹⁵ Diagne, Abdoulaye. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 25, 2013.

Polygamy is first of all an option. It is not an obligation. It is an option that god gave to men. Each individual is free to choose whether he wants to be polygamous or to stay monogamous. If [one says he wishes] to be polygamous, religion permits [him] to marry multiple wives. If [he says he wants] to be monogamous, religion says that that is a choice.¹⁶

Men who do choose to be polygamous must abide by the conditions: to not exceed four wives, to have the means to support all of his wives and children, and to not favor any one wife or treat them unequally. The only exception to the condition of having four wives was when slavery existed in Senegal. If a master were to have sexual encounters with his slave and she became pregnant, she would no longer be his slave, but instead a wife, even if he already had four. This was a way for Islam to protect slaves, but as slavery has almost completely disappeared in Senegal, this is no longer applicable.¹⁷

¹⁶ Diagne, Abdoulaye.

¹⁷ Diagne, Abdoulaye. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 25, 2013.

Methodology

Since this study focused largely on opinions, it required the conducting of many interviews. As mentioned in the previous sections, the focus was to determine the differences and similarities in the opinions based on the following factors: gender, length of marriage, ethnicity, and participation in a monogamous or polygamous marriage. Therefore, fourteen people were interviewed with the following characteristics:

Gender	Men	7
	Women	7
Length of Marriage	Younger (Unmarried/less than 10 years)	5
	Middle (10-20 years)	6
	Older (More than 20 years)	3
Ethnicity	Wolof	4
	Serere	2
	Other	4
Marital Status	Not married	1
	Monogamous marriage	9*
	Polygamous marriage	4

**Of the five men in monogamous marriages, two opted for monogamy, and three opted for polygamy up to four wives.*

Interview Subjects

Older woman, over thirty years, Serere, Polygamous (second of two wives)

Older woman, 46-47 years, Wolof, Monogamous

Younger man, 5 years, Wolof, Monogamous (opted for polygamy up to 4 wives)

Woman, 9 years, Lebou, Monogamous

Man (Imam), 9 years, Lebou, Monogamous

Man, 9 years, Serere, Monogamous-opted for polygamy

Younger man, 4 years, Mandingue, Monogamous

Man, 18 years, Lebou, Monogamous-opted for polygamy up to 4 wives

Older woman, 10 years, Serere, Polygamous (first of two wives)

Younger Man, 5 years, Jola, Monogamous-opted for polygamy up to 4 wives

Younger woman, not married, Soninke

Woman, 9 years, Wolof, Monogamous

Woman, more than 10 years, Wolof, Polygamous (first of three wives)

Older man, 29 and 7, Lebou, Polygamous (two wives)

According to the EDS¹⁸, Senegal has more than twenty ethnicities within its borders, with the Wolof ethnicity making up 43% of the population and the Serere ethnicity making up 15% of the population.¹⁹ In order to hear the opinions of people of many different ethnicities, interviews were arranged based on three categories of ethnicities: Wolof, Serere, and other. For the categories of gender, length of marriage, and type of marriage, a search of a relatively even amount of people who fit these descriptions was conducted. In this way, the potential to learn if these opinions differed based on these factors was accessible.

All interviews were conducted and recorded in French, and transcribed and translated by the author. All quotes in this study are a rough translation written by the author.

¹⁸ Enquete Demographique et de Sante Continue au Senegal

¹⁹ Enquete Demographique et de Sante Continue au Senegal (EDS-Continue) 2012-2013. "Rapport final liere annee." Last modified July, 2013. http://www.ansd.sn/publications/rapports_enquetes_etudes/enquetes/EDS-continue_2012-2013.pdf.

