

Textual analysis of Quran 4:2-3 and its implication on women's emotional well-being in Nigeria

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Abstract

Whereas polygamy is going out of fashion in some Arab nations, it is still being considered as a normal phenomenon in Africa, especially among the Muslims. Whilst some men argue that it is Sunna for them to practice polygamy, others believe that it is a moral way of solving their sexual drive, and both groups go further to justify their positions with Sura 4:2-3. None of these groups put the feelings of women in their considerations. This paper attempted to take a second look at this Qur'anic text, and critically considered its meaning, then and now, especially in the light of the emotional well-being of the women who are the main subject in this pericope which addressed the practice of polygamy in Islam. A closer look at the Qur'anic provisions using a textual analysis, as well as a historical and descriptive approach revealed a fact that neither supports the proponents of polygamy as a Sunna because Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was only allowed by Allah (SWT) to practise polygamy as a privilege as his Rasul, nor those who accept it as a means for solving sexual drive morally, because the reason that gave rise to the pericope then does not exist now. Hence, we submitted that Q 4:2-3 did not in any way encourage or support polygamy, given the stringent requirements or conditions to satisfy if one must go into it then. Besides, war that gave rise to the orphans, widows, and shortage of Muslim men due to heavy casualty at the battle front then no longer exists. We, therefore, call on the Sheikhs and Imams to do a correct exegesis of this Surah to the Muslim Ummah, and thereby save our women from ill-treatment and emotional trauma resulting from the multiplications of wives by our men, especially in Nigeria.

Keywords: Polygamy, Qur'an, Women, Implication, Emotional Well-Being

Introduction

Polygamy is a worldwide phenomenon. It means plurality of mates.¹ It is the custom of having more than one spouse at the same time.² Interestingly, birds like sage grouse, turkey, and Peahens, as well as some other creatures in the animal kingdom also practice polygamy³. Among the humans, it may either take the form of *polyandry*, a situation in which "a woman has more than one mate,"⁴ or *polygyny*, a situation in which "a man has more than one wife at the same time."⁵ However, if it is a mixture of men and women, it is called "a

¹Hammudah 'Abd al' Ati, *Islam in Focus* (Maryland: Amana Publications, 1998), 162.

²Microsoft Encarta (Microsoft Corporation, 2009).

³Ibid.

⁴Abd al' Ati, *Islam in Focus*, 162.

⁵ Ibid., 162.

group or communal marriage.”⁶ Meanwhile, of all these three basic types of plural marriages being practised by different societies in different ages under different circumstances amongst humanity, the most common pattern is polygyny.⁷ It cuts across the continents of the world, as well as religions.

This is the only form of plural marriage that is mentioned in the Qur’an. The other two have no place in Islam.⁸ While polygyny may be rampant in Islam, it also exists in other world religions like Judaism and Christianity.⁹

Whereas many have written to support the practice while focusing on the benefit to man, some others have written against it on the basis of gender equality between the man and woman, but the emotional well-being (that is, a contented state of being happy and healthy and prosperous¹⁰ emotionally) of the woman in a polygynous marriage has not been a major focus. For example, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali says that ‘men are allowed to marry up to four wives’ in Islam, and that ‘there is nothing abnormal or abhorrent about this;’¹¹ while Nawal El Saadawi argues that a man should be made to ‘control his sexual passions and limit himself to one wife, just as it demanded of the woman that she limit[s] herself to one husband,’ insisting that ‘women’s sexual desire was just as powerful as, if not more so, that of men.’¹² Another look at the issue of polygamy in SuratulAn-Nisaa in the light of a woman’s emotional well-being is the gap this paper intends to fill.

