

The Emotional Well-being of African Wives: Perceiving the Generalised Resistance Resources (GRRs) in Stress Management by Co-wives in Lola Shoneyin's Novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

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Summary

Although it is oppressive to women, polygamy is still relevant in many contemporary African societies, where the culturally acceptable identity of a woman is as a wife and mother, as demonstrated in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015). To overcome the challenges of their daily lives, polygynous wives must search for resources elsewhere, since mental health facilities are comparatively few in Africa, and that seeking professional help is often the exception.

At the end of her novel, Shoneyin keeps Baba Segi's three uneducated wives in the repressive marriage she has depicted, even though their husband permits them to leave. Bolanle, the educated, fourth wife, decides to divorce. While the man's domination is customary in a patriarchal culture, the woman's freedom and emotional well-being are subject to conditions laid down by her society, but ones which she can control through her response to subjugation. This article uses Aaron Antonovsky's theory of salutogenesis and its principles of the Generalised Resistance Resources (GRRs) to demonstrate how Iya Segi and Bolanle, respectively Baba Segi's first and last wives, cope or crumble in the face of stressors. Emphasis is on the GRRs of ego strength, co-wife bonding, co-wife rank, joy in children, economic freedom, and education and skills.

Opsomming

Hoewel dit vroue onderdruk, is poligamie steeds tersaaklik in baie hedendaagse Afrika-samelewings, waar die kultureel aanvaarbare identiteit van 'n vrou dié van vrou en moeder is, soos gedemonstreer in Lola Shoneyin se *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015). Ten einde die uitdagings van hul daaglikse bestaan te bowe te kom, moet vroue elders na hulpmiddele soek, gegewe dat geestesgesondheidsfasiliteite betreklik skaars is in Afrika, en dat die soeke na professionele hulp dikwels die uitsondering is.

Aan die einde van haar roman hou Shoneyin Baba Segi se drie onopgevoede vroue in die onderdrukkende huwelik wat sy uitbeeld, hoewel hul eggenoot hulle toelaat om hom te verlaat. Bolanle, die opgevoede vierde vrou, besluit om van hom te skei. Terwyl die man se dominansie in 'n patriargale kultuur gebruiklik is, is die vrou se vryheid en emosionele welstand onderhewig aan voorwaardes wat deur haar samelewing voorgeskryf word, hoewel sy dit kan beheer deur haar reaksie op onderwerping. Hierdie artikel gebruik Aaron Antonovsky se teorie van salutogenese en sy beginsels van die hulpbronne van veralgemeende weerstand (GRR'e) om aan te dui hoe Iya

Segi en Bolanle, onderskeidelik Baba Segi se eerste en laaste vroue, stressore hanteer of misluk om dit te hanteer. Die GRR'e van egosterkte, medevroubinding, medevroustatus, vreugde in kinders, ekonomiese vryheid, en opvoeding en vaardighede word beklemtoon.

Introduction

This article examines how Iya Segi and Bolanle, the first and last of four co-wives in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* [2010] (2015), address daily pressures in their polygamous family. Socio-cultural norms in the novel urge these characters to aspire to be wives and mothers. However, some of them end up disappointed and empty despite having assumed these identities. While Iya Segi, a once-power senior wife, mother and successful entrepreneur, is stripped of her investments, savings and freedom, Bolanle, the young, childless woman despised by her co-wives, ends up more emotionally stable. Their coping strategies and the varying outcomes are examined under the lens of the Generalised Resistance Resources (GRRs) developed as part of Anton Antonovsky's theory of salutogenesis.

Polygamy, an Enduring Option in Shoneyin's Novel

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives is set in the sub-Saharan country of Nigeria and revolves around a Yoruba family. Shoneyin's disgust for polygamy is expressed in a piece published by *The Guardian* (2010), in which she states: "Polygamy devalues women and the only person who revels in it is the husband who gets to enjoy variety."

