

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

ISLAM, POLYGYNY AND MODERN FEMINIST THINKING:  
AN APPRAISAL OF MARIAMA BA'S *SO LONG A LETTER*

BY

KASSIM, RABIATU

[Thesis submitted to the Department of Religion and Human Values, Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy Degree in Religion and Human Values]

MARCH 2014

**DECLARATION**

*I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.*

Candidate's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Rabiatu Kassim

Supervisors' Declaration

*We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision on thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.*

Principal Supervisor's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Prof. Sayed Hamza Ayantunde Malik

Co-supervisor's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Mustapha Abdul Hamid

## ABSTRACT

During Prophet Mohammad's Prophethood, many reforms were enacted to address the place of women in a patriarchal society. One of such reforms is the limits placed on polygyny as stipulated in Qur'an 4:3 which limit it to a maximum of four wives. However in this twenty first century, recourse is not made to the stipulation that makes polygyny the exception rather than the rule.

Using Mariama Ba's *So long a letter* as a basis; the researcher endeavours to find out Muslim feminist views on polygyny using Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities as study areas. The study reveals that the Islamic implementation and practice of polygyny vary among Muslims and it is influenced by the cultural contexts of various communities. Current trends seem to favour the social utility of the institution, rather than its religious validity. As revealed by the research, thirteen respondents out of a sample size of twenty which represent 65% are of the view that the reason why polygyny is practised is 'the social prestige syndrome'. Religion was not used explicitly as a justification. So, there are a lot of cultural or societal influences which encourage polygyny but men hide under the guise of the Islamic religion to practice it.

It was recommended that some reforms are needed to compel those involved to practice it fairly by appealing to their conscience. Thus, the main problem with polygyny is with its practice and implementation rather than its concept as a permissible act in Islam.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been feasible without the committed supervision, constructive criticisms, suggestions and guidance of my able supervisors, Mustapha Abdul Hamid and Professor S. Malik Ayetunde.

I also acknowledge the administrative staff and the team of lecturers at the Department of Religion of Human Values, in the likes of Prof. B.A. Ntreh, Prof. B. Anum, Jibrail Bin Yusif and all lectures in the University of Cape Coast and my colleagues for providing me with a provocative, challenging and supportive intellectual community.

My heartfelt gratitude also goes to the Alhaji Kassim (Cape Coast) and Alhaji Hamidu Kabore (Fise, Accra) families for their support and encouragement.

I am also appreciative of my husband, Mohammad Shamsu Hamidu for his challenging arguments and criticisms that broadened my thinking. Thank you for handling my worse thereby bringing out the best in me.

**DEDICATION**

*To all survivors of polygyny*

**TABLE OF CONTENT**

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
Background to the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Aims and Objectives	4
Theoretical Frameworks	5
Psychoanalytic Feminism	8
Liberal Feminism	8
Radical Feminism	9
Feminism and Religion	11
Christian Feminism	11
Jewish Feminism	12
Islamic Feminism	12
Methodology	14
Population and Study Area	15
Sampling and Sample Size	16
Data Collection Instrument	17
Data collection Problems	17
Delimitations of the Study	17

Ethical Consideration	18
Literature Review	18
Polygyny in Islam	18
Feminists' view of Polygyny	25
Significance of the Study	33
Organization of the Study	34

**CHAPTER TWO: MARIAMA BA AND THE *BOOK SO LONG A LETTER***

Introduction	36
Biography of Mariama Ba	36
Summary of <i>So Long a Letter</i>	37
Ramatoulaye Fall	38
Aissatou	41
Young Nabou and Binetou	43
Conclusion of summary	43
Review of the Book	44
Islam and Polygyny	44
Feminism and Patriarchy	48
Other Themes	56

**CHAPTER THREE: FEMINISM AND MODERN FEMINIST THINKING IN RELATION TO THE ISSUES AND CONCERNS RAISED BY MARIAMA BA IN THE BOOK *SO LONG A LETTER***

Introduction	59
Feminism and Modern Feminist Thinking	59

Modern Feminist Thinking in Relation to the Issues and Concern	
Raised by Mariama Ba in <i>So Long a Letter</i>	60
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF ISLAMIC POLYGYNY</b>	
Introduction	70
Islamic Concept of Polygyny	70
Brief History of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities	73
Kotokuraba Muslim Community	73
Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Community	75
Social Activities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities	76
Economic Activities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities	82
Political Activities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities	83
Polygyny in the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities	84
Contemporary Reasons for Polygyny	85
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION</b>	
Introduction	100
Summary	100
Major findings	103
Main conclusion	105
Recommendations	106
References	108