The methodology adopted for this paper is the exegetical approach, making use of the textual evidence. Oral interviews of some women were also conducted. The “Diffusion of Innovations Theory” which ‘predicts that media as well as interpersonal contacts provide information and influence opinion and judgment’¹³ is adopted because it postulates that ‘opinion leaders exert influence on audience behaviour via their personal contact,’ and that ‘additional intermediaries called change agents and gatekeepers are also included in the process of diffusion.’¹⁴ Hence, this paper aims at appealing to the conscience of Sheikhs, the Islamic scholars, and Imams who are the opinion leaders in Islam so that through them, the incidence of polygyny can be abated in Nigeria. However, since an average Nigerian will rather use the word “polygamy” whenever polygyny is intended, we will also use it to mean polygyny throughout this paper for easy reading and understanding; and our main focus shall be on the Nigerian Muslims.

⁶Ibid., 162.

⁷Ibid., 162.

⁸Ibid., 162.

⁹Ibid., 162.

¹⁰ Electronic Advanced English Dictionary

¹¹ Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on The Qur’an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2001), 57. Translated from Arabic by Ashur A. Shamis, Revised by Zaynab Alawaye.

¹² Sa’dāwāi, Nawāal, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (London SE11: Zed Books Ltd, 2015), 284. Translated from Arabic and Edited by Sherif Hetata.

¹³ Communication Theory by University of Twente (Netherlands, 2003/2004), 10. www.utwente.nl/communication-theories

¹⁴ Communication Theory by University of Twente

History of Polygamy among African Muslims

In a number of African ethnic groups, polygamy is not only culturally acceptable, it is seen as the ideal way to found and nurture a family.¹⁵ It is the men with many wives who are seen as the leaders and pillars of the local community; and their ability to manage a large homestead is testimony to their personal social skills and maturity.¹⁶ The basic reason for many wives is to have many children to support, develop and continue the homestead and the life of the lineage.¹⁷ Sometimes, women also initiate the marrying of more wives. Hear

Michael Kirwen,

For many women, a second wife represents a helper for the housework, cooking, caring for children, and cultivating the fields. At times, a first and only wife will encourage, even harangue [or force] her husband until he marries another woman who might even be her sister or her best friend. The end result is that the first wife gains power and dominance over another woman to the point that some scholars argue that one of the basic reasons polygyny continues in Africa on a wide scale is precisely because it enables women to dominate their fellow women socially and economically.¹⁸

Whereas, polygamy may be predominant in Africa, it is not limited to her. In the Western world where almost all countries have outlawed polygamy, Kirwen observes, that many men get around the law by taking mistresses, "women with whom they are sexually involved, and whom they maintain and support in some discrete fashion on a long term basis."¹⁹ Another form of having a new marital partner is to divorce one's spouse in order to marry another one. This form is called *serial polygyny*.²⁰ Similarly, in Asia and Latin America, especially among the wealthy, there are both mistress-type relationships, and (in some countries) legally binding marriages with more than one woman, e.g., Japan.²¹ However, just as polygamy existed before Judaism (as revealed by Lamech's marriage to Adah and Zillah at the same time – Gen 4:19), during Judaism (as revealed by David's and Solomon's marriages – 1 Sam 27: 3; 1 Chr 14: 3; 1 Kgs 11: 1-3), and during Christianity (as implied by Paul's epistle to Timothy – 1 Tim 3: 1-2), it also existed prior to the emergence of Islam. It was common and deeply rooted in the social life of the Arabs at the time.²² Whereas the Bible does not address the issue of polygamy directly, the Qur'an directly and boldly addressed it when Islam emerged. It attempted to regulate its practice among

¹⁵ Michael Kirwen et al (ed.), African Cultural Knowledge (Nairobi: MIAS Books, 2005), 152.

¹⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹ Ibid., 153.

²⁰ Ibid., 153.

²¹ Ibid., 153.

²² Abd al' Ati, Islam in Focus, 164.