While presenting the reader with an unusual polygamous marriage, with a sterile husband counselled by an impotent, deceitful and secretly jealous man (229), Shoneyin repeatedly demonstrates that polygamy is an enduring but problematic option for the contemporary Nigerian woman. First, at the beginning of the novel, polygamy appears to offer socio-economic relief to the disadvantaged first three wives, Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi, (128),¹ and to Bolanle, the educated fourth wife, who seeks a place to heal (16). Next, although Ishola Alao alias Baba Segi grants them permission to go at the end, the first three wives stay in the polygamous marriage (241). Their rejection of divorce coupled with Bolanle's earlier choice of a married man empower Baba Segi, who responds by subjugating his remaining wives (243). This establishes the dominance of patriarchy and, once more, the prevalence of polygamy.

My position on polygamy reflects Shoneyin's in that although she denounces the practice outright, she demonstrates its role in the psychosocial well-being of her female protagonists in a patriarchal culture. A double-edged sword, polygamy in the novel causes more emotional distress than it averts in

1. Iya is a teknonymous appellation linked to a person's first child, in this case, the first child of each wife for Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi. Bolanle is childless.

the women conforming to matrimonial societal norms. I therefore introduce the Generalised Resistance Resources (GRRs) as tools available to polygynous women for stress management and present a possible application of these by Iya Segi and Bolanle.

How the GRRS can Empower Polygynous Wives

Researchers in and out of Africa have provided considerable evidence to show that polygamy is detrimental to the emotional well-being of the woman. (1, 2, 3, 4).² Similar conclusions apply to studies specific to sub-Saharan Africa (5, 6)³ with some of the research subjects of Thabile Mbatha's study (2011: 32-33) describing polygamy as "a platform for exploitation by the in-laws", a place where they felt "isolated and neglected" and "competition with the second wife was a major threat", and they were exposed to risks such as "cheating, greed and HIV/AIDS".

The Mental Health Atlas 2017 (2018: 32) notes that compared to America, where there are 5.4% psychologists per 100 000 and 4.6% in Europe, only 0.1% exist in Africa. Unsurprisingly, there is no psychotherapy in Shoneyin's novel, although some characters are clearly psychotic. Leson James Foster and Akpobari Benson Nwiyor (2017: 44-49) assert that each of the four co-wives in Shoneyin's novel experiences trauma, which can be "individual or collective". After an elaborate psychoanalysis of the two characters of interest to them they conclude that: "[s]ome of her [Iya Femi's] actions, pursuant to monopolizing her husband's affection, clearly border on the manic. ... Bolanle's case appears even more sharply drawn. Her traumatic experience seems more deeply felt. ... She manifests several symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. ... She also manifests symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, especially hoarding..."

The competition for their husband's affection and for individual resources, the burden of protecting the secret of their husband's sterility, Bolanle's longing for a child and Iya Segi's for a life beyond her husband's house, and Iya Femi's desire for revenge are some incidents which traumatise these wives. Augustine Nwoye (2002: 194) observes that "in Africa not only trained professional family therapists but also writers, teachers, humanists and members of the clergy can inspire and give leadership to families". To analyse the representation of the coping strategies employed by the Alao co-wives, this paper draws inspiration from Gabriel Owiti Oguda's (2012) factual study of the Luo co-wives in Kenya based on the use of the Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs), which form part of Antonovsky's salutogenesis theoretical framework.

2. (1): Alean Al-Krenawi 2001: 187. (2): Al-Krenawi and John Graham 2006: 5. (3): Slonim-Nevo and Al-Krenawi 2006: 323. (4): Lindsay Dianne Shepard 3013: 2.

3. (5): Hinks & Davies 2008. (6): Cook 2007: 234.

Salutogenesis is a concept in health promotion that explores the social determinants of health in the well-being of an individual. According to Maurice Mittelmark et al. (2017: 7) salutogenesis “posits that life experiences help shape one’s sense of coherence – the sense of coherence. A strong sense of coherence helps one mobilise resources to cope with stressors and manage tension successfully”. They emphasise that “the sense of coherence helps a person mobilise generalised resistance resources and specific resistance resources in the face of psychosocial and physical stressors” (ibid., p. 10). While pathogenesis is aimed at eliminating the infectious agents and/or risks factors, salutogenesis focuses “attention on the study of the origins of health and assets for health”, (ibid.). Antonovsky (1979: 99) defined the GRRs as “any characteristic of the person, the group, or the environment, that can facilitate effective tension management”.

