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**Changing Patters of Marriage and the Family in Nigeria**

Marriage

From Polygamy to Monogamy

Traditionally, marriage in Africa is mostly polygamous. By 1963/64, the large majority of workers had actually made the transition to monogamy: 86.1 percent of the married workers had only one wife. Most of their fathers however still lived in "the olden times", with about 72 per cent of them polygamous.

Between 1963/64 and 1981/82, monogamy further increased its hold in the Nigerian working class. There are two major indicators to examine the structural change from polygamy to monogamy during that time span: workers marriages and their fathers marriages.

In terms of workers' marriage, the proportion of monogamous married workers increased from 86.1 per cent to 93.3 per cent; accordingly, the Proportion of polygamous married workers decreased from 13.9 per cent to 6.7 per cent. The mean number of Wives of married industrial workers decreased from 1.15 in 1963/64 to 1.07 in 1981/82. At both points in time, the percentage of workers with more than two wives was negligible.

Table 1: Married Workers by Number of Wives (in %)

Number	1963/64	1981/82
1	86,1	93,3
2	13,2	6,4
3	0,3	0,3
4	0,3	0,0
Total	99,9*	100,0
N	303	372

\*Error due to rounding

In 1963/64, polygamy was definitely on the way out for the younger industrial workers: whereas the mean number of wives was 1.04 and 1.13 for married industrial workers in the age groups of 18-25 and 26-35 years respectively, older workers had about 1.5 wives on average. As the following table shows, the mean number of wives decreased with decreasing age, both in 1963/64 and in 1981/82. Polygamy among workers in lower age groups remained marginal. A noticeable

change within the twenty years period concerns workers in higher age groups: the mean number of wives among workers in the age groups above 35 decreased considerably to 1.14 and 1.24 respectively.

Table 2: Mean Number of Wives by Age Groups

Age Group	1963/64	1981/82
18 – 25	1,04	1,03
26 – 35	1,13	1,06
36 – 45	1,44	1,14
46 - 60	1,63	1,24
Total	1,15	1,07

While the factory workers themselves have made the transition to monogamy, their fathers are still predominantly polygamous, both in 1963/64 and in 1981/82. The percentage of monogamous fathers increased from 28.1 per cent in 1963/64 to 34.0 per cent in 1981/82. The Proportion of fathers with two or three wives remained stable: the first increased slightly from 33.3 per cent to 34.6 per cent, the latter decreased negligibly from 16.2 per cent to 15.9 per cent. Despite a decrease in the Proportion of fathers having more than three wives from 22.4 per cent in 1963/64 to 15.5 per cent, it was still high in 1981/82. The average number of wives among workers` fathers decreased markedly: - from 2.71 in 1963/64  
- to 2.32 in 1981/82,

a decrease of 14.4 per cent over a twenty-years period.

Not only the mean number of wives of all workers but also the mean number of wives in all age groups of workers is considerably lower than the mean number of wives of their fathers. This indicates that the change from polygamy to monogamy is not only due to the alternation of generations but is related to socioeconomic conditions, which differ widely for urban workers and their fathers, who mostly belong to a distinct rural setting.

Table 3.: Number of Wives among Workers' Fathers (in %)

Number of wives	1963/64	1981/82
1	28,1	34,0
2	33,3	34,6
3	16,2	15,9
4	12,0	7,9
5	3,2	2,7
6-7	3,6	3,1
8-9	1,8	1,8
More	1,8	0,0
Total	100,0	100,0
N	501	491

The statistical decline of polygamy does not necessarily prove an institutional change. Since the practice of monogamy is related to necessities of the urban and industrial environment it might not correspond to attitudes to monogamy which are analyzed below.

#### Attitudes to Monogamy and Polygamy

In 1981/82, for more than three-quarters of workers monogamy was a matter of choice: they preferred one wife. Taking into account the 6.7 per cent of polygamous workers and the 17.6 per cent who preferred polygamy, some 11 per cent must have been monogamous out of necessity. The change in marital practice was paralleled by changing attitudes to polygamy: In 1963/64, 27.5 per cent were in favour of polygamy compared to 17.6 per cent in 1981/82.