²³ Abd al' Ati, Islam in Focus, 164.

the Muslims. According to Hammuda 'Abd al 'Ati, the Qur'an had to intervene after the battle of Uhud in which many Muslims were killed, leaving widows and orphans for which due care was incumbent upon the Muslim survivors.²³ He states further that the Qur'an introduced the

following regulations:²⁴

1. Polygamy is permissible with certain conditions and under certain circumstances. It is a conditional permission, and not an article of faith or a matter of obligation.
2. This permission is valid for a maximum of four wives who cannot at any one time include another woman who is a first- or second-degree blood relation such as sister, maternal or paternal aunt or niece.
3. The second or third wife, if ever taken, enjoys the same rights and privileges as the first. She is fully entitled to whatever is due to the first one. Equality between the wives in treatment, provisions and kindness is a prerequisite of polygamy and a condition that must be fulfilled by anyone who maintains more than one wife. This equality depends largely on the inner conscience of the individual involved.
4. Generally speaking, in the Muslim society, this practice is an exception to the ordinary course. It is resorted to in a final attempt to solve some social and moral problems, and to deal with unavoidable difficulties. In short, it is an emergency measure, and it should be confined to that sense.

Reasons for Polygamy Today

Notwithstanding the above regulations, many African Muslim men are polygamous today, just like their counterparts in the other continents of the world. The reason for this, according to Muhammad Sharif Chaudhry, is to forestall immorality. He was captured in the following words by Phil and Julie Parshall: "there are those 'peoples,' (he didn't say Muslims) who, even if they wished, cannot remain content with one wife. He contends that polygamy "comes to their rescue and saves them from the harms of unlicensed sexual indulgences."²⁵

As for J.A. Badawi, polygamy is needful to save man from immorality. To him, human nature is consistent with immorality, for which polygamy is an alternative.²⁶ In providing another rationale for polygamy, Bevan Jones reports that:

Men by nature and by instinct is polygamous, women monogamous...wives in at least twenty percent cases are,

²⁴ Ibid., 164.

²⁵ Phil and Julie Parshall, *Lifting the Veil: The World of Muslim Women* (GA: Authentic Media, 2002), 163.

²⁶ Ibid., 163.

through diseases or insanity, unwilling to give satisfaction to the husband...the charm and beauty of the wife at 25 are at vanishing point. Is it not therefore in fairness and justice that he should take a second or third wife? Others contend that polygamy is as moral as monogamy and that whatever element sanctifies the sex relationship in monogamy is present in polygamy also.²⁷

Speaking in the same light, Phil believes that “men are more sexually driven than women”; and that, to a Muslim, “is an adequate proof that polygamy is created by Allah.”²⁸ Another reason sometimes advanced by the Muslims to justify polygamy is demographic. According to ‘Abd al’Ati, “women outnumber men in some societies,” and the only way to ensure that most women satisfy their desire for companionship in such societies is for men to marry more than one wife.²⁹ Similarly, he holds that another factor that could lead a Muslim man into polygamy is procreation. To him, a Muslim is obliged to marry another woman if his wife is unable to bear children for him for whatever reason.³⁰

The nature of work one does is another justification for polygamy in Islam. To ‘Abd al’ Ati, a Muslim who, “travels a lot on business trips and stays away from home for various periods of time, on long and short journeys, in his own country and abroad” but who cannot control is sexual urge may practice what he calls “restricted polygamy³¹.” This is called Mut’a in Islam³², but I must observe here that this kind of polygamy is a Shiite practice,³³ so it is rarely practised by Muslim men in Africa. This is because Africa is majorly a Sunni State. Still talking about work, just as it was being done in Africa before the advent of Islam, many Muslim men still engage in polygamy today in order to increase the labour force of their business enterprise by marrying more wives rather than by employment of more hands from the labour market. This, in my mind, is a form of women abuse! Some Muslims practice polygamy as a status symbol. To such Muslims, their wealth qualifies them to practice polygamy; otherwise, they think it is a sin for them to remain monogamous when Allah has blessed them with so much wealth. To some others, it is simply sunnah to marry more than one wife. To them, if the Prophet (that is, Muhammad, SAW) did it, then it is obligatory for them to do it as good Muslims; a reason a respondent claimed her husband gave to her in my interview with her.

Arguments Against Polygamy

A critical look at the above reasons readily brings two questions to mind: first, are these reasons enough to justify any man to go into polygamy; and second, does the Qur’an support any Muslim who chooses to practice polygamy? Let us examine them closely. First and foremost, all the reasons given above appear so patriarchal and self-centred, without any consideration for the woman at all.