Applying the concept of salutogenesis to Luo co-wives in Kenya, Oguda (18) writes: “At the individual level, the salutogenic model is based on the premise that the cowife’s [sic] life situation is replete with certain predisposing factors that are individually peculiar”, just like those of the Israeli women who partly inspired Antonovsky. About the female concentration camp survivors Antonovsky (7) highlights that “[d]espite having lived through the most inconceivably inhuman experience, ... some women were reasonably healthy and happy, had raised families, worked, had friends, and were involved in community activities”. Oguda (19) therefore qualifies the GRRs as resources which “assist the co-wives in making sense out of the countless stressors that they are constantly bombarded with. The GRRs therefore provide the co-wives with sets of meaningful and coherent life experiences. When confronted with such repeated experiences, they generate, over time, a strong SoC (51)”.⁴

Antonovsky (110) raises the ambiguity surrounding the definition of coping, stating that “[s]ometimes it is confused with the outcome of an interaction with a stressor”, and clarifies that a “coping strategy is a plan for behavior, not the behavior that eventually results to cope with stressor”, (113). Despite the criticisms of the salutogenesis theory “for its generalized view of the world as either “coherent” (copes) or “incoherent” (fails to cope)” and the proposals that “response to adversity should be viewed in the way an individual responds to a given specific stressor” (Almedom Astier M. et al. quoted by Oguda 2012: 21), I also find the theory a suitable way of defining the coping techniques of co-wives in the African setting where mental healthcare is neglected. Antonovsky’s (112) consideration holds that “given our individual, cultural, historical, structural, and personal-historical back-grounds, we each tend to work out a typical coping strategy”.

4. 51: Antonovsky A. 1987, quoted by Oguda.

The Use of GRRs in Shoneyin's Novel

When asked how they coped in a polygamous marriage, some of Mbatha's (35) research subjects replied:

... that "Polygyny is survival of the fittest. Each one fend for herself. The demands of finance demand women to work. ..." ... "You have to be friends with your co-wife so that no other women can come between you." ... they join an organisation to do handwork and talk about their challenges as part of a healing process. ...

Stay in your house, look after your children and look after yourself. Keep your mouth shut and make your marriage work.

Their coping tactics evoke the GRRs of economic freedom and co-wife bonding as well as ego strength, applied through the element of silence or restraint. The need to define such strategies inspired Oguda (12-13), who notes that "no study has been able to capture the resistance resources co-wives draw upon to keep them in a positive frame of mind, which translates into a healthy wellbeing and higher quality of life". He filled this identified gap by applying the GRRs to Luo co-wives. The relevant GRRs used in his study are economic freedom (44), social position, considered here as co-wife rank (45-46), and joy in children (64). Oguda's discussion on "relationship between co-wives" (39) will be considered in this article as a GRR named "co-wife bonding". Other GRRs listed by Antonovsky (107-110) and applicable to the representation of polygynous wives in Shoneyin's novel are: knowledge-intelligence and ego identity. "Knowledge-intelligence" will be discussed under the contextually appropriate heading of "education and skills". Although Oguda (19) does not develop ego identity, he mentions it under the preferable term of ego strength. This article on Iya Segi and Bolanle will be based on these six GRRs randomly ranked.

Ego Strength

About ego identity Antonovsky (109) states: "[f]or our purpose, the central elements of ego identity as a GRR have been indicated: a sense of inner person, integrated and stable, yet dynamic and flexible; related to social and cultural reality, yet with independence, so that neither narcissism nor being a template of external reality is needed". Ego strength, which is not defined by Oguda, is appropriately captured by David L. Gutmann (1965: 229) in his paper "Women and the concept of ego strength": "Ego strength is generally defined in terms of delay and the derivatives of delay (eg. the 'secondary processes'). ... Through the judicious exercise of delay, with due regard for the requirements and possibilities in external reality, the strong ego guides the human organism towards reasonable gratification."