In addition to conducting interviews, the author participated in discussions with a group of brothers who grew up in a home with four mothers. They described their childhood life with a polygamous father and how they each now feel about polygamy. Additionally, online blogs and articles, usually written by non-Senegalese authors, were read in order to gauge a sense of the way the Western world depicted polygamy in West Africa. Furthermore, literary research was conducted, which included the reading of the *Code de la Famille* (Family Code), and *For Ourselves—Women Reading the Qur'an*, in which women interpret the traditions and customs explained in the Qur'an. Other books on polygamy, women, and gender roles were also used for background information on the practice and its history.

Findings/Interviews

There are three main arguments in the Qur'an as to why polygamy should exist. These themes were repeatedly discussed in interviews, and can be used to aid one in understanding why polygamy is still practiced in Senegal. Barbara Stowasser explains the following about polygamy:

[It] protects the older, sick, or barren wife from divorce while ensuring progeny for the man who may take a second young and healthy spouse. Secondly, polygamy is the most equitable solution to demographic problems in times of war, when soldiers are killed and there are not enough men to ensure marriage and motherhood opportunities for all females.²⁰

She adds that the third reason for polygamy is to decrease the possibility of extramarital sexual relations. Although times have changed, these ideas are still very present in the opinions of

²⁰ Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. (1994) *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press.

beliefs of the men and women interviewed in Dakar.

Monogamy

Role of women and men

Although it varies by family and situation, the roles of women and men are generally as follows. The woman is responsible for the household work. Her role is to “educate the children, take care of the children, take care of [her] husband and family, and to be in charge of [her] children's education.”²¹ The husband, on the other hand, finds work to support his family, plays a small role also in educating his children, and is the chief of the family.²² The husband “works to support his wife, to give her everything. He assures her food, clothes, and a place to live.”²³ While this is the traditional way of living, with the husband at work and the wife at home, living is also changing as women begin to work as well. The responsibilities start to become very similar.²⁴

Monogamy: How it can play a negative role

In Wolof, one of the main languages spoken in Dakar, there is a saying used by some men to justify polygamy:

Kun yu dul ay ay lo ay dal nala.

This expression means, “If you don't change households, misfortune will fall upon you.” In other terms, if you do not take more than one wife, you will not be happy. Other sayings such as this

²¹ Fall, Mariama. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, December 2, 2013.

²² Diagne, Abdoulaye. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 25, 2013.

²³ Ndiaye, Iba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 19, 2013.

²⁴ T., B. Interview by the author. Tape recording. November 20, 2013.

one are pro-polygamy, encouraging men that they would be happier being supported by multiple wives. Some people also believe that polygamy is better for the wife as well. One monogamous man, who opted for polygamy, explains that he wants to be polygamous simply because he knows his wife, although brave, has a lot of work to do. He feels “it is difficult for a single wife to take care of the household. She can be tired, and not have a lot of time.”²⁵ Likewise, a polygamous woman explains why being a monogamous wife is much more difficult:

It depends on the man of the family, because there are women in monogamous marriages who have a lot of problems managing their time, their families, and work. There are even women—because [our organization] handles violence against women—there are even women who come tell us that in their families, problems are created simply because they chose with their husband to now be in a monogamous marriage. Therefore, the environment plays a negative role sometimes...And there are ones who have problems being free, because they are obliged to go take care of the family, or to manage other details in the environment of the family of their husband or of their own family.²⁶

There are also advantages to a monogamous marriage in that a wife does not have to share her husband and the trust between a husband and wife has less of a chance of being broken.

However, some Senegalese, men and women, do feel that being in a polygamous marriage can be beneficial to the man and woman.

Polygamy

Roles of women and man

²⁵ Ndiaye, Iba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 19, 2013.

²⁶ Ndiaye, Ndiaya. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 15, 2013.

