

**THE AFRICAN FAMILY AND THE MULTIFACETED HUMAN TOLL EXACTED  
BY THE TIME-HONOURED PRACTICE OF POLYGAMY CUM UNBRIDLED  
MALE PROMISCUITY: AN EXAMINATION OF *THE OFFICIAL WIFE* BY MARY  
KAROORO OKURUT**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Using the Official Wife as a stepping-stone, we set out in this research paper to tackle the issues of polygamy and male promiscuity with a view to highlighting their attendant human ravages on the African family. The article argues that, unlike what conventional wisdom believes, polygamy comes in many forms, all of them having the potential for wreaking flat out untold havoc on the structure of a family. Women in polygamous unions or bonded to philandering husbands are prone to be on the receiving end of attachment injury which, oftentimes, culminates in excruciating mental disorders. Yet they are no slough when it comes to devising coping strategies against all the odds. The paper further suggests that children are not immune to the physical cum psychological downsides of the trauma injury experienced by either parent. In the event of a divorce or estrangement, there is a realization that the fact of the uncoupled partners maintaining some level of ‘civil’ physical contact might go some way towards allaying hostility between them, for the benefit of their children.*

**KEYWORDS:** Polygamy, Polygyny, Promiscuity, Attachment Injury, Jealousy, Family

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Mary Karooro Okurut (1954-) is a high profile Ugandan academic, writer and politician all into one. Prior to stepping into the political foray, she won her spurs as a grand old woman of Ugandan literature with two stunning novels (the Invisible Weevil cum The Official Wife) in addition to editing “A Woman’s Voice”, a collection of short stories authored by Ugandan female writers. Her credentials as a staunch champion of women’s issues shine inter alia through a no-nonsense call to set up the Ugandan Women Writers Association (FEMRITE). A one-time literature professor and renowned columnist in her own rights, Mrs Okurut has taken up top spots in the Ugandan state apparatus since the inception of her political career; she is the incumbent Minister in Charge of Official Duties in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Arguably, the time-honoured phenomenon of polygamy is a vexed issue across the globe, not least in Africa where it is taking a huge human toll. The availability of a huge body of literature pertaining to the perks and diverse downsides of polygamy speaks volumes about its paramountcy in academic circles. Much as the study of the practice of polygamy is not within the purview of this research paper, yet it would be relevant to go through some of the definitions given to the concept with a view to better grasping its intricacy. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines polygamy as “*the custom of having more than one wife at the same time*” (1134). As regards the Encyclopedia Britannica, it is somewhat more holistic in its definition of the word ‘polygamy’ as it appositely encompasses the diversity of sexual

orientation, namely “a plurality of wives or husbands, the possession of one man or husband” (128). Miriam Zeitzen offers an etymology-based uber-comprehensive definition of polygamy:

*Polygamy is the practice whereby a person is married to more than one spouse at the same time, as opposed to monogamy where one person has only one spouse at a time. In principle, there are three forms of polygamy: polygyny in which one man is married to several wives; polyandry, where one woman is married to several husbands; and group marriage, in which several husbands are married to several wives, e.g., some combination of polygyny and polyandry. This broad definition is based on the etymology of the word polygamy, which contains polys (= many) and gamos<sup>1</sup> (= marriage). Polygamy literally means ‘often married’ in Late Greek. (3)*

Received wisdom amongst Western circles has it that polygamy has an outlandishly uncivilized edge to it and that, accordingly, it is alien to the West. Interestingly, Zeitzen is at pains to debunk that barbed construction of the practice of plural marriage:

*Polygamy is worldwide, cross-cultural in its scope, it is found on all continents and among adherents of all world religions. Its practitioners range from modern feminists to traditional patriarchs, illustrating the great versatility of polygamy as a kinship system. An overview of the many peoples practising polygamy, in contemporary as in past societies, illustrates that a majority of the world’s cultures and religions have condoned some form of polygamy. (4)*

Here, Zeitzen clearly emphasizes that polygamy (which by the way is interchangeable with polygyny) has a huge following that cuts across geographical, racial and ethnic barriers. Notwithstanding, its widespread practice does not by any stretch of the imagination conceal the fact that it is not criticism-free. Actually, many a person opposes it on grounds that it acts as an albatross around women’s concerted drive towards full-fledged emancipation: “It [polygamy] trivializes women as chattels to their male counterparts and condemns them perpetually to second-citizens status” (Jonas 146). The practice of polygyny may entail some advantages for the men, but it doubtless exacts a hugely devastating psychological and physical toll on the women cum children born in polygamous families. Inequality, paterfamilias favoritism and co-wife rivalry factor, in no small measure, into the harrowing experiences that women as well as children born in polygynous families go through. The undivided attention given to harm by way of a core reason for rejecting polygamy as a family form has impinged big time upon insightful debate on polygyny (Beaman and Calder 7). What they appositely call the ‘discourse of harm’ has grown to “become an impenetrable cloak around polygamy that is supported by public discourse, including the media and the state” (7). Even though the latter social scientists speak from a Western vantage point, there is no getting away from the fact that the bulk of feminists and other likeminded people who dismiss African-style polygamy do so by foregrounding its inimical effects on women. All this underscores the necessity for a broad-brush approach to polygyny in terms of its impact (positive or otherwise) on female emancipation in order to gauge for sure its acceptability in the modern world. That a number of women and children suffer because of the practice of polygyny is a statement of the obvious. Even so, it would be a bit thick to make bald generalizations about the badness across the board

<sup>1</sup> Both ‘polys’ and ‘gamos’ are italicized in the book ; so, it is I who underline.

of polygamy regarding women's lives. At any rate, *The Official Wife* captures the depth of the havoc that polygamy wreaks on the African family.

A page-turner, *The Official Wife* recounts the story of an educated middle class Ugandan couple –Ishaka and Liz - whose peaceful married life turns sour unexpectedly upon the discovery of the hubby's sexual promiscuity. Liz's trials and tribulations get compounded when Ishaka decides to go down the path of polygamy. Ishaka's promiscuity is beyond the pale, for he stoops so low as to make it in bed with the charwomen, thereby driving her to the brink of near psychological breakdown. Liz reaches the ultimate in unconscionable possessiveness when, acting on a tip-off from a bosom friend of hers, she goes to Paradise Hotel where Ishaka and his mistress Manga are enjoying time. She knocks at Room 44, introducing herself as a room service staffer. Luckily, the lovebirds inside know better than to fall for the trick. Then she blows her cover, as it were, and starts giving Manga a mouthful. The tit for tat name calling between the two women competing for Ishaka's attentions are cringe-worthy. Ishaka wraps up making an honest woman of Manga and sets up house with her. After pondering at length over the best way out of her cruel marriage, she eventually opts out. Meanwhile, Kirabo and Eva – the couple's two kids- go through an emotional and psychological bad patch due to the absence of their father. Quite unexpectedly, Ishaka fall seriously ill, and Manga turns him out. Out of desperateness he, lo and behold, asks to be taken to Liz's. He swallows his pride and begs for help from his former wife. Strangely enough, Liz obliges, and "*get [s] hold of his emaciated arm, the size of a vein in a healthier body*" (158). She manages to have him admitted to hospital despite Fina's strenuous exhortations to not help "*this guy [who] abandons you and flies into the arms of some idiot...and flies back to you like nothing happened*" (162). Liz mends fences with Ishaka regardless, and, more significantly, gets married to him again for the great benefit of her beloved children.