Gutmann (230) mentions some biases associated with the concept of ego strength and delay, notably that "against creative impulsivity". Concerning Shoneyin's novel, I rephrase the concept of ego strength as using tact to

manage stressors either by avoiding them or offering planned responses, both achieved through the show of restraint (delay). Female resistance to male dominance requires a display of ego strength about which حلمى (a critic identified only in Arabic) (2017:3) writes: “The politics of resistance ... refer to the strategies through which the female characters get into negotiations with their male counterparts in the hope of capturing the attention of the patriarchal society to their predicament.” The critic continues that “the politics of resistance are incarnated in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* through women’s utilization of their bodies, through women’s solidarity, through economic independence, and through education” (21). While the attributes enumerated in the second quotation recall the GRRs of co-wife bonding, economic freedom, and education and skills, I see the politics of female resistance as a strategy under ego strength because “negotiations” involve careful thought and delayed responses.

To survive the competition in Baba Segi’s house, his wives must utilise several tools which involve resistance at one time and cooperation at another. Their redeeming like destructive actions require some degree of ego strength and ego identity, as illustrated in the analysis below of Bolane and Iya Segi.

Bolanle

Bolanle’s first sentence as a narrator demonstrates “a sense of inner person”, an element of Antonovsky’s definition of ego identity: “I didn’t just happen upon this room: I dreamt of the pale green walls before I arrived” (15). Her conviction that polygamy will benefit her is prompted by her need for a place where she can “heal in anonymity” (16), since she considers herself “a soiled, damaged woman” (16) following a rape (110-115) and subsequent termination of a pregnancy (116-118). She picks Baba Segi, and in a first-person narration describes him as “a man who accepted me, one who didn’t ask questions or find my quietness unsettling” (16), “a perfect man for me” (17).

As Baba Segi’s fourth wife, she overcomes several obstacles by combining the ego identity principles of stability, flexibility and independence, as well as ego strength. First, she confronts her exacting mother who has high expectations for the favourite of her two daughters, and defends the “overfed orang-utan”, also described by her friends as “a polygamist ogre” (16). When her mother labels her a gold digger (34) Bolanle maintains that she is watching out for herself (34). She can gain immediate satisfaction from the job her mother urges her to get (141); however, she covets the “delayed” satisfaction possible only after recovering her dignity. Her resistance to parental and peer-pressure shows strength of character or “a sense of inner person”. Bolanle continues: “I just wanted the war between who I used to be and who I’d become to end So, yes, I chose this home.” (16)

With this mindset she embraces Baba Segi and makes him desire her to the point of thinking the decision for them to settle down together is entirely his (201). When she realises that marriage to him simply moves the conflict from within herself to between her and her co-wives and occasionally with her

husband, she does not resign. Ego strength and ego identity are amongst the resources she uses to surmount the trials.

Because she hopes for acceptance in her new family, Bolanle combines restraint with flexibility. Her response to their humiliation of her by opting to teach her co-wives to read surprises Iya Tope (51), who elsewhere comments: “Iya Segi was wrong about the skin of educated types. The more those two poked Bolanle, the more mercy her eyes showed, the more her hands opened to the children. I have never known anyone like Bolanle before. Even after two years of their wickedness, she still greets them every morning” (54).

In a show of restraint Bolanle resists visits to the herbalists and prophets proposed by her husband (14), despite his insults and dismissal of her feelings of disgust at a criminal report about a pre-term foetus (13). Rather than retaliating, “Bolanle was determined to deny him the pleasure of hurting her feelings” (13), just as she refuses to let her desire for children push her to desperation.

According to Olushola Ayodeji Akanmode (2016: 10), “Bolanle’s upbringing, beliefs, experiences and innate qualities, enable her to be wise in handling life’s misfortunes and she is able to withstand the storm that erupts upon her arrival in the Alao household.” Another instance of this is her “calm” reaction to being accused of using witchcraft to eliminate Baba Segi. Iya Femi, one of the masterminds of the plot, declares: “Well, the bird had shown that she can fly without feathers” (66). Iya Femi hereby acknowledges that Bolanle has found a way of evading their traps, a feat she achieves thanks to ego strength and ego identity.

Bolanle’s final decision to leave Baba Segi’s house is not an act of resignation but a logical move by a more emotionally balanced woman who no longer views her marriage as an asset but a liability, given she cannot give her sterile husband children (244).

Iya Segi

Iya Segi’s application of ego strength is first seen when she marries Baba Segi despite her lesbian inclinations (98) and disregard for marriage (100). She accepts the arranged marriage (103) to eventually recover her money which her mother gifted her suitor (101). Hence, she must sacrifice for future gratification.