In a polygamous marriage, the man and women still have many of the same roles. However, since the husband is spending his time equally with each of his wives, the week is managed differently. One polygamous woman, the second wife of two, says she deals with her two days, when she must prepare the meal for the family. The husband buys the food and she works with the maid to cook and serve the food on Friday and Saturday, and her co-wife does the same on Sunday and Monday. On Sundays, she has time to visit her family. She enjoys living this way because it gives her time to herself and her own freedom. She explains her decision:

I chose polygamy to have time, because when you are in a monogamous marriage, I feel you do not have enough time for yourself. I wanted a husband who could come two days, and I'm free for two days. I am free. To have my time to myself, to see my parents, to do leisure activities, and therefore, to be a woman with a free mind. Besides being religious, I wanted to be free, to not be my husband's love all the time. No. Marriage, for me, there's work and there's the marriage, and there's the family...I am a free woman in my mind. I like liberty. And I think if I was in a monogamous marriage and my husband tightened the rules a little at the house, I would not be able to do it. I would not be able to because mentally I am not ready to be a wife to be managed, who receives orders.

Absolutely not. I am an intellectual woman, who is free-minded, so I do not think I could manage very well in that situation.²⁷

Polygamy: What opting for polygamy can mean and why men want to do it

Since there are conditions for the polygamous man, things can sometimes be a bit difficult. For instance, Iba Ndiaye says that we cannot treat wives differently, yet there is usually

²⁷ Ndiaye, Ndiaya. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 15, 2013.

a wife that a man secretly prefers. This could lead to him treating his wives differently, which could lend itself to further problems. Additionally, if one does not have the means to be polygamous, it can be very difficult to maintain both marriages and families. He explains that, “everything you buy for one of your wives, you have to buy for the other. On Tabaski,²⁸ you have to buy two sheep. It is a rule...If you have three wives, you have to buy three sheep...And if the wives do not live together, each month you have to buy food for both families.”²⁹

Given the financial or emotional hardships that a man might face in a polygamous marriage, one might question why a man would opt for polygamy. Another monogamous man who opted for polygamy explains that opting for polygamy “is better than monogamy because I know people who opted for monogamy and regretted it...because you are young and do not understand life. You are young, your wife is young, you don't have kids yet. Your whole life is your wife.”³⁰ Reasons such as this make some men opt for polygamy without the specific intention of becoming polygamous one day. They simply wish to leave the option open for themselves in case they change their mind or expect to view the world differently at a later date.

Polygamy: Negative aspects for women

Although a polygamous marriage might give a woman more freedom and time to herself, there are also many negative consequences that can arise. For instance, a first wife might become upset when the money her husband gives to her family is cut in half so that he can support his new wife. Sometimes the second wife also moves into the home that the first wife and her husband created together. In addition, depending on the age a man remarries, he might be too old

²⁸ Muslim holiday of atonement during which sheep are sacrificed

²⁹ Ndiaye, Iba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 19, 2013.

³⁰ F., M.S. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 20, 2013.

to take good care of his children and their education. One polygamous woman, the first of two wives, puts it simply, saying, "When [your daughter] is 20 or 25 years old, you might not still be there. And even if you are still there, you cannot do much for her...You are so old, what will the young girl become?...Having a lot of kids at such an old age, the wife will not have a lot of money to educate them."³¹ In other words, men who marry a young woman when they are at a much older age may not live long enough to provide good support for the children of his second marriage.

Another consequence of polygamy is that it can lead very easily to jealousy, and even violence. One woman explains her story in which she became overcome with emotion and acted unlike her usual self: Her daughter came to her one day and told her she thought her father had a new girlfriend. The father had picked the daughter up from school and they had stopped at a house where she saw him with another woman. The subject's husband already had a second wife, but the daughter insisted that her father had a girlfriend as well. Her story is as follows:

The next day...I was going to cook him lakh.³² And he said, 'Oh, can I get the milk for you?' And I said yes. And I thought, 'Why did he want to do that for me? Perhaps because he wants to go somewhere.' So I took a taxi and I followed him. Because my daughter had described the house...So I followed him and I came right in front of the house. And I didn't see my husband's car, but I got out of the taxi to stay and see when he would come back. And maybe thirty minutes later, my husband came back with the woman. They were together in the car. And in that moment, frankly, I did not really think. And I did things that I will regret for my entire life. I hit the car and the windshield shattered, and

³¹ S., F. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 29, 2013.