Table 4.: Preference for Monogamy/Polygamy (in %)

Preference for	1963/64	1981/82
One Wife	72,3	77,5
Undecided	0,2	4,9
More than one	27,5	17,6
Total	100,0	100,0
N	509	471

The predominance of monogamous marriage among industrial workers did not simply depend on age. The correlation between attitudes and age supports the assumption that the practice of monogamous marriage depended on value changes which were more pronounced in the younger generation. The proportion of workers

who preferred monogamy decreased with age: In 1963/64, 87.5 per cent of workers below the age of 18, 78 per cent of workers between 18 and 25 years, 71 per cent of workers between 26 and 35 years, 41 per cent of workers between 36 and 45 years, and 38 per cent of those above the age of 45 preferred to be married with only one wife. The same tendency was found in 1981/82. However, whereas in 1963/64 only a minority of workers above the age of 36 preferred monogamy, twenty years later nearly three-quarters of this age group did so.

Table 5.: Attitudes to Monogamy by Age in 1981/82

Preference for	Up to 26	26 – 35	36 – 45	More than 45
One	81,6	76,4	73,1	70,6
Undecided	4,0	6,4	4,3	0,0
More than one	14,1	17,2	22,6	29,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	125	233	93	17

The place of upbringing had almost no influence on attitudes to monogamy and polygamy. Surprisingly, the percentage of workers who preferred monogamy and came from villages was even higher than that of workers coming from urban areas. In 1963/64, 76 per cent of workers who were born in villages, and 69 per cent of workers of urban origin preferred monogamy. In 1981/82, 80.5 per cent of workers coming from villages, 78.1 per cent from small towns and 72.8 per cent from cities preferred monogamy. At both points in time, however, polygamy had a significantly higher preference in villages. A parallel study in Nigerian villages in 1963/64 showed that 67 per cent of interviewed villagers preferred polygamy at that time. The higher preference of monogamy by workers who were born in villages can be explained by two facts: On the one hand, for the migrants coming from rural areas the transition into industrial employment meant a clear break from their former socioeconomic conditions. For them polygamy is economically not bearable. In comparison, some workers who were born in urban surroundings lived with their extended family. Thus, for them the transition into industrial employment did not require such a break with their former life and accordingly did not require new attitudes to such an extent.

On the other hand, in the urban population there is a considerable proportion of Islamic Yorubas in Ibadan and Lagos. Ethnicity and religion had the most significant influence on attitudes to monogamy and polygamy: In 1963/64, 86 per cent of Ibo but only 64 per cent of Yoruba workers preferred monogamy. In 1981/82, these proportions were 87.6 per cent and 73.0 per cent respectively. Whereas only 5.3 per cent of Ibo workers preferred polygamy, a remarkable 22.0 per cent of the Yoruba workers did so. This relative high preference for polygamy among Yoruba workers depended strongly on religion: whereas only 58.3 per cent of Muslim workers had a preference for monogamy, this was true for not less than three-quarters of workers from other religions. 34.3 per cent of Muslim workers preferred monogamy.

## Reasons for the Preference of Monogamy

There are three main reasons given by the workers in favour of monogamy: economic, social and religious.

The economic argument implies that in an urban-industrial situation, workers can no longer afford to have several wives:

Firstly, because their own income is limited. Secondly, because children are no longer a welcome addition to the family's work force. Unlike peasant children, those of workers cost money for their education and for their maintenance. Thirdly, because wives no longer needed for sharing farm work; they still work, even the urban setting, but mainly for their own sustenance.

The social argument refers to the web of relations between wives among wives, which tend to be strenuous: "Too much trouble" is the main argument of most workers against polygamy, "To live happily" or "I can love only one" the argument in favour of monogamy.

The religious argument refers to the church's prohibition of polygamy.

The most rational argument is the economic one. The social argument may express the workers' feelings, but it hardly provides the reason for the transition from polygamy to monogamy. For Polygamy seems always to have been the source of quarreling, among the workers as among their fathers; yet the fathers did not draw the consequence of marrying only one. While there are certainly many instances of amicable relations between co-wives, African literature and African drama are full of stories of fights between co-wives and wives and husbands. At least, there no good reason to assume that urban marriages are more trouble-prone than rural ones.

Between 1963/64 and 1981/82, the importance of the economic argument remained stable: to approximately 37 per cent of workers at both points in time more wives were too expensive.

Attitudes to polygamy have changed mainly on two accounts. Religious reasons have somewhat declined in importance, from 26.0 per cent of respondents in 1963/64 to 20.2 per cent in 1981/82. Social reasons have soared: In 1982/82, 42.1 per cent instead of

25.7 per cent of workers in 1963/64 rejected polygamy because of too much trouble, and 10.4 per cent, instead of 0.3 per cent can happily live with or love only one wife.