Staying married to Baba Segi would require much tact. حلم notes that “[a]lthough Iya Segi does not enjoy sexual intercourse with Baba Segi, she keeps pleasing his ego, ‘I will follow you anywhere, my lord’” (22). She delays voicing her desire to start a business but then sulks to the point where he inquires and obliges her (73). She herself admits: “I had to use all my wisdom to force Baba Segi’s hand” (ibid.). She controls the house but gives her husband the impression that he does (104). Iya Tope describes her as the wife who “already owned his [Baba Segi’s] mind and did with it as she pleased” (48).

Iya Segi does not wait for direction her but thinks for herself and progresses thanks to her material and mental resources, her “integrated and stable, yet

dynamic and flexible” self (Antonovsky on ego identity). Moolla (2017: 85) concurs, stating: “Her wealth allows the marriage to Ishola Alao to take place and her ingenuity allows her to be impregnated.”

Iya Segi, however, becomes vainglorious and echoes her mother’s disregard for men (97): “Men are like yam. You can cut them how you like” (75). Having easily coerced Baba Segi to the extent of owning “eight cement shops in Ibadan alone” (104), she employs the same tactics with her co-wives, and entertains dictatorial ideas to the extent of using her daughter as a spy: “She tells me everything that happens in my absence. I have told her that she must cling to me until the day she leaves to rule her own home” (104).

I refrain from outrightly praising Iya Segi as one who uses “wisdom, effective dialogue and negotiation in getting whatever she desires” (Akanmode: 12-13), because while “negotiation” requires honesty, Iya Segi is cunning. She lies and often prioritises her personal welfare over her family’s. Predictably, her exploits do not bring her sustainable happiness. At the end of the novel, her dream to return to her village, build a multi-storey building and indulge in her lesbian fantasies (104-105) is brutally ended when Baba Segi confiscates her savings and keeps her homebound (243).

Co-wife Bonding

Alongside freedom, joint upbringing of the children and stability, sisterly bonding is another benefit of polygamy mentioned by some of the seven wives of Alexander Joseph of Utah, USA, in an article by Ross Laver and Paula Kaihla (Marie Claire) cited by Obioma Nnaemeka (1997: 167). Some reasons for polygamy in Africa are: securing the family lineage through male offspring, social prestige, having a constant sexual partner when one wife is nursing (Edmund Egbah 1972: 431-433). Cook (2007: 236) posits that “the high infant and child mortality rates may also have contributed to this cultural practice as well as hazardous male behavior like hunting and war”. The reasons for polygamy in the African context that come closest to sisterly bonding are the sharing of chores, mentioned by Mbatha (29), and joint child upbringing.

In Shoneyin’s novel, none of the Alao wives embraces polygamy hoping for friendship with her co-wives. Iya Segi dislikes Iya Tope at first glance (83). Iya Femi immediately despises her two senior co-wives (129) but eventually accommodates Iya Segi (131). Bolanle’s efforts to befriend her three senior co-wives are often met with scorn (22), although Iya Tope ultimately dissociates herself from the trio and empathises with her (52). Oguda (39) attempts an explanation for such indifference to specific co-wives: “By choosing which co-wife to relate to, co-wives here exhibit their inherent sense of self-consciousness and democratic choice to associate with those whom [sic] are directly responsible for their positive sense of wellbeing, hence a higher quality of life.” In the Alao family, such selective co-wife bonding is genuine, for the welfare of the family, as well as malicious, for personal gain.

While some women can use “cooperation as a substitute for competition to win the husband’s favour” (Nelly Agunda Amolo 2017: 39), the cooperation among the first three Alao wives is to secure their secret of bearing children for other men. When Iya Tope tries to defend Bolanle, against whom the other co-wives want to hatch a plot, Iya Femi reminds her of their secret pact (53). Because Bolanle is viewed as a threat to that oath and is the new favourite of their husband, they unite to destroy her.