³² Meal of millet mixed with yogurt

I hit the woman too. Perhaps I should have hit my husband, not the woman. She did not do anything to me, it was my husband who did it. But in that moment, I did not really think and I hit the woman. And there was a lot of blood. Her parents came. One of her brothers wanted to attack me but my husband said, 'Please, do not do anything. She is a woman, you should not hit her.' So when we came back to the house, the next day, one of my husband's parents told me that the woman's family was pressing charges. With her injury, they gave the woman a medical certificate of 21 days. And in Senegal when you have a medical certificate of 21 days, the person who caused you the harm can go to prison. And I think if my husband did not intervene, I may have gone to prison. So the woman's family called my husband and said, 'We have a medical certificate for 21 days. There are two conditions. One, you marry her and we will let it go with the police. Two, if you do not marry her, we will continue to pursue your wife and she will go to prison.' That I honestly did not know. It was after that my husband's uncle told me. He said, 'You know that your husband had a third wife because of you.' Maybe it was something he wanted as well, because why would he have been seeing her? But it is honestly something that I regret. I am not an aggressive person. Not at all. But in that moment, I did not really think. And I was really very, very angry because of the situation. After that and now, I have a much better relationship with the woman. Her oldest girl is [named after me]...And during vacation she comes to my house and my children go to her house. Now we have a good relationship.³³

Having to share your husband with other women can affect woman's emotions to a point that they act out in such jealousy and anger. However, violence is not the only way in which women react. Some women use mysticism to cause harm to their co-wife or her children. In other words,

³³ Fall, Mariama. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, December 2, 2013.

women can seek out a Marabout, or Muslim monk, to put a curse on the other wife or her family. For instance, the same woman had a very strange event occur once her husband married a second woman. She received a phone call one day from the principal of her children's school, informing her that her children had not come to school for three weeks. The principal had assumed the children were sick, while the woman had assumed that, as she left the house at the same time the children did in the morning, her children had been attending classes as usual. The fact that they had not been to class surprised her because her children enjoyed learning and worked hard. They were not the type of students to skip classes. Upon returning home, she found her children and demanded an explanation. They told her that they did not understand what was happening, but that they would leave for school in the morning, but in front of the school doors, they would turn around, feeling a strong sense telling them they could not enter the building. The woman called her mother, who told her to see a fortuneteller, to interpret the meaning of the situation. The fortuneteller explained to her that a spell had been cast on her children in order to make it difficult for them to continue with their education. He also mentioned that now that the woman had discovered the spell, it was now broken, and once she washed and purified her children, they would be able to return to school. She did as the fortuneteller told her to do, and her children returned to school. To this day, she believes that the second wife, out of jealousy, had gone to a Marabout to cast the spell on her children.

Polygamy: Negative aspects for men

In addition to having the large responsibility of supporting multiple women and children, men can have additional problems in a polygamous marriage. One polygamous woman, the first

of two wives, believes that no polygamous man is happy. She says the process goes as follows:

For the first one, you say you will leave and come back. She lets you do that, mainly because she no longer wants to see you. And there you lose the grand love. And with the second, you do not have all of the same capacities you once had, so you cannot satisfy her...And what does she do? She abandons you. Because she is disappointed. All that she thought you had you do not....The first no longer loves you, and the second no longer loves you. You find yourself between a rock and a hard place...And you are left unhappy...So there are a lot of consequences for the man and the women. Women will manage with it. A husband will do what he does.³⁴

Whether this is completely true or merely a speculation, it is clear that in a polygamous marriage, the man and women have the potential to face difficult situations that can have a large effect on their emotions and the marriage's ability to function properly.