Arguably, Mary Karooro Okurut uses *The Official Wife* as a bully pulpit to paint a raw picture of the horrors of polygamy. The novelist's utter rejection of modern-day polygyny as a form of family, whose politics is a drag on women's all-out emancipatory drive, is writ large. Witness the treatment of women at the hands of men as mere sexual ciphers. From the get go, the main protagonist (from whose point of view the story is narrated) vents her dismay at men's proclivity to discussing their partners' sexual performances behind their backs, citing her hubby as an example:

*Just like my Ishaka who shifts goalposts from time to time. Ishaka has no problems telling his friends what I look like down south and how pleasant or how deep my well is compared to his other exploits, when he gathers with the 'boys' for an evening sip around the malwa<sup>2</sup> pot.*  
(12)

The immorality of adultery and sex outside of marriage play second fiddle, as it were, to the male mental representation of women as a sexual plaything. A high level of nefarious perversion cloaks the sacredness encapsulated in the practice of sexuality. Little wonder that virginity is something of a dirty word for men in the community portrayed by Mary Okurut:

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<sup>2</sup> In the book 'down south' and 'malwa' are both in bold and italicized ; so, it is I who underline.

*The men of this tribe think the best lay is the one who switches on a tap of water during sex, in degrees that brings to mind Noah's blood. So they will rumble on and on about how this women is good because she River Nile look like a small stream while the other is lousy because the Sahara desert couldn't be drier. (12)*

Still from a Schopenhauerian vantage point, virginity is a testament to a woman's purity, and, accordingly, constitutes a sure-fire recipe for female honor that boils down to "*the general opinion in regard to a girl that she is pure, and in regard to a wife that she is faithful*"<sup>3</sup> (59-60). The practice of unbridled male promiscuity is made even more treacherous by the pervasiveness of destitution, not to mention the straitjacket of the patriarchal system that keeps women in perpetual bondage. Actually, what Mary Okurut's female narrator calls "double bed" wreaks untold physical and psychological havoc on women. Of note is the contention that the brazen public flaunting of their sexual prowess by the likes of Ishaka underscores the cost-effectiveness of the phallus<sup>4</sup> as a symbol of male dominance. "*The transformation of sex into discourse*" (Foucault 61) is downright obnoxious. It enacts, to all intents and purposes, a two-fold function: not only does it foreground the primacy of masculine sexuality but it also robs women of their dignity, casting them as a bunch of impressionable easy lay who have no control over their bodies. Michel Foucault rightly points out, "*The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion*" (38). Through her narrator, Mary Okuru registers her bafflement as to why, when it comes to the practice of sex, women kowtow to men's wishes, thereby acknowledging unabashedly their hegemonic claim to power. Not surprisingly, Liz slams this old-school mindset:

<sup>3</sup> The sophisticated nineteenth-century German thinker feels that man is women's common foe, and propounds the necessity for a covenant in order for them to conquer him. On the strength of man's '*superior physical and intellectual power*', women's interest is best served by bandying together "*with a show of esprit de corps*" so as to "*to lay siege and conquer him, and so get possession of him and a share of those good things*" (60). Under the terms of the said covenant "*the honor of all women depends on the enforcement of the rule that no woman should give herself to a man except in marriage, in order that every man may be forced, as it were, to surrender and ally himself with a woman*" (60). Schopenhauer is at pains to emphasize, nevertheless, that the expected result "*can be obtained only by the strict observance of the rule*" in that "*Any girl who commits a breach of the rule betrays the whole female race, because its welfare would be destroyed if every woman were to do likewise*". It is also part of man's side of the bargain to undertake "*responsibility for all woman's needs and also for the children that spring from their union*" (60). The "*mutual interdependence*" that this treasure trove of wisdom advocates can only be mediated through a deep-dyed belief in pre-marriage virginity and faithfulness in marriage. Needless to say that a politics of sexuality anchored in promiscuity, like that practised by Ishaka and other likeminded folks, lengthens the odds on the realization of the proposed agreement.

<sup>4</sup> The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the word 'phallus' primarily as "*the male sexual organ especially when it erect*". The second definition reads as follows: "*a model or an image of the male sexual organ that represents power and fertility*." It carries then an aura of male authority that is anathema to women as it makes a mockery of the soundness of their case for equality. In the International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities, Flood et al posit that the symbolic patriarchal edge of the phallus is what marks it out from penis as a biological organ. If anything, there is more to phallus than the state of stiffness of the male sexual organ: "*the phallus is not the physical or biological penis, but rather an external representation of the penis that symbolically stands in for the power and patriarchal authority of men and masculinity*" (475). Arguably, the natural inability of the female sexual organ to be erect provides, from a macho standpoint, the ground for women's supposed subservience to men. Hence the use in feminist theory of the term "*'phallogentrism' across disciplines from literary criticism to architecture to critique the taken for granted presence and supremacy of hegemonic masculinity in social, gendered and cultural relations*" (475).

*They put their women on too much tension. The poor females are too eager to be awarded high marks on how much liquid they can produce that instead of concentrating on enjoying the act, they are wondering how much fluid will come out. In the process, because they are so tensed up, they dry up and end up making fools – and failures of themselves. In a society where everybody has to make the grade, the poor girls end feeling real failures. (12)*

By allowing themselves to be used as a sexual objects, women play into the hands of men whose unquenchable prurience finds full gratification in promiscuity. The practice of hectic sexual activity goes with the territory of perversion. Ishaka is perversion writ large. He is, actually, cast in the mould of those men whom sex makes tick. To be sure, his crass lack of moral compass plays out in his lascivious bent that knows no bounds, and his unconscionable scornful attitude to his significant other, which is unbecoming for a man of his stature. Ishaka is so sexually promiscuous as to think nothing of chatting up house girls who cave in to his nefarious demands not so much out of love but out of fear of being given the boot. Charlatades are doubtless fair game for the likes of Ishaka who cash in on their destitution and desperateness for a source of livelihood in order to provide for parents and kin in the village. No wonder that, from Liz's perspective, her hubby's lack of inter alia taste is beyond the pale:

*Sometimes a woman will mourn because her husband has betrayed his marriage vows to her by turning left or right. But it is also true that quite often a woman will weep not because of the husband's unfaithfulness (it is only a handful of naïve women that ever expect a man to be faithful), but because of his complete disregard and lack of taste. In my case, it is both. How can I share a man with my own housegirl? (30)*

Ishaka's laidback attitude towards the practice of sex encapsulates lack of control and preposterousness in terms of love object choice. There is a degree of compulsion in his pattern of sexual behavior, which he is hard put to it to subdue. Compulsivity, in Paul Becker's estimation, "is an irresistible and persistent impulse to perform an act repeatedly" (Becker). Ishaka's unsavoury dependence on sex bespeaks a devastating inability to exercise free will. Liz's reading of her husband's perception of sexuality says a mouthful:

*His philosophy is: it does not matter whether he has sex with a graduate or an illiterate village calico because after all, he asks, does a vagina go to school? What obscene rubbish!*

*And therein lies the fundamental difference between men's and women's sexuality: most men have sex with only the vagina while women have sex with the whole man and not just the penis. (40)*

Liz justifiably brands her philandering hubby 'poor lecher.' Indeed, he lives and breathes sex. The sacred end game of love is somewhat anathema to him in that it is a foil to his immoral way of seeking gratification of his sexual drives. The politics of marriage life entails faithfulness to one's partner through thick and thin, which wisdom is out of whack with the likes of Ishaka's scheme of things. Men who are obsessed with sex make no bones about doing the dirty on their wives. In their mental landscape, fidelity is a dirty word. If you think about it, their behavior reeks of irrationality in the sense that they are unmindful about the potential

trouble to which they are exposing themselves and their families. Thus, it would not be thick to lump them in the category of sex addicts, the more so since they are “*examples of sexual behavior where loss of control and excess seem evident and clear*” (Carnes and Adams 5). More significantly,

*The continuation of sexual behaviors that have resulted in adverse consequences such as arrests, divorce, and loss of health, job, or freedom clearly define behavior that is compulsive and out of control. When sexual behavior is compulsive and yet continues despite adverse consequences, it is called sexual addiction. (5)*