Table 6.: Reasons for the Preference of Monogamy (in %)

Reasons for preference	1963/ 64		1981/ 82	
	Responses	Respondents	Responses	Respondents
More too expensive	33,7	36,3	29,9	37,3
Too much trouble	23,8	25,7	33,4	42,1
I can love only one	0,3	0,3	8,3	10,4
Religious reasons	24,1	26,0	16,0	20,2
Education of children	5,3	5,7	4,2	5,3
Responsibility	1,5	1,6	5,5	7,0
Family`s tradition	1,5	1,6	1,0	1,3
Other	9,9	10,7	1,6	2,0
Total	100,0*	107,9	99,9*	126,2
N	395	366	476	377

\* Error due to rounding

In 1981/82, dependencies of the above reasons on age, education and skills were not very dear. Economic and social reasons were most important for all age groups, educational standards and skill levels. The economic argument was somewhat less important for younger workers with higher education.

A striking variance was found with regard to the most modern and subjective reason for monogamy: I can only love one was of some more importance for young workers, and of considerable higher importance for higher skilled and educated workers. This reason was given by 6.3 per cent and 3.7 per cent, respectively, of unskilled and semiskilled, but by 33.7 per cent of skilled workers and 13.9 per cent of foremen/supervisors. Only 6.4 and 8 per cent, respectively, of workers of standard VI and below gave this argument, but 15.5 per cent of those with some secondary education and 18.3 per cent with secondary and higher educational standards.

### Continuity of Traditional Marriage Ceremonies

The structural change from polygamy to monogamy workers did not lead to the dissolution of the traditional marriage ceremony. In Nigeria, three types of marriage receive full recognition: court, Christian and Muslim marriage. Marriages by traditional law (native law and custom) are socially recognized but do not receive full legal backing.

In 1981/82, more than half of the workers were married by traditional or native law and custom, somewhat more than in 1963/64. This indicates a strengthening rather than a weakening of indigenous practices. Civil marriages have gained little in popularity, its share increasing by only 1.4 per cent.

Table 7.: Marriage Ceremony (in %)

Type of marriage	1963/ 64 Responses*	1981/82 Respondents	1981/82 Respondents
Native law and custom	49,0	49,8	53,4
Church	26,0	26,4	21,7
Muslim ceremony	22,7	23,1	18,8
Court/civil ceremony	2,0	2,0	3,4
Cohabitation	0,3	0,3	2,7
Total	100,0	101,6	100,0
N	303	308	415

\* Some have married in several ways

## Family

### Nuclear Family

Although polygamy decreased considerably and industrial workers in 1981/82 were almost exclusively monogamous, the number of children per married industrial worker increased from a mean number of 2.2 in 1963/64 to 3.1 children in 1981/82.

As Table 8 shows, the percentage of industrial workers with no children decreased from 13.2 per cent in 1963/64 to 4.6 per cent in 1981/82, and the percentage of those with one child from 28.1 per cent to 15.6 per cent. The proportion of industrial workers with two children, covering a quarter of all married workers, did not change. The percentage of those with three children increased slightly from 14.9 per cent to 18 per cent. A considerable increase was found with regard to workers with four and more children whose proportion increased from 9.6 per cent to 22.6 per cent.

Table 8: Number of Children among Married Workers (in %)

Number	1963/64	1981/82
None	13,2	4,6
1	28,1	15,6
2	25,4	25,0
3	14,9	18,0
4	8,9	14,3
5	4,3	11,0
6-7	3,0	9,4
9-10	1,3	2,2
More	1,0	–
Total	100,0*	100,1*
N	303	372

\* Error due to rounding

Due to increasing numbers of children, the average family size increased from 4.35 persons in 1963/64 to 5.17 persons in 1981/82. This did not reflect a changing family structure but is related to a different age composition. Table 9 shows that, in 1981/82, the mean number of children was considerably higher in the upper age groups. Workers between 18 and 25 years had one child on average, those between 26 to 35 years had 2.46, those between 36 to 45 years 4.58 and those between 46 to 60 years 5.86 children on average. (see Table 2.6)

### Extended Family Relations

The transition from rural and traditional socioeconomic and cultural settings into industrial employment in an urban environment implied a structural change from polygamous to monogamous marriage and from an extended to a nuclear family system. This structural change is a particular feature of urban and industrial Labour force formation. The spatial separation between rural Families and their urban members is a first step of dissolving extended families as units of production and consumption. However, such a spatial separation does not necessarily imply a total breakdown of social and economic relations within the extended family system. On this basis one would predict

- 1) a low percentage of workers sending money home to extended family members,
- 2) a decrease in that percentage over time (assuming that the breakdown is a gradual process taking place over time),
- 3) a non-increase of that percentage with increasing social status (assuming that social status is an indicator of adaptation to urban living conditions and that these conditions are opposed to the extended family system).