Polygamy: Why women still marry into polygamous marriages

As there are many negative factors that could arise in a polygamous marriage, one might question why a young woman would enter into a polygamous marriage with an older man. A polygamous woman, the second wife of two gives an explanation with which many other interviewees agreed. She says that women “do not want to stay single. It is a society that does not like the single woman.”³⁵ Although women may not originally wish to marry a man much older, some feel they have to marry by a certain age, and will do so. Additionally, having a child out of marriage is regarded very negatively by Islam. Women, therefore, do not want to become

³⁴ S., F. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 29, 2013.

³⁵ Ndiaye, Ndiaya. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 15, 2013.

pregnant without a husband, but they may wish to partake in sexual encounters and may consequently marry earlier. Lastly, certain women wish to continue with their education before marriage. They may not finish studying until a later age, an age at which younger men may not wish to marry them. Due to these reasons, Senegalese women do occasionally feel the need or desire to enter into polygamous marriages as the second, third, or fourth wife.

Polygamy: How it is changing

According to most of the interviewees, living in a polygamous family is becoming more difficult, which is causing a new trend in which men only take one or two wives, rather than three or four. Living today is much more expensive, as the husband has to pay for school, clothing, education, and the rest of his family's needs. It is becoming hard to manage for some. As Papis Bassene explains, it is difficult providing your children with the best possible education when you have ten to twenty children in your home. He adds that it is also hard to share one's love with four other people who have different backgrounds. He adds, "you can have four wives, but you have four worlds in front of you then. Each wife has her world...so you are inviting people to leave their world behind to join your world. It is no longer a partnership, because there is no way of making it equal at that point."³⁶

Polygamy: Would Senegal ever make it illegal?

One woman expressed the gratitude she would feel if polygamy was made illegal in Senegal. She noted that families would be more peaceful and the education of children would be

³⁶ Bassene, Papis. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 29, 2013.

better taken care of.³⁷ Although she feels this way, most of the interviewees do not feel that it would necessarily be beneficial for Senegal at this time.

As one subject put it, Senegal without polygamy would be the “reign of adultery.”³⁸ Many Senegalese feel that without polygamy, men would find mistresses rather than second and third wives, so they feel it is better to legalize the relationship than to go against the laws of Islam. Many people enjoy having the freedom to choose whether they wish to be polygamous or not. Mme Ndiaye explains that “it is always a choice. You have to give people the freedom to choose. Do not force, do not push, do not oblige. You have to leave people free.”³⁹ Additionally, many feel that the majority of the Senegalese would never vote to make polygamy illegal for several reasons, the first being that it simply goes against the Family Code. Even if the Family Code were to be edited, religion and tradition have too strong an influence in Senegal for a resistance against polygamy. One woman said that even though she would prefer for it to be illegal, practicing Muslims would refuse to let it pass.⁴⁰ A monogamous man explained that one cannot choose which laws he or she wishes to follow, religiously or legally. He explains his situation:

I am Senegalese, and there are laws that I am against. But I cannot do anything, they are the laws of my country. I respect them. If I do not want to follow those laws, I can leave the country and move somewhere else. I am Muslim and I am staying here, I therefore have to accept the Muslim laws. The day where I can no longer support them...the best thing to do would be to change religions.⁴¹

Finally, many people believe that no one would have the right to change a law such as that.

³⁷ Deme, Fatou. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 18, 2013.

³⁸ Paye, Medoune. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 28, 2013.

³⁹ Ndiaye, Ndiaya. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 15, 2013.

⁴⁰ Deme, Fatou. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 18, 2013.

⁴¹ Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 22, 2013.

Several interviewees explained that the polygamy that exists today was established by God and communicated to the Muslim people through the prophet Muhammad. Therefore, they believe that it is not in their power as mere human beings to change the laws that are written in such sacred texts. Only one interviewee, a polygamous man, thought that polygamy would one day be abolished in Senegal. The rest believed that religion, tradition, and law were too strong to allow for such a change.