Primary Sources	119
Those Interviewed	120
Appendix A	122

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

Naturally, human beings live in groups or communities. The group or community's survival depends on the harmony it upholds. However, it appears that human beings have certain instinct that occasionally causes all types of conflicts (Abudu, 1996; p. 62). In the study of Aristotle's work the *Politics*, by Nicholas (1992) explains that human beings are political animal but the city or the formation of a community is natural. She further postulates that human beings are political animals because they are rational and possess speech. Thus, they can fully exercise their capacity for reason and by communicating with others about what is advantageous and just. Man is political in nature because it calls for the exercise of humanity's highest natural capacity (1992).

On the other hand, Aristotle put the city (community) as a natural growth, parallel to any other living being. However, the growth of the community is more violent than harmonious as a result of conflict engendered by physical disruptive passion (Nicholas, 1992). She further opined that life is, to a large extent ruled by necessity— by compulsive force, rather than choice, by the need for survival rather than concern of nobility.

On this issue, Barry (1989) also notes that through contact with societies, people come to realise that social arrangements are not natural phenomenon but are socially created realities or human creation. So, the way to achieve and sustain harmony in the community is by ensuring justice in all

aspects of human relations. That is why certain guidelines or laws are put in place to guide society. For instance, the Qur'an in which certain laws, edicts, and admonitions are stipulated is seen by Muslims as a universal guide for all humankind where in it in order for humankind to achieve the ultimate good or enter paradise- *al-Jannah*.

The Qur'an is the Holy book for Muslims, containing the references to the Five Pillars of Islam - Profession of Faith (*Kalimatul-Sahada*), Prayer (*Salat*), Fasting (*Sawn*), Alms- Giving (*Zakat*), and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*). In addition to the Five Pillars, Islamic law or *shari'ah* has developed a tradition of rulings and interpretations or *ijtihad* that touch on virtually all aspects of life and society. Therefore, every aspect of a Muslim's life is guided by the Qur'an, *Sunnah* (sayings and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)), and the other sources of Islamic laws such as the *Qiyas* and *Ijmah*.

The law on marriage and more specifically on polygyny in Islam is no exception. In other words, polygyny is to ensure harmony in the community as Qur'an c 4:3 allegedly gives legitimacy to polygyny, by stating, "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan. Marry women of your choice, two, three, or four. But if ye fear that he shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then only one or (a captive) that your right hand possesses. That is more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice"

Some scholars like Amina Wadud (1999; 2006); Ziba Mir-Hosseini. (2006); Amira Mashhour (2005); Rachael Jones (2006); Asma Barlas (2002); Fatima Mernissi (2003); and Majid Khadduri (1977), argue that this injunction on polygyny in Islam was motivated by specific social and historical circumstances of seventh century Arabia. So, since the upsurge of

feminist activity in the early seventeenth century (17<sup>th</sup>), some Muslim scholars and other feminists have questioned the basis of polygyny. Indeed, some have made the argument that polygyny in today's world is an anathema. One of such Muslim scholar is Mariama Ba. In her novel, *So Long a Letter*, she questions the institution of polygyny, arguing that it is both unfair and insensitive, especially to the feelings of the women who are involved in polygynous relationships (Ba, 1981).

It is against this background that this work reviewed the issues raised in *So Long a Letter* and subjected Ba's arguments to critical scrutiny. An assessment of the principles of Islamic law on polygyny from feminist perspectives with regard to the issues raised by Ba (1981) on polygyny was made. Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim Communities is used as a research area to get contemporary views in order to reveal the position that makes polygyny adaptable to modern trends of social development.

### **Statement of Problem**

Islam is generally believed to be a religion that permits polygyny [as most polygynous Muslim men quote] Qur'an 4:3 which state "marry women of your choice, two, three, four" However, for those people, recourse is not made to the condition that makes polygyny the exception rather than the rule.

Indeed reference is not even made to the historical and social circumstances of seventh century Arabia that somehow made polygyny unavoidable. The result of this misuse of Qur'anic edict is that the rights of most women are trampled upon with impunity using the Qur'an as a basis and

therefore negating the reforms the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) brought about.

So, using Mariama Ba's *So long a letter* as a basis; this study is an attempt to give a comprehensive as well as exposes contradictions inherent in the patriarchal arguments on polygyny.