Oguda (40) explains that “[s]uch cases of co-wives harbouring malevolent intentions towards fellow co-wives points to a deeply divided home with a less authoritative household head. It also portrays a lack of collective trust and common understanding among co-wives especially in the absence of a shared sense of identity.” A shared identity is, however, what Iya Segi aims to create in the end when she assumes the entire responsibility for the sexual scandals of her co-wives: “I misled them” (216), she confesses to the doctor and Baba Segi about the paternity of their children. Later, when she pleads with Baba Segi to accept them and their children, she uses the plural “our” (241). Broken and defeated, she regains some of her dignity through her attempts to create a platform from which they can support each other and build stronger family ties. Baba Segi’s failure to take responsibility for his laxity that enabled the chaos in his family obliges Iya Segi to, once more, take the lead.

In summary, some of the factors that encourage co-wife acrimony or malicious bonding in Shoneyin’s novel are jealousy, a carefree husband (104) who practises favouritism (48), limited self-confidence in some co-wives, and co-wife competition.

The only person who consistently desires genuine sisterhood is Bolanle. She senses the competition that is brewing on the day of her arrival (21) and multiplies her efforts at honest co-wife bonding, an example being her attempts to teach her co-wives to read (22). Yet two years into the marriage, she still feels so isolated to the extent of engaging in petty conversations with Iya Tope “just to hear a friendly voice that belongs to another grown woman” (22). Bolanle’s faith that they would eventually accept her is unwavering: “One day, they will accept me as a member of this family” (23).

It can be said that Bolanle’s actions are driven by feminist empathy, described as “the ability to feel oneself into the experience of a woman in undeserved suffering” (Chielozona Eze 2015: 311). Notwithstanding their maltreatment of her, Bolanle is always forthcoming; for instance, she ensures Iya Tope is relieved of chronic constipation (55).

Of the four Alao wives only Bolanle, and Iya Tope to a lesser extent, take a shot at genuine co-wife bonding. Their actions are mainly motivated by charitable love and family welfare. The display of such virtues still does not ease life for either of them, especially Bolanle. For their part, Iya Segi and Iya Femi are constantly stressed because of the need to maintain their malicious bond.

Social Position (Co-wife Rank)

Nnaemeka quotes Patrick Merand (174) as stating that: “The first wife, usually the oldest, enjoys undisputed authority over her co-wives; she is the only wife not chosen as ‘replacement’”. Elsewhere (175) she writes: “Usually, the senior wife reciprocates the respect through friendship and bonding.” Oguda (46-48) recommends that one way to enhance the quality of life of a polygynous wife is that she should be the senior wife, if she cannot avoid polygamy altogether.

Co-wife rank is a debatable GRR in Baba Segi’s family, for Iya Segi, the indisputable matriarch of the family, is also a dictator. Iya Tope highlights this contrast by referring to her as “the mother-of-the-home” (47) and later (48) as the wife who could manipulate their husband. She thinks Iya Segi abuses her position for narcissistic purposes: “Some women just want everything” (48). Iya Segi herself arrogantly asserts the importance of senior co-wife rank when, after Iya Femi complains about her food portions, she challenges her to go remarry and as a first wife (49).

Iya Segi is respected by her co-wives even if grudgingly so. Rather than using her rank and status for “friendship and bonding” mentioned by Nnaemeka (175), she manipulates them, having put them in her debt by sharing the tip on how to get pregnant. Her braggadocio is unsurprising: “My husband only thinks he controls this household and I let him believe that he does I alone can approve vengeance and only I know how to bring calm” (104).

Antonovsky (105) affirms that the “GRR concept refers primarily to characteristics that facilitate dealing with and overcoming the stressor.” Iya Segi therefore effectively adapts to the threats from her younger and more desirable co-wives by using her rank to intimidate them while also manipulating their husband. This strategy works to her advantage until she is overcome by jealousy of her most junior co-wife. Again, her disregard for honesty and empathy, attributes of genuine co-wife bonding, enables stressors. Her disgraceful end (243) indicates that senior co-wife rank is indeed not a sustainable GRR in the novel.

Men also recognise the importance of rank among co-wives. Urging Baba Segi to get Bolanle to see an herbalist, one of the men in Teacher’s shack states: “You are the husband and she is a mere wife, and the fourth one at that!” (4). Bolanle’s position as the last wife eases the decision to maltreat her. Although seemingly powerless and persecuted, she remains level-headed, assists her co-wives and their children, and ends up being the refuge for dying Segi (204). Unavoidably a co-wife, Bolanle strives for harmonious living with her co-wives and exercises patience, Oguda (47-48), thereby exemplifying the qualities of a senior wife.