The first hypothesis can be outrightly rejected: 92 per cent of the workers sent money home in 1981/82. Only 0.2 per cent answered that they never sent money home.

The second prediction is equally wrong: the percentage of workers who sent money home increased from 86.8 per cent in 1963/64 to 92 per cent in 1981/82.

The third prediction is also wrong: The amount of money sent home did not only increase with income in absolute but also in relative terms. i.e., the higher the income the higher the proportion of one's wage sent home.

63.8 per cent of the workers who sent money home in 1963/64 supported their extended families in a monthly cycle. This percentage decreased to 58.4 per cent in 1981/82. The same proportion of workers at both points in time, namely 35.5 and 35.7 per cent respectively, sent money home every two or three to four or six months. In 1981/82, 21 per cent of the workers sent money home every two or three and 14.7 per cent every four or six month.



Table 9: Cycle of Extended Family Support (in %)

Cycle	Proportion of Workers	
	1963/64	1981/1982
Monthly	63,8	58,4
Every 2 or 3 months	35,5	21,0
Every 4 or 6 months	–	14,7
Annually	0,7	1,7
Other	–	4,2
Total	100,0	100,1
N	442	470

Recipients of family support were mainly parents, brothers and sisters. Only 3.4 per cent in 1963/64 and 7.0 per cent in 1981/82 supported other relatives. In 1963/64, 78.3 per cent of industrial workers paid for the maintenance of their parents. In 1981/82, this percentage decreased to 55.6 per cent. However, further support of parents in 1981/82 was included in the 26.2 per cent of workers who supported parents, brothers and sisters with money. Thus, it can be assumed that the support of parents did not really decrease, and differences were mainly due to different sets of possible answers in the questionnaires.

Maintenance and education of brothers or sisters were second in importance. In 1963/64, 46.4 per cent of the workers supported their brothers and sisters by taking care of their maintenance and education. In 1981/82, 40.5 per cent did so. Further support for brothers and sisters was included in the category „Money for parents, brothers and sisters”.

Table 10.: Recipients and Purpose of Family Support (in %)

Recipients/ Purpose	1963/ 64 Responses	1963/ 64 Respondents	1981/ 82 Responses	1981/ 82 Respondents
Maintenance of parents	61,1	78,3	42,6	55,6
Maintenance of brothers/sisters	21,2	27,2	12,2	16,0
Education of brothers/ sisters	15,0	19,2	10,2	13,4
Maintenance and education of brothers/sisters	–	–	8,2	11,1
Money to parents/brothers/sisters	–	–	20,0	26,2
Other relatives	2,7	3,4	5,4	7,0
Miscellaneous	–	–	1,1	1,4
Total	100,0	128,1	100,0	130,6
N	566	442	611	468

## Summary

Despite rapid urbanization, the large majority of workers were immigrants. They migrated to the city mainly in search of economic opportunities. Big cities are the places where to find work and where the money is. This did not change over the years.

It was not the urban environment as such which attracted the workers: only one-quarter of them, and one-third of those with a city preference, intended to stay permanently. Village life, therefore, was not rejected generally. The crucial criterion was whether rural areas could provide economic opportunities or not.

In correspondence to the findings of PEACE (1979) and PEIL (1972, 1981), friends were of considerable importance within the workers' urban social network. Workers' best friends were not from the same company and did not have the same job. They were usually from the same places of upbringing and lived in the same neighbourhood. Friendship had a definite social function in providing a mutual-help system among the workers.

Ethnic affiliation was still important in some personal relationships. In social relations, however, it was of very limited importance.

While the workers' fathers were mostly polygamous, polygamy was definitely on the way out for the workers themselves. This was not simply due to the alternation of generations but to socioeconomic conditions which differed widely for urban workers and their fathers, mostly belonging to distinct rural settings. The change in marital

practice was paralleled by changing attitudes with a significantly decreasing rate of workers preferring polygamy.

The structural change from polygamous to monogamous marriage and from an extended to a nuclear family system is a particular feature of an urban and industrial labour force formation. The spatial separation between rural families and their urban members is a first step of dissolving extended families as units of production and consumption. However, there was no breakdown of extended family relations. Social and economic relations played still an important role: Almost all workers supported, even at an increasing rate between 1963/64 and 1981/82, members of their extended family.