²⁷ Ibid., 162.

²⁸ Ibid., 162.

²⁹ Abd al’ Ati, Islam in Focus, 165.

³⁰ Ibid., 165.

³¹ Abd al’ Ati, Islam in Focus, 172.

³² See Sura 5: 87, and Khan, Sahih-al Bukhari, Hadith 7.12.3.

³³ R. Ibrahim Adebayo, “A Study of Nikah Al-Mut’ah and It’s Implications For Feminine Dignity” Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURELS) 4, No.1 (2014): 1.

Does polygamy really stop a man from immorality, or the desire to want to sleep with more women? Nay, we do not think so! If it did not stop the Prophet from having concubines³⁴ after having multiple wives³⁵, it does appear that it cannot stop any Muslim today. What many Muslim men fail to understand is the fact that they cannot use the Prophet as an example on the issue of polygamy because of the special privilege that was granted to him as Rasul of Allah (Q 33:51). Rather, it is self-discipline and self-control resulting from a deliberate spiritual jihad that can save a man from immorality and not multiple wives. After all, until the Prophet was given the privilege to practice polygamy, he maintained a monogamous marriage with Khadijah, his first wife, for about 25 years (595-619 AD) till her demise.³⁶

Health wise, the lives of the innocent women caught up in the web of polygamy could be endangered as a result of the multiple sex partners their husbands usually have, especially in this era of several sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), including AIDS.³⁷ Similarly, a woman who feels neglected by her husband in a polygamous home, and who is spiritually low, may be forced to seek for companionship, succour, and satisfaction outside of her home by engaging in extra-marital affairs. This kind of circumstantial, though unjustifiable, affair could be an open-door for diseases to the other innocent mates of hers. By this, it means that polygamy leads its victims to "the harms of unlicensed sexual indulgences", rather than save them from it, as wrongly claimed by Chaudhry above. Further, to enter into polygamy on the ground that women outnumber men, is parochial in our mind, to say the least. Has there been any record of any woman or group of women in a society who has claimed to be single because there are not enough men in their community, in this generation? Again, to marry more women just because the first cannot bear children, in our mind, is an act of selfishness. Can the family not foster children through kafalah?³⁸ What happens when the infertility is the man's problem? Similarly, a man who practices polygamy because his wife's beauty is "vanishing" due to old age is obviously telling people around him that he never ever loved the woman but only married her for her beauty. Besides, who tells such a man that he, himself, is not ageing? Moreover, a Muslim who has to go into polygamy because he is wealthy needs to remember that there are many noble causes, such as building more Mosques, donating to orphanages, and such like, which he can pursue with his wealth rather than cause problem(s) for himself through polygamy because the greatest hazard of polygamy is that it

³⁴Anne Cooper and Elsie A. Maxwell (Eds.), *Ishmael My Brother*(Nigeria: Evangel Publisher Ltd., 2003), 108.

³⁵ Mark A. Gabriel, *Jesus and Muhammad* (Florida: Frontline A Strang Company, 2004), 170.

³⁶ Muhammad's Favourite Wives. <https://www.billionbibles.org/sharia/muhammads-favorite-wives.html>

³⁷N.Moosa, "Polygynous Muslim Marriages in South Africa: their Potential Impact on the Incidence of Hiv/Aids" (PER/PELJ) 12, No.3, (2009): 67. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>

³⁸It is only Kafala that is permitted in Islam; child adoption is not permissible. In Kafala, the child fostered retains his family name if he has one, unlike in adoption where the name of the child adopted is subsumed into the adopting family's name. See Focus on Adoption magazine, 2020, Adoption in Islam by Adoptive Families Association of BC for more. <https://www.bcadoption.com/resources/articles/adoption-islam>

causes rivalry and jealousy among the women; even Prophet Muhammad's family was not

exempted from this. The following Hadith is a testimony to this fact:

Narrated Urwa: (The Prophet) then said to (Um Salama), "Do not hurt me regarding Aisha." On that Um Salama said, "I repent to Allah for hurting you." Then the group of Um Salama called Fatima, the daughter of Allah's Apostle, and sent her to Allah's Apostle to say to him, "Your wives request you to treat them and daughter of Abu Bakr on equal terms." Then Fatima conveyed the message to him. The Prophet said, "O my daughter! Don't you love whom I love?" She replied in the affirmative and returned and told them of the situation. They requested her to go to him again but she refused. They then sent Zainab bint Jahah who went to him and used harsh words saying, "Your wives request you to treat them and daughter of Ibn Abu Quhaba on equal terms." On that she raised her voice and abused Aisha to her face so much so that Allah's Apostle looked at Aisha to see whether she would retort. Aisha started to reply to Zainab till she silenced her. The Prophet then looked at Aisha and said, "She is really the daughter of Abu Bakr."³⁹

Textual Evidence

In spite of the above arguments against polygamy, it is important to examine the position of the Qur'an on this issue. Does the Qur'an support or recommend polygamy after all as a regular practice? What does it say about polygamy?

Give unto *orphans* their wealth. Exchange not the good for the bad (in your management thereof) nor absorb their wealth into your own wealth. Lo! that would be a great sin. And *if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans*, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and *if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only)* or (the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely *that ye will not do injustice*.⁴⁰ (Surah 4, An-Nisaa, ayats 2-3, emphases mine).

First, it is important to note that this Surah was given shortly after the battle of Uhud which gave rise to many widows and orphans among the Muslims, and that "this Ayah mentions polygyny only in reference to orphans."⁴¹ Again, "although polygyny is permitted in the text, it is also conditioned upon almost unachievable terms of justice."⁴² According to some scholars, the counsel was meant as an admonition to take care of the women among

³⁹See Khan, Sahih-al Bukhari, Hadith 3:455-56; 47.8.755.

⁴⁰ Holy Qur'an English Translation by Pikhthal.

⁴¹Asma Barlas, Believing Women in Islam (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 191.

⁴²Amina Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 193.

them⁴³, and not necessarily to promote polygamy. Anne Cooper and Elsie A. Maxwell opine that “these verses emphasise that to marry more than one woman, a man must be able to be fair with all of them and if he is not able, he should marry only one.”⁴⁴ But can a man really be fair or just between two or more people. In other words, can a man treat two or more women equally?

The Qur’an offers an answer to this onerous question in the two following texts: “Ye will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much ye wish (to do so): But turn not altogether away (from one), leaving her as in suspense. If ye do good and keep from evil, lo! Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.” (Sura 4:129). Similarly, Sura 33:4 says, “Allah hath not assigned unto any man two hearts within his body. . .” Following the two texts above, it is almost a truism that no one person can treat two different people exactly the same way, no matter how well intended the person might be.

Even Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who is the perfect example of the Muslim faithfuls is recorded as not being able to treat his numerous wives equally. George W. Braswell writes that “Muhammad [SAW] had difficulties with his wives over his preferential treatment of Aisha.”⁴⁵ The following tradition portray favouritism toward his youngest wife - Aisha. “Narrated Abu Musa: Allah’s Apostle said, ‘Many amongst men reached (the level of) perfection but none amongst the women reached this level except Aisha, Pharaoh’s wife, and Mary, the daughter of Imran. And no doubt, the superiority of Aisha to other women is like the superiority of Tharid (i.e., a meat and bread dish) to other meals’”⁴⁶ Refer also to the earlier Hadith cited above in which the prophet’s wives had to be demanding equal treatment with Aisha, from him.