When Ishaka represents to his wife his complaint that the housemaid is lukewarm to him and urges her in thinly veiled words to remedy that “abnormality”, one cannot help but smell a rat: “*Why don’t you tell this girl that I am just a human being like herself and she doesn’t have to tremble every time she meets me? The way on she goes on, you would think I am an ogre, for Christ’s sake!*” (21). Yet Liz feels that she has no reason whatsoever to find fault with the char’s frosty attitude, perhaps suspecting Ishaka’s intentions:

*Personally I have absolutely no problem with the H.G’s menphobia; as far as I am concerned that is a very useful sentiment in an H.G under the roof of a married woman. You don’t want your man to go fishing in other waters, you don’t want to catch him eating bananas in a plantation that ain’t his. My joy in this regard but I say none of this to my husband. (21)*

In an endeavour to placate her hubby’s hissy fit, she says with a note of finality, “*Don’t worry. She will outgrow it sooner or later*” (21). Liz’s joy and optimism are, though, short-lived. The H.G’s sudden shift of behavior by imitating her boss in everything set alarm bells ringing. Much as she touts “*the importance of role models for the young girls*”, Liz can’t stand the maid’s suggestive demeanour while cleaning the room: “*I soon discover that she wants to role model me right to the bedroom*” (22). As a result, she starts mulling over the idea of sending her back to the village but thinks better of it on grounds that it will not pay off since her “*dear Ishaka can’t let an H.G. be.*” By Liz’s own admission, “*Ishaka is now beyond repair and seems to be attracted to these girls the way a cat reacts to meat*” (22). This uncharitable judgment of her husband is testimony to his sexual obsession. Her blow-by-blow description of how she came to catch Ishaka and the H.G. red handed disporting themselves in the master bedroom, captures the length of the trauma that she has experienced (24-29). The depth of the shock is so unendurable that Liz begins developing what psychiatrists call “*stereotypy.*” Witness her mechanical toing and froing respecting the taps, “*I go check whether the taps are closed more than ten times each night*” (49). Stereotypy is defined as follows:

*Stereotyped behavior, or stereotypy, is the constant, almost mechanical repetition of an action. For example, pacing the same circle each day, head-banging, rocking or repetitive hand movements, or repeating some phrase over many weeks or months. (Eldergill 1061)*

Also, Liz displays disquieting signs of ‘*clouding of consciousness*’<sup>5</sup> subsequent to her shock discovery, the most glaring instance of which is her call to the Fire Brigade; in her mental

<sup>5</sup> ‘Clouding of consciousness’ is one among a string of symptoms of mental disorders. In *Mental Health Review Tribunals: Law and Practice*, he describes it as “*impairment of orientation, perception and attention.*” The

representation, she, indeed, mistakenly believes her house to be on fire. In less than no time, the firefighters arrive, only to realize (much to their bewilderment) that there is in actual fact no fire. Astounded, the fire chief advises her to enlist the services of a shrink due to her obvious “mental problem”, Liz waxes indignant, and lashes out at him: “*Let me assure you, so-called commander of the Fire Brigade that it is you who is (sic) in dire need of those services. Firefighting seems to have entered your faculties and deranged your mental capabilities*” (54). The fire chief may have every reason to press charges against the woman for making a hoax call but he knows better because of her being seemingly unbalanced. Ishaka’s sexual promiscuity coupled with his crass inability to see errors in his way compounds no end Liz’s ordeals. Renowned twentieth-century American psychologist Abraham Maslow discovers in a scientific study based on a clinical experimental research that there is more to the behavior of promiscuous men and women than a mere frenzied search for sexual gratification. Actually, married partners confess to the significance of the spouse as a foremost provider of sexual pleasure. By the same token, they recognize the necessity for a long-lasting steady sexual relationship as a recipe for achieving complete sexual-fulfilment and happiness: “*Married men and women who were also promiscuous very frequently were quite sure that sheer sexual pleasure and satisfaction was for them confined to the relations with the spouse*” (Qtd. in Ruitenbeek) 182). As a result, a cluster of emotional needs factor into promiscuity: “*Other emotional needs were satisfied in their extra-marital affairs, namely the desire to be sure they were still attractive, the thrill of novelty, unconscious hostility for the spouse, and often, frankly and consciously, the desire to conquer, to collect ‘scalps’*” (182). On no account can, from Maslow’s perspective, the aim of full sexual pleasure and happiness be obtained in promiscuity, this due to the fact that it is “*displaced by the desire to impress, the desire to shine by comparison with other sexual partners, the wish to break down aloofness or coldness, snobbishness, etc.*” (182). The pervasive and sustained practice of casual hasty sexual encounters reflect what Maslow calls ‘dominant affairs’ or ‘insecure affairs.’<sup>6</sup> In light of the

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distinctive features of this mental condition is that “*there is difficulty with thinking, attention, perception, memory and usually drowsiness and sometimes excitability*” (1058). ‘Clouding of consciousness’ and ‘impaired consciousness’ come to the same thing. The seriousness of this condition lies in the fact that it has adverse effects on the brain, not least because it precludes the patient from knowing about the external world. To better capture the depth of ‘impaired consciousness’, Eldergill contrasts with unimpaired consciousness: “*Consciousness is the awareness of one’s own internal thoughts and feelings together with the ability to recognize one’s external environment*” (1058). This mental disorder disconnects the individual from reality with unintended consequences. Harking back to *The Official Wife*, Liz displays several times signs of clouding of consciousness since catching her hubby and the charlady red handed in the master bedroom. The ‘shoe’ incident and the ‘cholera’ incident (56-7-8) arguably betoken an impaired consciousness. By her own admission, it is because of Ishaka that she is reduced to a laughing stock: “*My dear husband, the author of my present ills, searer (sic) of my conscience, cause of all my misery, pursuer of my perils, the epitome of my dislikes and the personification of all that I now find objectionable. His Excellence, Ishaka*” (59).

<sup>6</sup> A Maslow, based on his study, avers that promiscuity is a ‘dominant affair’ or an ‘insecure affair.’ His coinage of these phrases results from his analysis of the psychology of promiscuous men or women. The word ‘dominant’ reflects a feeling of triumphant superiority attendant upon chiefly male promiscuity, which feeling cannot be divorced by any stretch of the imagination from a patriarchal and phallic mindset. It follows from Maslow’s article that a desire to display irresistibility and manliness doubtless underpins casual hasty sexual intercourse as opposed to pleasure gratification. The Don Juan example is telling: “*The Don Juan (or the Doña Juana) has often been described in the literature a person who bolsters up an insecure-ego by convincing himself and others that he is a strong, conquering, and man (or woman). . . . From such individuals we get reports that the greatest thrill comes not at the moment of the subject’s climax, but at the moment’s of the partner’s climax, for such seems to be the moment of conquering*” (183). When you think about it, there is something of a complex of inferiority lurking behind this macho mindset. Maslow continues his elaboration: “*In such men, it is interesting to see the continued recurrence, in conversation about a snobbish or aloof woman, of the phrase, ‘She ought to be raped’ as if this were the ultimate humiliation that would bring her to her (psychological) knees and allow the man to feel*

foregoing, it is easy to tease out Ishaka's feigned bafflement as to the house cleaner's aloofness or coldness. Notwithstanding, promiscuity (whether it be male or female) is an immorality.