Joy in Children

This is a resource formulated by Oguda based on its relevance in the data he collected in interviews with the Luo co-wives. The GRR which comes closest to integrating this concept is social support, classified by Antonovsky (114-116) as one of the interpersonal-relational GRRs that are hinged on “commitment”. Joy in children will therefore be analysed on the basis of a mother’s commitment to her offspring and its implications. Oguda (65) asserts that:

By focusing on the development of their children, co-wives released some of the pressures they faced from the acrimonious competition from fellow co-wives. The positive development of their children not only promises [sic] them help in old age but also increased their sense of self-esteem and belongingness. In addition to supporting their parents financially, this study also found out that children offered emotional support to their mothers in times of loneliness and grief.

The desire for the outlined rewards is what likely prompted Iya Segi to crave children. She declares: “Every time I saw a mother rocking a baby on her back, my nipples would itch to be suckled” (215). She eventually satisfies her maternal instincts as well as the demands of a society which venerates motherhood, expressed through her mother (101): “‘You need one [a man] to bear children. The world has no patience for spinsters. It spits them out.’ Barely married, Iya Segi faces more pressure from her mother-in-law, intensified by her suspicions of her husband’s sterility (215).

Ezinwanyi E. Adam and Alheri Winifred Bulus (2018: 72) acclaim Iya Segi for getting children without parting from her money, meaning, Baba Segi. However, the price she pays for motherhood is higher, since she is the architect of the adulterous plot. Furthermore, she relegates the upbringing of her children to her co-wives as she concentrates on growing her businesses (75). Her children in turn increasingly lean on their stepmothers, especially Bolanle. Her son, Akin, secretly seeks Bolanle’s help with his homework (23) while her daughter, Segi, confides in her (155). To Iya Segi’s consternation, Segi openly solicits Bolanle’s assistance as she battles fatal sickness after eating poisoned food intended for Bolanle (204).

Motherhood becomes a torment when Iya Segi must beg Segi to talk to her (204). In a first-person narration, she defends herself against intentionally poisoning her: “‘The food was not meant for you, child! It wasn’t meant for you!’ She watched me as I tore my dress from the neck to the hem. I slapped the walls and scratched my face. I boxed my breasts and pulled my hair” (206). Nursing, one of the most reliable signs of biological maternity and pride, is profaned when Iya Segi boxes her breasts. The same society which had taunted her childlessness and hailed her ascension to motherhood would shame her epic fall from its pedestal.

Indeed, motherhood is not always “joy”, a fact parodied by Buchi Emecheta in the title of her novel *The Joys Of Motherhood* [1979](2008), which

highlights Nnu Ego's unmet expectations from her adult children (180), her disappointments, and lonely death (253). Motherhood becomes a painful burden for Iya Segi too, considering she not only loses the first of her two children (234), but she must live with the guilt of her role in Segi's demise. Joy in children is a GRR for Iya Segi at the beginning of the novel but a stressor at the end.

For Bolanle, joy in children is initially a stressor but later a GRR thanks to co-mothering. She states: "One day they will all love me. ... One day, I will have a child of my own and everything will fall into its place" (23). It can be argued that unlike Iya Segi, her longing is spurred not mainly because of unfulfilled maternal instincts but more because of the absence of the acceptance and respect that motherhood would earn her. Baba Segi reproaches what he sees as her lack of maternal instincts: "Do tears not fill your eyes when you see mothers suckling infants?" (43). Pressure to be pregnant is also exerted on Bolanle indirectly by Iya Segi (54), who hopes Baba Segi will divorce her for failing to conceive (50). The true extent of Bolanle's desire for motherhood remains elusive since she is not let in on the secret of Baba Segi's sterility.