Results and Analysis

Differences in opinions

Although the subjects varied in their gender, length in time married, ethnicity, and type of marriage, it was not a large enough sample to determine if any of these factors have a strong enough influence on their opinions. Even within the group, some polygamous women, for example, had completely differing opinions toward polygamy and their marriage. In other cases, interviewees of varying characteristics shared the same opinion, such as an older, polygamous woman and a younger, monogamous man sharing the opinion that life can be difficult for the monogamous wife. Therefore, given the data received in this study, the characteristics tested do not create a general opinion, such as all monogamous women disliking polygamy. Instead, opinions regarding polygamy seem to be based on individuals, rather than on groups.

Influence of religion

Based on the conducted interviews, religion has the largest effect on the modern day opinions of polygamy in Dakar. Given that the Qur'an allows men to marry up to four women,

the Qur'an was written at the time of the prophet, and that Senegal is made up mostly of practicing Muslims, its people will continue to follow the words in the text. Mané explains that people's opinions do change, but their opinions cannot fight against the religious laws. The texts are too sacred for someone to attempt to interfere to correct it simply based on changing times. He adds, "whether I like it or not, it is not me who can change that law. It is a religious law that is sacred. I could not change it, as no one could change what is in the Bible, the Qur'an, or the Torah."⁴²

The Qur'an also teaches a different concept of love, in which one can love many, while saving a special love for God. In response to who might question the practice of polygamy, Bassene says he would argue:

Based on where he is she is from, we have different concepts of love. Our love is not absolute. There is only one love absolute, which is love for the creator, for god, and love for the prophet in which we believe. That is an absolute love. But for everything else, it is a relative love. It means that that love is not exclusive. If it becomes an exclusive love, it becomes a desire of possession. So the loved person becomes an object. Like how we possess a computer or a pen or a bag. So we will possess a human being. That is what we call an exclusive love. Now god gave us an immense love. We have an ocean of love, but in that ocean, multiple people can come swim. So that is our conception of love. It is so vast we can love 2, 3, 4, 5 people. And no one will be a deficit of love. Everyone will get the love that he or she wants.⁴³

In other words, the Qur'an teaches Muslims to love God and the Prophet the most, and to open

⁴² Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 22, 2013.

⁴³ Bassene, Papis. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dakar, November 29, 2013.

their hearts to several loves, which can lead to polygamy.

Influence of the west

Although the western world is visually influential in the media, in restaurants, and in schools in Dakar, there seems to be very little influence on polygamy, in comparison to the influence of religion on the practice. Only two interviewees mentioned the impact of the western world. Mané explains that the younger generation is starting to want to live like the “occidental family” or the “toubab⁴⁴ family.” He notes that people like the idea of going out to a restaurant with the family, or riding in the car with the husband and wife in the front and the children in the back, which he sees as western-influenced activities. He notes that not having an amount of children that could make up a soccer team allows for an increase in westernized ideas of living. Since having this amount of children is no longer necessary in a city, and living in a city is expensive, having a smaller family is both ideal and cheaper.⁴⁵

Other Senegalese look at the western world and see that there is a lot of adultery being committed. They prefer to legalize polygamy because they feel that is better than hiding a woman, which goes against their religion.

Misgivings

When asked why polygamy still exists in Senegal, most interviewees included as part of their response something regarding women being more numerous than men in Senegal. Some explained that the number of women doubled or even tripled the number of men. According to

⁴⁴ Non-Senegalese or white person

⁴⁵ Mané, Keba. Interview by author. Tape recording. November 22, 2013.