Women’s Rights under Shari’a and the Implication of Polygamy on Women’s Emotional Well Being

It is interesting to note that Islamic Law or Shari’ah requires that a man who desires to take a second wife should seek the consent of his wife (who has the right to decline) before he does so.⁴⁷ In addition, al-Ghazali observes that the law permits the woman the “right to incorporate her refusal of polygamy in the marriage contract,” and that, according to the renowned Shari’ah jurist, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, “the husband is obliged to abide by that condition or the wife can demand a divorce and be granted it.”⁴⁸

However, it does appear that many Muslim women are not aware of this provision of the law, and for those who are aware among them, the fear of being labelled as a ‘bad woman’ seems to make them give consent reluctantly. An example is a woman in the West Bank who believes that to grant consent to one’s husband’s request to take a second wife is an act of respect from the

⁴³Prusher, Ilene R., “Two Homes, Two Families, Two Wives,” Christian Science Monitor, 08827729, 8/10/2000, Vol. 92, Issue 182. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>

⁴⁴ Cooper and Maxwell, Ishmael My Brother, 180.

⁴⁵George W. Braswell, Jr., Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996), 111.

⁴⁶Khan, Sahih-al Bukhari, Hadith 4:411; 55.28.623.

⁴⁷ al-Ghazali, A Thematic Commentary on The Qur’an, 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 57.

woman. Hear her, "I respect my husband, so I agreed."⁴⁹ Yet the same woman says "it would be better to have such a law"⁵⁰ that outrightly prohibits polygamy in her country. We think it suffices to say here that this kind of a woman will be suffering emotionally, especially as she was described as one who "acts much like a divorcee relieved to be rid of her husband."⁵¹ This, in our mind, is a mental torture! No wonder the Canadian court had to rule against religious rights to polygamy in Canada notwithstanding her democratic stance and strong defence for fundamental human and religious rights of citizens "in order to prevent the real and substantial risk of harm that it [polygamy] posed to women and children."⁵²

Furthermore, it was discovered through some interviews conducted that men sometimes refuse their wives the opportunity to exercise their right to grant or decline consent to their own desire for a second wife by not informing them at all before embarking on such a venture. For example, a respondent told me that her husband did not bother to inform her before he finally took his second wife because she said 'no' to such a request about three years earlier when he first informed her of such an intention. Perhaps that is why Mariam in West Bank says "if a man wants to marry, he will do it whether it's illegal or not."⁵³ This appears to be the reason why many Muslim women do not complain about the multiplication of wives by their husbands. Their silence does not necessarily mean that they are happy with it. Many of them suffer anguish within!

One of the female Muslim respondents claimed she lost her right as a signatory to her husband's bank account as soon as the husband took a second wife. Again, she said she lost the closeness she used to enjoy with her husband as she now sees her husband every other week as he now maintains two homes since the other wife lives in another house. The same is the case with the woman at the West Bank as her own husband became scarce to her too immediately he took the second wife.⁵⁴ The same was the case in the researcher's family when his father began to multiply wives on his mother who happened to be the first. He became scarce! The first wives usually suffer loneliness, and this usually creates a hole in their hearts.

Frankly, no man who truly loves his daughter would desire that the daughter's husband should add more wives to his daughter in her matrimonial home. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) showed this kind of true love for the daughter when his son-in-law decided to add another wife to Fatima, his daughter. The following Hadith succinctly captures the prophet's reaction.

Narrated Al-Miswar bin Makhrama:

⁴⁹Prusher, "Two Homes, Two Families, Two Wives,"

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵²Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, What's the Harm in Polygamy? Multicultural Toleration and Women's Experience of Plural Marriage. (Cambridge: University Press, 2017).
<https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2016.36>

⁵³Prusher, "Two Homes, Two Families, Two Wives,"

⁵⁴Ibid.

I heard Allah's Apostle who was on the pulpit, saying, "Banu Hisham bin Al-Mughira have requested me to allow them to marry their daughter to Ali bin Abu Talib, but I don't give permission, and will not give permission unless 'Ali bin Abi Talib divorces my daughter in order to marry their daughter, because Fatima is a part of my body, and I hate what she hates to see, and what hurts her, hurts me."⁵⁵

This hadith also reveals that polygamy hurts women. Hence, the prophet's rejection of it for his daughter. Every true father would do this for the daughter! This, also, appears to show the Prophet's rejection of polygamy for the Faithfull's; telling them in a way that he practised it as a privilege (since Allah, SWT, would not count however he treats his own wives as a sin against him)⁵⁶ and, hence, should not be made a way of life by his followers.