*The Official Wife* is a testament to the devastating weight of old-school shibboleths anchored in a misogynistic conception of man-woman power relations. The paramountcy of the trope of masculinity in African societies means that even partnered sexual relationship is gendered<sup>7</sup>. Cultural mores hallmarked by the stifling strictures of patriarchy give free rein to men to practice sexuality as they see fit, and, inexplicably, coerce women into toeing the line of male dominance in every facet of public cum private life. No wonder that the internalization by women of their sexual subservience to men by dint of a male biased narrative accounts for their self-critical soul searching when their marriages go through a bad patch. Witness how Liz pityingly scratches her head trying to fathom out Ishaka's extra-marital shenanigans, above all with a woman who, from her perspective, is ugliness personified:

*For when a man abandons decidedly beautiful, well-educated (I have a Masters) woman like me for a decidedly ugly, less educated (she has one degree – not bad anyway) one like Manga, wagging tongues jump to one conclusion: the intruder must be in possession of a better engine (I hate the way they use that word. Engine indeed!) than that of the wife. Better a live dog than a dead lion, the Bible says. Could this be coming true in my own life? (86)*

As it turns out, the aforementioned 'intruder' going by the name of Manga is Ishaka's new mistress, no less. It is of note, though, to point out that her real name is Malaika. Indeed, Liz devises a moniker out of hate for her 'co-wife.' As she overtly admits, "*Getting that accursed name, Malaika from my mouth as painful as a circumciser's knife. The fact that it is a beautiful name does not make matters any easier. In fact, it makes it worse*" (65). After mature reflection, she comes up with 'Malai', the short for Malaika and, to boot, "*it sounds less beautiful.*" However, it dawns on her that 'Malai' carries a whiff of superstition in light of her community's belief systems: "*You recall what our people say: that a bad name bewitches? How I wish that*

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*superior.*" Aloof women are fair game for "*the high dominance person who is somewhat insecure*" because of the challenge that they pose for him: "*So long as they hold off and fail to make love, they remain attractive, challenging and superior. As soon as they succumb they have lost their value and are cast aside once the first thrill of conquest is gone*" (183). A. Maslow is at pains to emphasize that the 'secure' person's sexual behavior is a foil to the meanness encapsulated in the phallogocentric behavior of the 'insecure' person: "*These findings are not true of the secure person and they become untrue for insecure high-dominance people who eventually attain psychological security*" (183). From Maslow's clinical research-based perspective, sexually promiscuous men's display of dominance through their conquest of aloof or snobbish women is, at bottom, bogus. They have an 'insecure' ego.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'gender' is key to feminist theory. It came into usage in the 1970s when First Wave feminism discourse was in full swing. Back then, "*It was used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours and competences, which are then assigned as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'*" (Pilcher and Whelehan 56). It is often contrasted with the word 'sex' in discursive explanations of the root causes of male-dominance. Anne Oakley's seminal definitions of this dyadic notion in feminist discourse is still topical: "*'Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender' however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'*" (Qtd. in Delphy 2). While 'sex' is naturally formed, 'gender' has a social and cultural edge to it; so, it has undertones of arbitrariness. When something is said to be 'gendered', "*its character is either masculine or feminine, or when it exhibits patterns of difference by gender*" (Pilcher and Whelehan 59). *The Official Wife* brings into sharp relief the 'gendered' perception of sexuality in the community of Eleven House, with men sort of entitled to infidelity and women condemned to faithfulness.

*Malaika horror had an ugly name!"* Liz wraps up settling for Manga (66). Deserving elaboration is the point that Liz experiences the pangs of jealousy from a dyadic perspective – that is, cultural and emotional. For one thing, she perceives her quasi abandonment by Ishaka as an excruciatingly painful humiliation that makes her worthless in the eyes of her peers and community. Secondly, her jealous attitude is doubtless a measure of the deep-seated attachment to her love-object whose definitive loss may spell devastation for her. Drawing a comparison between jealousy and envy, Melvin Lansky writes: “*Jealousy, in contrast to envy, involves love for the object. It centers on the actual or anticipated loss of the love object already felt to be one’s possession or the fear of that loss to a rival*” (28). From this vantage point, jealousy is a bulwark against loss, nay trauma. It is not, nonetheless, an intractable issue as Lansky acknowledges: “*Jealousy is a problem that seems, at least in the ideation of the jealous person, solvable (i.e., by defeat of the rival, and securing of the love object’s love)*” (28). Thus, the daredevil agency that she undertakes as part of her defense techniques is geared towards prevailing upon her rival in one way or another. Prominent in her pushback drive is the investment in sexual fantasy. Defined as “*almost any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual*”, sexual fantasy is “*a central aspect of human sexual behavior*” (Leitenberg and Henning 470) which can serve as a protective cover of sorts. As a backwash effect of Ishaka’s immoral behavior, Liz starts developing low self-regard, “*And for the ‘original wife’, your self-worth evaporates when everyone around you starts whispering that her goods [italicized in the novel; so, it is I who underline] are better than yours. Or that they are packed much better*” (86). Consequently, she embarks upon an enactment of sexual fantasies that all fizzle out - what with Ishaka sternly rebuking her:

*It torments me to think that, actually, the reason Ishaka went to Manga could be because she has a better engine than mine. It torments me so much that I confront Ishaka last night. I have been waiting for him. It is after midnight and I am still waiting. Then I hear a car in the drive. Quickly, I throw off my clothes. I Switch on all the lights.*

*He comes in and registers shock at my naked exhibition.*

*‘What’s the matter with you? Have taken leave of your senses?’*

*Meanwhile I stand with legs astride:*

*‘Ishaka, I want you to tell me what the matter is with me!’*

*‘Just remember that you are a mother of two and stop scandalizing yourself.’ (86-7)*

Even though Liz has not lived this flashy behavior in imagination beforehand, the fact remains that it falls within the ambit of what passes as sexual fantasy. If anything, an array of sexual offences including exhibitionism qualifies as sexual fantasy (Leitenberg and Henning 469). Despite a string of failures, Liz is not about to give up on her strenuous drive in order to not lose her husband forever, not least to a rival whom she spitefully calls “*the new dog*” (67). She is possessed with a rare sense of bouncebackability and self-possession that enables her to weather the storm of her ‘cruel marriage.’ Liz always has an ace up her sleeve, so that when a ploy goes awry, she contrives another one pronto. Witness the “*proverbial tigress in bed*” that she unavailingly plays for the sole purpose of winning her hubby over:

*I have spent long sleepless nights trying to fathom what could have made you [Ishaka] abandon me in favour of that wizard. Maybe she behaves like a whore [italicized in the novel; so, it is I who underline] in bed, every man's dream, I hear.*

*So I decide to imagine what she does and do the same. As soon as I make up my mind, I go take a long bath. I scrub every part of my body more than ten times to make sure every cavity is clinically clean. ... Then I put on this tiny piece of thread that is supposed to pass for pants. ...*

*The door is opening. I now must strike the pose of the irresistible woman. I throw one leg carelessly here and the other there. I lower my eyes, making them heavy in that bedroom eyes look.*

*'Hello darling!' Welcome back. And tell you what, you are going to have me for dinner!' And I laugh in this low-tone sexy voice. 'What the hell do you think you are doing? Have you turned into a common cheap slut? Please leave that stupid act and put on some decent clothes. Remember you are a mother of two.'* (107-8)

This quotation may be long, yet it speaks to Liz's resourcefulness and the lengths to which she is prepared to go to get her own way. More's the pity, every single one of her gimmicks is a dead end. The resort to 'submissive' sexual fantasies bespeaks a desire to pour oil on the troubled waters of her marriage. For all her feminist bent and animus against certain age-old traditional mores, Liz has no hung-up about taking the lead in getting the chemistry right again with her husband. Her fence-mending disposition towards Ishaka bears commending as it reflects the absence of superciliousness and conceitedness in her. More importantly, the cultivation of humility in a romantic relationship can help a couple pick up the pieces of their marriage and move on: "*Humility has the potential to affect how couples react to and manage stressful situations. By allowing self-forgiveness, accepting support, and admitting wrongdoings and fault, humble individuals are more apt to effectively cope with stressors*" (Worthington, Davis and Hook 225). Liz's display of humility is the more commendable since the latter is gruff and, lo and behold, lopsided in his treatment of his own wife and his mistress—that is, Manga of whom he wraps up making an honest woman. The most glaring example of Ishaka's nefarious unfairness is allowing Manga to travel to South Africa to have a baby. Spare the expenses! Liz is justifiably choked about Ishaka's meanness:

*Four years later, Ishaka gets entangled with his Manga horror. Before long, she is pregnant. I privately hope she will gestate for two years like an elephant, but she somehow manages to keep it at nine and pushes out a baby girl. In a South African hospital! My spy network tells me that Manga tells Ishaka that she does not feel comfortable giving birth in our hospitals. And since he does what whatever she wants, he buys tow first class tickets to Johannesburg. This in spite of the fact that when I tell I need money to fix our upcountry house, he glares at me and he says he is broke. (79)*

Ishaka's entanglement with Manga comes in shadow of the celebration of his second child with Liz, a baby girl who is named after her paternal grandma: "*The best way that a man can show*

*that he loves his daughter is to give her his mother's name"* (79). The next big wound that Liz experiences at the hands of Ishaka since his entanglement with Manga comes in the form of a lie, which lie makes a mockery of Liz's frantic drive to forfend marital dissolution. The shock discovery that *"After saying he was naming our daughter after his mother, he goes and gives the same name to his other daughter [It is I who underline the words that are italicized in the novel]"* (81) is downright unpalatable. Not surprisingly, Liz could not conceal her amazement when Ishaka asked her to get ready to accompany him to Kolokolo airstrip, *"the traditional venue for all major government functions."* Her comeback is crystal-clear, albeit quizzical: *"So my dear, why should I come with you for the function?" I ask in this voice, some 100 kg heavy.*" Ishaka's retort is telling: *"Because you are my official wife. Simple"* (62). Ishaka's marital union with Liz is not any longer one with gravistas. She is pretty much a cipher inasmuch as he needs her to enjoy a token of respectability at official events.

Granted, Liz does not have it in her to come to terms with Manga's destructive intrusion into her marriage but she errs on the side of jealousy. She projects to a fault her heart sorrows onto Manga, so that her scathing verbal onslaught passes her off as a wicked wench. Defined as the *"perception of the threat of a loss of a valued relationship to a real or imagined rival which includes affective, cognitive and behavioural components"* (Mullen 597), jealousy goes with the territory of love. As it turns out, normal jealousy *"is not only a way of experiencing love, but also a way of existing"* (Qtd. in Maggini, Lundgren and Leuci 136). Divorcing love from jealousy would be a tall order. The two partners that make up a romantic relationship enter into something of covenant underpinned by trust. There is a moral imperative binding them, namely that the onus is on them to ensure that trust is not dented. Faithfulness is arguably a surefire way to mediate the likelihood of the relational trust standing the test of time. P.E. Mullen appositely underlines that fear of breach of trust is encapsulated in jealousy: *"Jealousy is about infidelity, and infidelity has a moral dimension"* (599). To be sure, infidelity epitomizes betrayal of marriage vows. Liz regrets the long time that she has lived in a fool's paradise:

*I admit I had long started taking Ishaka for granted, that since he said 'I do' and promised to be faithful, he would always be there for me and me only. How could I forget that men only say those words strictly in honour of those present, not that they have any intention of keeping their word? (106)*

However, when jealousy has an intense and irrational edge to it, then it turns morbid: *"Morbid jealousy differs from normal jealousy by its intensity and irrationality. It can occur even when a partner is actually being unfaithful, which means that unfaithfulness is not a sufficient reason for developing morbid jealousy, but an excessive or irrational response to it"* (Batinic, Duisin and Barisic). Liz reaches the ultimate in morbid jealousy when, on a tip-off from Fina "her spy network", she beards the lion in his den and goes to The Parasite Hotel to confront Manga. She is all the more determined to brazen it out because Fina gives her treacherously poisonous pep talk, so to speak: *"Go and give her a hiding. She shouldn't just walk in and snatch your man without putting up a fight! You are not a saint, for Christ's sake"* (94). When she arrives at the hotel, she makes a beeline for Room 44. She poses as a Room Service staffer to pull Ishaka and his inamorata's leg to get them to open the door. At one point, the lovebirds come near to opening before thinking better of it (96-7). The moment Liz realizes that her ploy has come to grief, she waxes indignant:

*You lousy sonofabitch (sic), stinking bastard! I will give you a honeymoon you will never forget. Cat, dog, hyena, despicable rat. And*

*that common whore. Cheapest harlot evr on the market. Open the door and I will show you where you came from, lousy bitch. (98)*

The name-calling that ensues between the two women is cringe-worthy. Despite the hotel manager's strenuous effort to plead with Liz to calm down, she won't relent; so, the exchange of uncouth words continues with a vengeance. Liz even goes as far as slamming the manager for illegal activity as she struggles hard to free herself: "*Let go of me, you manager of illicit trade. You are part of this. An accomplice. It is you who gave them the premises, and so you are as guilty as they are*" (99). This cheap jibe at Manga captures Liz's desperation: "*After all he spends three quarters of his time with me. He is with you just for a few hours in a month!*" What is calculated to make Manga feel cheap turns out to be a cipher in light of the potency of her reply: "*It is called quality time, Madam. Quality time – those few hours we spend together. We'd rather spend a few precious hours together than having long, meaningless time. Quality not quantity time*" (103-4). Arguably, the success of a marriage cannot be seriously measured by the length of time that the partners spend together but by the way in which they spend that time together. But for mutual respect and contentedness as well as steadfast faithfulness, a couple cannot live peaceably no matter how long they live together. Liz repeatedly owns that her resentment at Ishaka stems inter alia from the fact that he is nuts about a 'whore.' However, the respectability and good family background of a co-wife or mistress does not the pains of sharing a man any the less palatable. As Fina makes it clear to her friend: "*You know, Liz, erase from your mind this thinking that he has insulted you by picking on a wretch like Manga. If he had picked a decent, beautiful woman, it still would have hurt you bad.*" Lack of respect and the development of low self-regard are unmistakable by-products of the experience of being cheated upon as a wife or a man for that matter.

In the world of *The Official Wife*, women are at the receiving end of no end of humiliation at the hands of philandering husbands. As it turns out, the practice of Polygamy and male promiscuity are, actually, a push factor for psychological breakdown amongst women. Male favoritism and its attendant downsides wreak untold multifaceted havoc in the family. More significantly, polygamy has the potential for bringing about low sexual drive in women, so that they do not have it in them to positively respond to their partners' sexual endeavours. Liz confesses to an aversion to sex with their husbands as part of the backwash effects of their promiscuity and choice of family form. Better still, she claims that polygamy impairs intimacy between sexual partners: "*Polygamy just makes it difficult for intimacy to be sustained between husband and wife. Sex is relegated from the ultimate expression of love to a mere duty, especially for the estranged wife*" (128). She buttresses up her point by giving the experience of a friend of hers:

*A friend a first wife herself – caught in such a situation decides to stay in the marriage. She says when the husband demands for sex, she dutifully presents her body. She is totally detached from the act. In her own words, the man might as well be having sex with a piece of wood. Or like in some frigid woman where, while enduring sex, the woman asks for fish and chips. (128)*