ANSD's⁴⁶ statistics of the year 2013, the male population in Senegal is 6,708,088, while the female population is 6,859,250.⁴⁷ This means that women actually make up approximately 50.6% of the population in Senegal. This is a serious misconception. Many Senegalese use this as a solid reason for continuing the practice of polygamy. Perhaps if more people were educated in the actual makeup of the population, or perhaps if the number of women continues to drop closer to that of men, people will begin to see Senegal in terms of the number of men and women being relatively equal, rather than believing there is this grand difference.

Challenges

The biggest challenge was finding the right people to talk to based on the factors that needed to be tested. While it was very easy finding monogamous men and women to interview, it was more difficult finding polygamous women, and extremely difficult to locate polygamous men. The reason for the latter is because polygamy is less common in the city of Dakar and men usually wait until an older age to remarry. In order to adapt to this problem, speaking with both monogamous men who had opted for polygamy and monogamous men who had opted for monogamy was managed.

Another struggle was trying to conduct interviews and discussions in a serious manner, while not all subjects took the conversation seriously. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they were being interviewed by a young, white, American woman. Dressing and acting in professional manner made most interviewees respond respectfully. Unfortunately that was not the case for all interviewees.

⁴⁶ Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Demographie

⁴⁷ Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Demographie. "Les indicateurs clés sur le Senegal." Accessed November 25, 2013. http://www.ansd.sn/senegal_indicateurs.html.

In researching, it was very difficult to locate the actual number of polygamous marriages currently in Senegal. The most recent statistic found is from 2002, in which 38.1% of the Senegalese married population was polygamous.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Based on the data collected, most Senegalese feel that polygamy is a fundamental part of the Senegalese culture due to tradition, religion, and law. Most believe that it should stay because it is too engrained in their culture and traditions. Since one of the goals of this study was to determine if the opinions of the Senegalese are affected by western ideals, it is important to look at the way they believe westerners feel about the practice. One monogamous man explained that “for a foreigner, it is hard to understand because there is religion and the Family Code, and you do not use it [in other countries]. So if you come to Senegal and you see it, it is a little hard to understand. You have to meet people who can explain it to you, otherwise it could be very hard.”⁴⁹ Perhaps speaking with those who can explain seemingly alien practices would help westerners and Africans to better understand each other's culture and traditional practices. Another man compared the way in which many westerners view polygamy to the way in which the Senegalese have difficulty in comprehending the legalization of gay marriage in some western countries. Both concepts are foreign to the other culture. Rather than simply expressing opinions based on one's own culture and traditions, it would be best for people to take the time to learn about a practice, how it originated, its meaning, and then to judge it if they so wish. It is impossible to simply define the practice of polygamy as positive or negative. Polygamy,

⁴⁸ Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Demographie. “Rapport National de Presentations.” Accessed December 6, 2013. http://www.ansd.sn/publications/rapports_enquetes_etudes/enquetes/RGPH3_RAP_NAT.pdf.

⁴⁹ T., B. Interview by the author. Tape recording. November 20, 2013.

although practiced less in Dakar than in rural areas, is still believed to be a solid practice, even with its potentially negative factors. With that, there is no specific information pointing to there being a change in its legalization in the near future. The practice is becoming less common due to economic issues, but religion and tradition play too strong a role in Senegalese society for the practice to alter drastically. Although other African countries, such as Tunisia, have stopped the practice, Senegal is not looking to do so. In fact, based on the interviews conducted, many men and women see the benefits of both monogamous and polygamous marriages and would like to continue living with the choice to be polygamous. The fourteen interviewees, acting as representatives of the married population in Dakar, give a voice to part of the Senegalese population in the discussion regarding polygamy. It is important for their opinions to be heard in order for non-Senegalese people to gain a better understanding of the practice in Senegal so that they can join this discussion with new understanding and acceptance of another culture's values and traditions.

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

Before all interviews, interviewees were asked if they were alright with their answers to be shared, their names to be used (or if initials or a different name was preferred), and if they were uncomfortable, to tell the author to move on to the next question.

1. How many years have you been married? Is it a polygamous or monogamous marriage?

Answers varied. See Table in Methodology section.