Quite unfortunately though, many Muslims have made polygamy a way of life. This fact is made evident by Kareem, who while justifying that the Muslims are higher in number in Nigeria, attributed the reason for this to "the fact that Muslims practice polygamy."⁵⁷ One can only imagine how many women who had been, and are still being, traumatised in Nigeria, which is being considered by all as the giant of Africa, being the most populous nation in the continent, due especially to the patriarchal exegesis of Q 4:2-3 by some Muslim scholars and clerics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while polygamy may become economically impossible in certain urban social contexts, that does not mean that the attitude towards polygamy has changed, especially in the Muslim communities in Africa⁵⁸ owing largely to the misunderstanding of Surah 4:2-3. Yet, the truth is that polygamy is not sanctioned in Islam by the Qur'an.⁵⁹

Hence, men should begin to treat the women with utmost respect that they deserve as mothers that they are. After all, according to Sunnah, paradise is at their hills⁶⁰ and those who consider them as "an enviable evil, an eternal mischief, an attractive calamity, a domestic risk, and a charming and decorated

⁵⁵ Bukhari: Book 7, Volume 62, Hadith 157

⁵⁶ Allah (SWT) permits the Prophet (SAW) to deal with his wife as he deems fit. No other person is given that privilege as such an act may amount to sin to them. Surah 33, aya 51 says: You (O Muhammad SAW) can postpone (the turn of) whom you will of them (your wives), and you may receive whom you will. And whomsoever you desire of those whom you have set aside (her turn temporarily), it is no sin on you (to receive her again), that is better; that they may be comforted and not grieved, and may all be pleased with what you give them. Allâh knows what is in your hearts. And Allâh is Ever AllKnowing, Most Forbearing.

⁵⁷ Kareem, MuritalaKewuyemi, "Islamic Banking and the Question of Secularism" *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURLS)* 6, No.1, (2016): 83.

⁵⁸ J. Spencer Trimingham, *The influence of Islam upon Africa* (Singapore: Longman Singapore Publishers (Pte) Ltd., 1980), 120.

⁵⁹ Cooper and Maxwell, *Ishmael My Brother*, 179.

⁶⁰ *Sunna an-Nisa*

misfortune”⁶¹ should have a deep rethink. Their emotional well-being should be considered by every well-meaning and responsible husband who should treat his wife as he would want to be treated by her, especially as it has been proven by research that “females are more sensitive to emotional expressions in real interpersonal interactions”⁶² than men. The provision by Shari’ah requiring the man to obtain the consent of his wife before he marries the second in itself suggests that polygamy is not the standard for marriage in Islam.

Finally, Islamic scholars and clerics who hitherto had understood Q 4:2-3 to be the permission for polygamy (and have been teaching the Muslim Ummah so) should take a second look at these ayats, and join the crusade for monogamy which Islam actually intends, because their influence is strongly needed to preserve the emotional well-being of our Muslim women in their marriages. This is especially necessary as Tunisia, an Islamic country has already legislated against polygamy since the 70’s and agitations for same are ripe in Morocco and Palestine.⁶³ Besides, if Islamic religion could be “so severe with woman that death could be her penalty if she so much as looked at a man other than her husband,”⁶⁴ then men should not be so permitted to treat the women anyhow by multiplying wives and denying the first wives the attention they deserve, and their presence which they used to enjoy, by becoming scarce to them because of the other wives. This may be a sin that may lead some men to hell because Allah (SWT) has warned that “ye [men] will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much ye wish (to do so)” (Sura 4:129). So, the best thing for every Muslim man is to stay clear of polygamy. That way, our Muslim women would be more emotionally healthy when rivalry, resulting from multiplication of wives by their spouses, is removed from their lot.

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⁶¹ Ali, *Liberation of Women in the Seventh Century* (Chicago: The Institute of Islamic Information and Education, 1990), 3.

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⁶³ Prusher, “Two Homes, Two Families, Two Wives,”

⁶⁴ Nawāal, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, 285.

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