This lack of interest in sexual activity finds outlet in atypical behavior that reflects what psychiatrists call 'Female sexual disorder/arousal,' the foremost diagnostic criteria of which is "*absent/reduced interest in sexual activity, absent/reduced/sexual erotic thoughts or fantasies, no/reduced initiation of sexual activity, and typically unreceptive to a partner's attempts to initiate*" (Weeks, Gambescia and Hertlein19). The development of this kind of

sexual condition comes in shadow of the experience of excruciating dissatisfaction in a romantic relationship. The resultant angsty behavioural pattern wraps up impinging on the victim's practice of normal sexuality. The likes of Liz's abnormal attitude to sex lay be morbid, yet, when you think about it, it provides a most riveting glimpse into the vantage point from which the erotic release of women ought to be considered. Renowned Austria-born twentieth century psychotherapist Alfred Adler claims that only folks with a tunnel vision perceive women's attitude to sex from a physical perspective. Debunking the Schopenhaurian view of eroticism as "*a purely animalistic sexual drive*," Adler contends that "*it is an essential part of human social feelings which reflect the total personality and thus also the degree of interaction with society, and a readiness for life with another person*" (114). If anything, an interplay of potent determinants irrespective of aesthetics feed into a woman's attitude to sex and, consequently, her choice of a romantic partner. Adler writes: "*When one looks at this subject closely, it becomes apparent that aside from the physical basis for the sexual attitude of women, there are other much more powerful influences that determine a woman's sexual life*" (113). Any appraisal of female sexuality should take cognizance of the fact that "*a woman is limited by tradition, personal pride, and economics, which are just as important in choosing a partner as sexual impulses*" (113). There is more to a woman's frigidity and rejection of a bonded partner than meets the eye. Neither a woman nor a man forgoes on a whim the anticipated feeling of contentedness encapsulated in '*Resolution*' that Montgomery is described as the last phase of the '*Sexual response cycle*'.<sup>8</sup>

The insensitivity of men to women's emotional frailty accounts for the high incidence of psychological breakdown in the fictive world depicted by Mary Okurut. The premiere mental collapse-triggering factor amongst women is the shock discovery of their husbands' adultery after they pass away. Instances abound of men keeping their extra-marital affairs under wraps, so that their wives find out about their shenanigans only after they are gone. Liz counts herself lucky to know of Ishaka's second wife unlike many of her peers who freak out when they lately get wise to what their hubbies were up during their lifetime:

*There is one thing I must thank Ishaka, though. Of course I will not thank him to his face. Believe you me, I am at least happy that he has made it known that he has a second wife. I mean it. . . . Because look, many a married woman for a long time imagines she is the one and only wife. Until death strikes the man. Then she gets the shock of her life. (135-36)*

One case in point is Lydia who has been married with Richard for over two decades. During this whole length of time, never has she questioned her husband's faithfulness and steadfast love. In a move disingenuously calculated to con his wife, Richard "*has a big photograph of*

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<sup>8</sup> The sexual cycle response is thought of being composed of four phases: Desire, arousal, orgasm, and resolution. Description of the said phases reads as follows: "*These stages consist of the desire phase where one feels the urge to have sex, the arousal stage where one has increased physiological excitement such as higher heart rate and blood pressure, the orgasm phase where reflexive muscle contractions occur, and finally the resolution phase where the body return to its pre-arousal state*" (Jeffcott and LoPiccolo in Gabbart et al. 227). The dividing line between the latter stage and the first three is that sexual dysfunction is not associated with it. Rather, it can only occur in desire, arousal, or orgasm. The significance of '*resolution*' lies in the fact that it provides the yardstick by which success of the sexual experience is measured. It goes hand in cap with organism: "*Resolution through orgasm is characterized by a subjective sense of well-being. This sense of euphoria and pleasure in the entire successful sexual experience serves to enhance fantasy during the next sexual response*" (Ahmed 60). Failure to achieve successful resolution might bring about anxiety or irritability.

her (framed in gold) on his office, carries a miniature version of the same in his wallet, calls her twice or thrice a day while at the office and takes her out three times a week, never mind he is always busy” (136). Little wonder that Lydia has always touted the fact that her husband “is the only man she had ever known and the only one blessed with the privilege of seeing her naked.” Lydia’s bubble bursts when the “angel of death strikes him [Richard] down in a grisly car accident.” The funeral service takes place at the church that is unsurprisingly chock-a-block with mourners. The keynote speaker calls upon Lydia to get up and lay her wreath, which she does in a dignified manner. The plot thickens, for, as she resumes her seat, she “comes face to face with a tall beautiful woman who – if she were not sobbing uncontrollably- looks a perfect reincarnation of the lean-figured and fine-legged Cleopatra” (137). This ‘other’ woman passes out; her grieving was such that one observer thought that she was the real widow. Lydia faints in turn when she sees the mistress’s kids laying their wreaths in the wake of her own children. She reaches the ultimate in dismay when she learns from the official from the ‘Administrator General’s office’ that Richard’s inheritance has to be equally divided between the two women and their children. Lydia does not take in strides what she looks on as a glaring injustice. Indeed, she challenges the legality of the official’s decision, putting forward her official wife status and her huge contribution to the buildup of the inheritance but the law enforcer is not having any of it (139-140). He does not mince words when it comes to explaining his unwavering stance on the matter:

*But the law is the law, he explains, adding that he did not write the law in the first place; he is only implementing it to the letter. Since these ‘other’ children also belonged to the deceased, the law provides that they too benefit from their father’s estate. The question of the children’s legitimacy was immaterial here, he points, out, as he appends his signature at the bottom of the page, to show that the matter has been concluded. (140)*

Here, Mary Okurut concretely emphasizes men’s insensitivity to women’s emotional frailty. More significantly, Lydia’s psychological distress encapsulates a scathing condemnation and rejection of *de facto* polygamy, which is a variant form of polygamy. According to Zeitzen, the distinctive feature of *de facto* polygamy “is it does not involve formal marriage between some of the partners, distinguishing it from ‘real’ legally recognized, or *de jure* polygamy, which involves formal marriage for all partners” (17). Arguably, cowardice, official wife disrespect, male mental construction of woman as a sexual object feed into that type of polygamy. Whatever the hue it takes on, polygamy feeds into female vulnerability and subservience to men. Socially and culturally accepted norms hallmarked by their male-centeredness deprive women of a say in matters pertaining to their romantic sexual lives. To be sure, the common occurrence of such a weird practice ‘sororal’ marriage is mediated merely by the phallogocentric hidebound mindset in African societies. The stark injustice that Mrs Gooba has experienced epitomizes that old-school perception of woman as a nonentity. Indeed, she is forced to have her sister as a co-wife. She and community members level a protest but they are overridden by parental authority which draws legitimacy from a patriarchy-based cultural wellspring. What bears testimony is the flimsy grounds put forward to substantiate away the call:

*But the parents settled the matter when they said they saw nothing wrong with the matter. As long as Gooba brought along the right brideprice (sic), there was no problem. Besides, they pointed out to the elder sister [that] she would find it easier to deal with her own sister*

*than with some unknown foreign woman. And, God forbid, if one of them died before the other, the surviving sister would look after her sister's children without any problem. There would be no repeat tales of stepmothers burning their step-kids or sending them to bed hungry, or something like that. (112)*

The foregoing captures the ingrained anchoring of money and culture in matters that partake of personal choice. Although “*sororal polygamy is practised in some societies because it is believed to foster greater cohesiveness among co-wives sharing values and norms*” (Zeitzen 32), yet the fact remains that it tells against women due to the arbitrariness that mediates its occurrence. Mary Okorut depicts a society in which women have no choice of life.