2. How do you define marriage? What does it mean to you? *Answers varied.*
3. In your couple, what are your roles and your spouses roles? *Answers varied.*
4. Why do you think polygamy still exists in Senegal today? *Answers varied.*
5. Do you support polygamy? Do you think it is positive or negative? *Answers varied.*

6. If you were in a monogamous/polygamous marriage, rather than a polygamous/monogamous marriage, how do you feel your marriage would be different?

Answers varied.

7. How would Senegal be different if there were no more polygamous marriages in the country? *Answers varied.*

8. Did you know that polygamy is regulated by the Family Code? **100% answered yes.**

9. Were your parents or any other family members polygamous? How did they live?

Answers varied. Approximately 71% had polygamous fathers.

10. How would you explain polygamy in Senegal to someone who has never encountered the practice? *Answers varied.*

11. How would you respond to someone who wanted to make polygamy illegal in Senegal?

Do you think it will ever be abolished in Senegal? *Answers varied.*

12. Do you think the conditions set for the polygamous man are just? *Answers varied.*

Appendix B: Time Log

Date	What	Time	Total Amount of Hours Worked
11/11/13	Developed questions for interviews	12:30-13:30	1
11/12/13	Set up first two interviews	11:00-11:30	2.5
11/12/13	Gathered quotes/background information (Family Law)	11:30-14:30	5.5

11/14/13	Prepared for first interview (copied questions, prepared documents, tested tape recorder)	14:30-15:30	6.5
11/15/13	Researched/gathered sources and quotes	10:30-12:30	8.5
11/15/13	Interviewed Mme Ndiaye (Interview #1)	15:00-15:30	9
11/15/13	Met with adviser	15:30-16:00	9.5
11/15/13	Transcribed Interview #1	16:00-19:00	12.5
11/17/13	Finished transcribing Interview #1	15:00-16:00	13.5
11/18/13	Research and Interview #2	11:00-14:30	17
11/18/13	Transcribed Interview #2	15:00-15:30	17.5
11/19/13	Interview #3	10:00-10:30	18
11/19/13	Transcribed Interview #3	14:00-17:00	21
11/20/13	Finished transcribing interviews #2 and #3	9:00-14:00	26
11/20/13	Translated interview #1	14:30-17:30	29
11/20/13	Interview #4/5 and 6	22:00-00:00	31
11/20/13	Discussion with single men (20's)	00:00-1:30	32.5
11/22/13	Translated #4/5	8:20-9:20	33.5
11/22/13	Interview #7 and discussion	10:00-11:30	35
11/25/13	Interview #8 and began transcribing	10:45-14:45	39
11/26/13	Transcribing	12:00-13:00, 14:30-19:00	44.5

11/27/13	Transcribing and literary research	10:00-17:00	51.5
11/28/13	Interview with polygamous man (Interview #14)	10:00-10:30	52
11/28/13	Transcription and discussion	11:00-13:30, 16:00-19:00	57.5
11/29/13	Interview #9	10:00-11:30	59
11/29/13	Interview #10	12:00-13:00	60
11/29/13	Interview #11	15:00-15:30	60.5
11/29/13	Transcription	13:00-18:00	65.5
11/30/13	Interview #12	10:00-10:30	66
11/30/13	Transcription and translation	11:00-17:00	72
12/02/13	Interview #13	14:30-15:30	73
12/02/13	Collecting quotes from interviews	10:00-14:00, 15:00-19:00	81
12/03/13	Meeting with adviser	14:30-15:30	82
12/03/13	Quotes and outlining	10:30-14:30, 15:30-20:30	91
12/04/13	Quotes, outlining, began writing	10:00-15:00, 17:30-4:00	101.5
12/05/13	Completed first draft	11:00-15:00, 17:00-19:00, 20:00-00:30	111.5
12/06/13	Formatting and editing	12:00-22:00	121.5

13.