Mariama Ba's work is a literary work in the Languages. This research however uses the issues raised in the book with regards to polygyny to find out the views on polygyny using the Islamic communities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities as study areas.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Research**

The objectives of this research are:

1. There is a “disconnect between rights that women are guaranteed in the Qur'an and rights that they are given in reality” (Jones 2006; p 1) with regard to polygyny. This research aims to prove or disprove this assertion.
2. To examine the Islamic conception of polygyny to ascertain the true concepts and misconceptions of polygyny.
3. To find out the female perception of polygyny as practiced by Muslims since relatively little research specifically address women's attitudes toward polygyny despite the wide spread interest in polygyny (Mekers & Franklin 1995)
4. To analyse the female perception of polygyny as discussed in *So long a letter* so that the misuse and contradictions inherent in the patriarchal arguments on polygyny can be brought to bear.

5. To bring to light the perception of women as portrayed in the book *So Long a Letter* will be brought to light alongside the contemporary perception using Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities in the Cape Coast Municipality as a study area so as to get a modern feminist thought.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Teddlies and Tashakkori (2008), a theoretical framework of a study is a structure that can hold or support a research. Thus, the theoretical framework is but a theory that serves as a basis for argument in a research.

For a firm grasp of the issue of Islamic polygyny from a modern feminist point of view, this work will be guided by the theory of feminism. It is difficult in getting a universally agreed definition of feminism since different disciplines view it from their respective angles. Thus feminism is not a simple or a unified philosophy.

While steering feminist ideologies is enormous, some scholars have tried to offer some general definition. Bell Hooks defined feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression,” (Hooks, 2000; p. 2).

Similarly, Knox and Pinch (2000) also define feminism as a broad social movement advocating equal rights for men and women. They added that various forms of academic analysis that attempt to expose the diverse processes that lead women to be oppressed” also forms part of feminism. In rhetorical studies, there is the view that feminism “focuses on the concept of

equity, with a goal of reorganizing society on the basis of equality for the sexes in all areas of social relations” (Foss, Foss and Griffin, 1999; p. 2).

It is further recognized that feminism could mean eradicating discrimination and subjugation for “people of colour, people with disabilities, people of different ages and socio-economic classes, and lesbians and gay men,” or even eco-feminism, which blends feminism with environmentalism (Foss, Foss and Griffin, 1999; p. 2).

It is worthy of note that Hooks (2000), Knox and Pinch (2000), and Foss, Foss and Griffin (1999) do not limit their definition to only females but open the concept to cover other areas.

Plumwood (2002) argues that Feminist theory is the most innovative and truly living theory in today’s academies, but the struggle between the living and the dead extends beyond feminism and even beyond institutions.

According to Bardon (2007), feminism aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Therefore, themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy.

Feminism is a general term which became popular in the early 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries through women’s movements with the aim of addressing the social gap between men and women in the social, economic and political level in order to attain equality with men. It is therefore the belief in the political, social, and economic equality of women with men. Feminism is a discourse that involves various movements, theories, and philosophies which are

concerned with the issue of gender difference and campaign for women's rights and interests.

However, Plumwood (2002) postulates that the feminists' goal is to eradicate from culture everything that is masculine and remake people into a gender-neutral society and that to understand feminism requires knowledge of how the feminist co-opted cultures and built their political power.

Feminism can therefore be said to be a set of theories about women's oppressions and a set of strategies for social change. Magwe (2006), states that the definition of feminism goes beyond distinguishing feminism from other forms of thought. Magwe (2006) adds that the problem is "discernible within the general body of feminist thought". The contemporary "Western feminism" broadly divides feminism into categories such as Liberal, Radical, Marxist and Socialist Feminism and others. However, there is a general tendency amongst theorists to speak of feminism and Western feminism in particular as the two main branches. At the end, Magwe (2006) could not give an exact definition of feminism which implies that it is up to the different groups to define feminism from their perspectives.

In conclusion, one is of the view that feminism has gone beyond only women's right but agree with some scholars such as Hooks (2000), Knox and Pinch (2000), and Foss, Foss and Griffin (1999) who do not limit their definition to only females but open the concept to cover other angles such as equity, eradicating discrimination and subjugations of all kind and even environmentalism.

The difficulty in getting an agreed definition of feminism has led to the development or emergence of different types of feminism such as



Psychoanalytic Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Libertarian feminism, Conservative Feminism, Religious Feminism. Therefore, some of these theories will now be discussed to justify the choice of feminist theory used for this research.

### *Psychoanalytic Feminism*

Psychoanalytic feminism considers the consequences of women's different psychosexual development for their roles in organization and management, focusing on feminine character traits to explain women's subordinate economic status.