Higgledy-piggledy sexuality implies that the sanctity of marriage vows take a back seat to the overriding male anxiety to display manliness in unconscionable way with unintended consequences. The wilful trivialization of women as mere sexual objects that betrays itself in the inability to settle down with one woman coupled with the gross failure to have a think about the potentially devastating fallout from irresponsible sexual behavior make the likes of Richard and Ishaka an uncivilized bunch. They may have a method to their madness. Still, as Michel Foucault writes, the abnormality of their sexuality sets them apart from normal beings:

*Underneath the great violator of the rules of marriage – stealer of wives, seducer of virgins, the shame of families, and an insult to wives – another personage can be glimpsed: the individual driven, in spite of himself, by the somber madness of sex. . . . He deliberately break the law but at the same time something like a nature gown awry transports him far from all nature. (40)*

Modern-day bonded relationships, not least polygamous ones, are markedly characterized by the materialistic mindset that underpins it. A paradigm shift accounts for the fact that the first wife no longer has pride of place in the family setting as it used to be. Indeed, a concatenation of self-serving motivations form the bedrock of polygynous unions that ride roughshod over the symbolism attached to first wife status. As Liz mulls over the difference between traditional and present-day polygamous marriages, she is at pains to bag the second wife's competitive bent that feeds on the husband's naivety:

*The first wife was always respected. More highly respected by the husband than all the other wives. But modern day polygamy is built on totally different premises. The other woman comes as a competitor, to snatch love from the first wife for herself. Her life is focused on nothing else but to show the official wife that the man loves her better. She will do anything to hurt the official wife; maybe not physically, but anything that will torture her rival's spirits. (128)*

It would not be thick to argue that a bonded relationship that is not anchored in love is doomed to failure. A partnered relationship built on love is sure to stand the test of time as it has something of a soothing influence. From a Humean philosophical perspective, love is nothing less than a measure of the wish for the beloved person's pleasure and enjoyment. To put differently, when you love someone, you know better than do anything that might thwart their happiness: “*Love is always follow'd followed by a desire of the happiness of the person below'd, and an aversion to his misery: As hatred produces a desire of the misery and an aversion to*

*the happiness of the person hated*" (367). Thus, love is the opposite of hatred. Lydia's distress bears witness, in no small measure, to the degree to which women are left to the tender mercies of men. The asymmetrical nature of the power dynamics in polygamous unions coupled with the dead hand of the system of patriarchy mean that woman are compelled every inch to take it on the chin. This rubs off on the structure of the family. The Family is 'a universal institution'<sup>9</sup> that ought to be shielded from any move by either husband or wife that might blight its cohesiveness. Doubtless, polygamous unions and frenzied male extra-marital affairs have a potential for putting kids under a huge psychological strain. Yet the role of parents, not least that of the mother, in the well-being and psychological development of their children cannot be emphasized enough. In an ideal world, parents are the first and foremost caregivers. Freud appositely points out: "*For a small child his parents are at first the only authority and*

<sup>9</sup> The significance of the family as a universal institution was put forwards by social scientists known as functionalists, who stress the foremost functions of the family plays without which society would vanish off the face of the earth. A leading proponent of the functional approach to the study of the family, George P. Murdock came up in 1949 with a seminal book, to wit *Social Structure*, in which he discussed at length the centrality of the family in human societies. From the get go, Murdock defines the family as follows: "*The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults*" (2). Murdock carried out a survey of 250 families- that is, 'representative human societies.' A key result of his findings is the existence of basically three different kind of family organizations: the nuclear family, the polygamous family and the extended family. Murdock is at pains to flag up the paramountcy of the nuclear family owing to its preponderance in human societies across the world and, into the bargain, the primacy of the functions it serves across the board: "*The nuclear family is a universal social grouping. Either as the sole prevailing form of the family or the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded, it exist as a distinct and strongly functional in every human society*" (2). From Murdock's perspective, the functions of the nuclear family are fourfold: sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational. The sexual function refers to the regulatory dimension of sexual activity within the family. Granted that sex is "*a powerful impulse, often pressing the individuals to behavior disruptive of the cooperative relationships upon which human social life rests,*" (4) some form of control as to its expression must be exercised. Human societies were able to mediate the regulation of sexual expression through what Murdock calls culturally defined '*series of sexual taboos and permission.*' Important though it is, sex alone is not sufficient to maintain marital relationship. Murdock an 'auxiliary support' in the form of 'economic cooperation, based on the division of labour' is necessary. The biological differences between man and woman make for an easy economic cooperation: "*man, with his physical superior strength, can better undertake the more strenuous tasks, such as lumbering, mining, quarrying, land clearance, and housebuilding. Not handicapped, as is woman, by the physiological burdens of pregnancy and nursing, he can range farther afield to hunt, to fish, to herd, and to trade. Woman is no disadvantage, however, in lighter tasks which can be performed in or near the home, e.g., the gathering of vegetable products, the fetching of water, the preparation of food, and the manufacture of clothing and utensils*" (7). Thus, "*the labors of each partner provide insurance to the other*" (8). This division of labour benefits all members of the family: "*Economic cooperation not only binds husband to wife; it also strengthens the various relationships between parents and children within the nuclear family*" (8). As regards the educational function, it is every bit as important as the first two functions. It is within the family that the child is supposed to receive 'primary education.' On no account, in Murdock's estimation, can schools supersede the family in its responsibility for "bearing and rearing children." This does not means by any means other cultural institutions or strata of society have no say in children's education: "*Finally, grandparents, schools, secret initiatory societies may assist in the educational process, but parents universally retain the principal role in teaching and discipline*" (11). Speaking of the reproductive function, it is key to society's survival as without new members the human race is doomed to extinction. The importance of developing consciousness about biological parents and the lines of descent is also encapsulated in the reproductive function of the nuclear family, which Murdock, incidentally, equates to the 'ideal family.' Harking back to the sexual function, even though Murdock is of the mind that it is not the be all and end all of marital relationship, it is nonetheless of great significance. For one thing, it helps keep the spouses emotionally stable only if either of them does not experience lack of sexual gratification. On the other hand, should one the partners is deprived of sexual satisfaction, he/she may be tempted to stray, which could rub off on the stability of the family as a whole.

*the source of all belief*" (237). He highlights the significance of the mother as "unique, without parallel, established unalterably for a whole lifetime as the first and strongest love-object" (237). Hence, Liz's obdurate unwillingness to take the plunge and opt out of her marriage speaks to the consciousness of her attachment figure status. She, actually, cannot bring herself to compound the agony of her kids who are already suffering the emotional shock of their father's absence. Whenever her friend Fina attempts to push her down the path of divorce, she adamantly refuses, putting forward the interest of the children. From her vantage point, her non-sense call to stay in her marriage is not tantamount to an acceptance of polygamy. Far from it. She says in answer to her friend, "*Fina. I though we said not to use the word 'accept' ever again. I am not accepting the polygamous situation. But I already have two children with Ishaka so, for me, it is easier to stay than to leave. I am not accepting it. . . I am just resigning myself to it*" (135). It is worth underlining, though, that Ishaka's inability to reform himself does not help her cause and that of her offspring. If anything, he has somewhat cut loose from them, thereby putting them in a most emotional tight spot. Children who were used to being swung by their dad suddenly get the cold shoulder, so that they have the sulks (144-5). Liz's contention that "*He no longer loves them*" and that "*they are no more than fleas in his armpits, sheer footnotes in his life*" is downright pitiable. When she comes to the realization that Ishaka is not about to mend his ways, Liz bites the bullet of uncoupling: "*Moving away and starting life all over has not been easy. The way I pack my things and leave is like a bereavement. Like I have severed the better chunk of my life. When you have slept under the same blanket with someone for more than twenty years, it's not easy to call it quits*" (145). From an attachment theory<sup>10</sup> perspective, Liz doubtless develops anxiety over separation from an 'affectional bond.' She does not feel up to detaching herself emotionally from her ex-hubby; this difficulty in drawing a line under a time-honoured shared intimacy is par for the course: "*Emotional detachment . . . is often difficult because of the level of emotional investment experienced by partners. Because of the intimacy involved in marriage, former partners experience a familiarity shared with relatively few other people*" (Brimball in Emery 107). Her ingrained attachment to her former affectional tie and the distressing fear of permanently losing sight of him impels her to attempt to keep in touch with Ishaka even after they are divorced:

*Funny I know, from the day I leave, I keep on hoping that Ishaka will call.*

*'Liz, why the hell have you moved out on me? I miss you so much. Please comeback. Like every woman whose relationship has ended, I*