Attempts at co-mothering initially compound her stress. When she offers to help the Alao children with their studies only Iya Tope's children turn up and only once, while Iya Segi scolds her to reserve such teaching for her offspring (22). Taking the cue from their mothers, the children treat her despicably (23). Such spite increases her longing for children of her own, often expressed spontaneously, like when she imagines the position of a cot in her bedroom (95). When her co-wives' children begin to warm to her, she enjoys the often-hidden interactions (154). Her "commitment", which until then was mainly to her herself and her husband, is partly diverted to some of her stepchildren, to the extent that she becomes the ultimate favourite of Segi on the teenager's deathbed (211). Co-mothering, although challenging at the onset, becomes a source of consolation for Bolanle. In her marriage she neither conceives nor enjoys biological motherhood, but she expels the burden that had diminished her womanhood.

As demonstrated, joy in children can be fleeting since it is conditioned by so many factors.

Economic Freedom

Economic freedom is the solution to the stressor of dependence on a husband, which Iya Segi clearly abhors (97-98). About pecuniary means as a GRR, Antonovsky (106) asserts that "[n]ot only does money directly facilitate coping with stressors; but, linked to the acquisition of other GRRs, it also is indirectly powerful". Iya Segi's use of economic freedom as a GRR is evident in how she manipulates her husband and dependent co-wives. Her drive is commendable but, as mentioned, her egoism destroys her. That said, it is worth exploring how the uneducated rural girl becomes a city entrepreneur, succeeding in the male-dominated building materials sector (104).

Iya Segi does not wait to be married and hard up before thinking of financial independence. She starts as a young girl who is inspired by her mother's words that "only a foolish woman leans heavily on a man's promises" (97). She thus realises early on that wealth can earn her influence in a patriarchal society (98).

As discussed under ego strength, she coerces Baba Segi into allowing her to sell sweets wholesale and later cement (74). Her position as a wage-earner gives her authority over her co-wives. Her dynamism prompts her husband to surrender the running of the house to her. Perhaps he secretly envies her financial success, for he confiscates everything at the end, rendering her powerless (243).

Education and Skills

Mittelmark et al. (57) explain Antonovsky's GRR of knowledge-intelligence as "knowing the real world and acquiring skills." The competitive atmosphere in Baba Segi's household urges his wives to use their skills to protect themselves, entice their husband, or put their children in advantageous positions, amongst others. While Iya Segi invests her trading skills and harvests financial freedom, as discussed above, Bolanle benefits from her education.

Baba Segi respects Bolanle's education and treats her differently because he acknowledges her broader worldview. His counsellor, Teacher, thinks likewise. Where he had earlier advised Baba Segi to feed Iya Segi herbal potions to facilitate pregnancy, he recommends a hospital check-up for Bolanle (5). Prior to that, Bolanle had shunned her husband's proposal to visit an herbalist (5), a move illiterate Iya Segi had been compelled to accept.

Although Bolanle's education is empowering, it is also a stressor in an environment where it is undervalued. She tries to teach Baba Segi and his wives the rules of etiquette (19-20) but they rebuff her efforts, (21-22). Her co-wives highlight their disdain for her educational insight by ruining her books (22). Thanks to her enlightenment, combined with ego strength, Bolanle chooses to ignore such trifles (22).

When asked what she does, she tells her parent's landlady she is considering getting a job or pursuing her education (179). Her emphasis on what she wants as opposed to taking what is available indicates she seeks job satisfaction and is willing to delay employment for that. She combines education with ego strength as foundations for the future she desires.

Education is one resource which emboldens her to admit her time in Baba Segi's house is up. Her final sentence, which also ends the novel is: "I am back now and the world is spread before me like an egg cracked open" (245).

Conclusion on the GRRs

The GRRs, particularly ego strength, genuine co-wife bonding and education, help Bolanle to endure the traumatic life in Baba Segi's house and empower her to leave. Iya Segi uses malicious co-wife bonding, her status as the senior

wife, her entrepreneurial skills and the resulting economic freedom, for personal gain at her family's expense. It is not surprising, therefore, that she ends up as the biggest loser among the Alao wives.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that although polygamy is repressive to women, polygynous wives can mitigate its adverse effects by using the GRRs. While Bolanle's education puts her in a superior intellectual position, she employs other GRRs to improve her emotional well-being. Unlike Bolanle, who uses the tools at her disposal constructively to control her response to dealing with stressors, Iya Segi at times is blindsided by her egoism, with the consequence that she inadvertently multiplies her stressors.

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