<sup>10</sup> When we talk about 'attachment theory', we mainly think of two psychoanalysts whose research went a long way towards helping us get a handle on mother-child relationship: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. According to Bowlby, attachment is confined to the early years of infancy. However, it could have ramifications in adult relationship. The need to foster relationship for security and safety is inherent in human nature: "*Whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave*" (Bowlby 129). Key to attachment theory is 'attachment behaviour which describes "*any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other dearly identified individual who is conceived of as better able to cope*" (25-6). When unwanted or unwilling separation from the affectional bond occurs, the child develops anxiety; but the anxiety develops into grief when he experiences loss of the attachment figure. The same dynamics play out in an adult romantic relationship as that occurs in mother-child tie. Mary Ainsworth defines affectional bond as follows: "*It is a relative long-lived tie in which the partner is important as a unique individual, interchangeable with none other, from whom inexplicable separation would cause distress, and whose loss occasions grief*" (799). In the case of Liz, the appalling realization that the severing of the bonds of attachment to her husband is unavoidable, and, consequently, that she is bound to experience loss, she displays emotional distress. Her separation response is bereavement, which speaks volumes about the nature of her loss. Bereavement is a state spawned loss, especially that of a loved one.

*long to hear that, even though this is the last I would admit to anybody, including myself. But he doesn't call. And I cease to expect his call.*

*But sometimes I get tempted and call his cellphone. Then as soon as he picks it and says the customary 'hello', my throat somehow runs dry and I get tongue-tied. (145-6)*

On the face of it, Liz sounds regretful. When you think about it, though, she appears to be developing coping strategies with a view to ensuring survival. A maintenance of some form of contact with her erstwhile partner enables Liz to push back against the possibility of experiencing undue “*anxiety, insomnia, inertia, hyperactivity or a feeling of helplessness*” (Buglass 44), which are hallmarks of a bereaved person, and take the sting out of her bereavement. A twenty-year-old close relationship cannot be broken overnight without untold psychological harm on the partners. Still divorced couples can successfully work through their emotional distress if they eschew behaviour that is conducive to compounding any lingering hostility between them: “*Janet Reibstein strongly encourages that former partners establish limited and rule-bound contacts that are civil, aimed at limiting behaviors that might activate attachment feelings, and mutually agreeable for both partners*” (Brimball in Emery 107). The end game of the necessity of establishing proximity cum contact between one-time relationship partners is not so much remarriage but the prevention of the development of hatred with unintended consequences on kids.

Mary Okurut's utter condemnation and rejection of polygamy as well as male promiscuity is writ large in the poetic justice that Ishaka meets. If anything, he comes down with an unknown illness and starts wasting away. In the beginning, Manga hides him from people out of shame but wrap up throwing him out. Reduced to a tramp with no home and no job, he pockets his pride and comes back to Liz, asking for help (157-8). Against all expectations and against Fina's exhortations, Liz warmly welcomes back her ex-hubby. Better still, she sends for three doctors no less with a view to getting a handle on the nature of his condition. Conflicting diagnostic results sends her scratching her head. Not willing to take chances Liz tells Ishaka about her decision to take him to hospital, which he ‘meekly’ accepts without batting an eyelid (160). Ishaka's indifferent health brings the best in Liz who does not so much as jib at cleaning Ishaka after he removes his bowels:

*To tell you the truth, I wouldn't ordinarily relish cleaning the shit off a mature person. But Ishaka cannot take himself to the toilet and besides, this is the man who took me from my parents' home. It's not his fault, anyway, that he is sick. I cannot tell an H.G. to do it. So I proceed to the bathroom and pull out a pair of gloves. The ones that come with the hair dye. I put them on and proceed to the sitting room. I unzip Ishaka's trousers and pull them down. (160)*

Liz's forgiving disposition and the significance of ensuring the presence of Ishaka in the house as an irreplaceable father figure drives her no-nonsense call to nurse her ex-hubby to recovery. As a sentient woman, it ill behooves her to somewhat let Ishaka stew in his own juice even though she has every reason to. Her need for inter alia “*intimate communication*” underpins her flat refusal to “*feed the social mirror satisfaction*”, much to Fina's dismay. When Ishaka is back on his feet, he cannot help but thank Liz no end who snatches him from the jaws of death:

*“Liz, I owe my life to you...” he begins.*

*... 'Liz,' Ishaka looks up, 'thank you for everything. . . I . . . I . . . I . . . do not know how to express my gratitude.'*

*'I know I hurt you real bad and do not even deserve the forgiveness I ask. Please forgive me. Give me one last chance; come back to me. Be my wife again. (164)*

In answer, Liz says in a most humble and moving way, *"Ishaka, please don't thank me, I just did my duty"* (164). Thereupon she calls Fina, informing her about Ishaka's discharge. She goes on to get her to drop by the office and *"ask[s] Mr. Kimeta to give you the office car so that we can Ishaka"* (165). On the way out of the hospital, a row breaks out between the two women as to where Ishaka should be taken to. Whilst Fina urges her to avenge herself on Ishaka by sending him back to Manga's, Liz isn't having none of it. Actually, she grows weary of the firebrand's treacherously poisonous rhetoric and then resolves to cut her down to size: *"Fina, with all due respect to you, you will not become the destiny to my body, soul, and spirit"* (166). Liz's love is resurrected if it has ever died off at all. Thus, the overarching necessity for full-blown reconciliation prevails over the meanness of revenge. Twentieth-century renowned English writer George Orwell appositely calls revenge 'sour': *"the whole idea of revenge and punishment is a childish daydream. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as revenge. Revenge is an act that you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless. As soon as the sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also"* (5). Through the assertiveness and depth of insight of her lead character, Mary Okurut builds up the case for female empowerment through education. Liz's high level of education attainment means she is a cut above her peers when it comes reasoned decisions and championing of feminist cause. During the whole of length of her marital woes and the period subsequent to her divorce, Liz has always left the door open for reconciliation not so much out of undimmed love but for the sake of her children. Kirabo and her kid sister Eva are their mother's pride and joy. The last lines of the novel are an eloquent testimony to her motherly love:

*There are broken all over my life; wounds, scars and pains all over. The broken pipes in the family will take a while to mend. Certainly the broken sexual relationship with Ishaka will take a long, much longer time to heal, if at all it ever does.*

*But what matters most to me just now is that Eva and Kirabo are probably the happiest children in the children. (170)*

Ishaka has wreaked havoc of the family by meting out attachment injury to Liz. Relational traumas in the backwash of betrayal doubtless have a long-lasting negative effect on the relationship bond which might take time to abate. However, an injured partner possessed of an ability to translate the brutality of shock from a violation of trust into a positive can successfully pick up the pieces of a seemingly irreparable psychological blow and move on. Liz to all intents and purposes has what nineteenth-century renowned German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche calls *plastic power*, by which he means *"the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds"* (62). Indeed, Liz advocates bouncebackability as a way of navigating the twists and turns of life:

*We always fall down in life but we have to make an effort and rise up again. That is what we mean by overcoming the world. . . . The*

*important thing is not that you fell, rather whether, after falling, you stayed down and moaned like a pregnant cow having a pity party, or you got up, dusted yourself, held your head high and marched on. (43-4)*

This willingness not to let the blows of fate get her down is a huge selling point that makes it possible for Liz to weather the difficulties facing her. Wholesome resilience cum bent for forgiveness are an invaluable asset in bonded relationship as they are apt to keep potential divorce-triggering events at bay. Granted, the experience of harrowing damage in a marital relationship in the form of infidelity or abandonment has far-reaching negative bearing on the injured partner. But with psychological strength and an unflagging concern for the children's interest as well as a sense of leniency a couple can eschew the devastating path of estrangement to embark upon a reconciliatory enterprise full of promise.

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