According to Lasswell (1930) Psychoanalytic have been portrayed as one of the elements containing feminism. Psychoanalytic feminism is traced to Sigmund Freud and its matriarchy-patriarchy conflict which is central to his work *Totem and Taboo* (1950). Freud's theories can be seen to be centred on the triangular Oedipus complex, the patricidal relation between child and father, and incestuous desire for the mother, as a model for the development of each individual's personality. Freud disliked feminist sexual radicalism, but echoed some of it. Mother-right should not be confused with gynaeocracy (Freud, 1950). Psychoanalytic feminist view that both men and women are the same by nature and in reasoning. And that the only difference between them can be seen in their physiology (Dawda, 2005).

### *Liberal Feminism*

Schuld (1977) postulates that Liberal Feminism is characterized by an individualistic emphasis on equality. He further explains that Liberal feminism asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reform.

This is an individualistic form of feminism, which focuses on women's ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal feminism uses the personal interactions between men and women as the place from which to transform society.

According to Nes and Ladicola (1988), liberal feminists are women who are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society.

Issues important to Liberal Feminists include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, equal pay for equal work, affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women (Nes and Ladicola, 1988). As indicated by Schuld (1977), Liberal Feminism dealt with equal opportunity, affirmative action and discrimination.

According to Liberal Feminism, society itself does not need a major overhaul, but rather laws need to be changed and opportunities have to be opened up to allow women to become equals in society. To a Liberal Feminist, evidence of progress is seen largely by the numbers of women in positions previously occupied by men, especially powerful positions.

### *Radical Feminism*

Radical feminist theory put into practice organizational forms that were reflective of feminist values, such as equality, community, participation, and an integration of form and content, focusing on 'womanspace' to fulfil their needs. It considers the capitalist hierarchy, which it describes as sexist, as the defining feature of women's oppression (MacKinnon, 1982). They also believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with

what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating system (Nes and Ladicola, 1988).

Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way (Plumwood, 2002).

Radical Feminism is a philosophy that sees the oppression of women as fundamental and the most basic form of oppression and that all other forms of oppression stem from male dominance. Thus, the purpose of this oppression is to obtain psychological ego satisfaction, and strength and self-esteem.

Kramarae, Cheri; Spender, and Dale (2000) stated that some Radical Feminists see no alternatives other than the total uprooting and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals. Over time a number of sub-types of Radical Feminism such as Cultural Feminism, Separatist Feminism and Anti-pornography Feminism have emerged.

Critics of Radical Feminism such as Alice Echols (a feminist historian and cultural theorist) assert that because it is based on an essentialist view of the differences between women and men and advocates independence and institution building, it has led feminists to retreat from politics to life-style. Thus, this is the depoliticisation of Radical Feminism (Nes & Ladicola, 1988)

Radical feminists, however, believe that society is extremely patriarchal, and, until patriarchy is transformed on all levels, the system will remain unjust. A minority of radical feminists are *separatist feminists*, who believe that men and women need to maintain separate institutions and relationships (MacKinnon, 1982).

### *Feminism and Religion*

Feminist theology is a movement that reconsiders the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies of religions from a feminist perspective (Moaddel, 1998). Some of the goals of feminist theology include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities, reinterpreting male-dominated imagery and language about God, determining women's place in relation to career and motherhood, and studying images of women in the religion's sacred texts (Mortley, 1981).

There are a lot of religions in the world which form feminist activities with religious basis (Feminist theology). However, only three will be discussed here namely; Christian Feminism, Jewish Feminism Islamic Feminism.

### *Christian Feminism*

Christian feminism is a branch of Feminist Theology which seeks to interpret and understand Christianity in light of the equality of women and men. Because this equality has been historically ignored, Christian feminists believe their contributions are necessary for a complete understanding of Christianity (Mortley, 1981).

While there is no standard set of beliefs among Christian feminists, most agree that God does not discriminate on the basis of biologically-determined characteristics such as sex (Ochs, 1977). Their major issues are the ordination of women, male dominance in Christian marriage, and claims of moral deficiency and inferiority of abilities of women compared to men. They also are concerned with the balance of parenting between mothers and fathers and the overall treatment of women in the church (Plaskow, 2003).

### *Jewish Feminism*

According to Judith Plaskow (2003) the main issues for early Jewish Feminists in these movements were the exclusion from the all-male prayer group or *minyan*, the exemption from positive time-bound *mitzvot*, and women's inability to function as witnesses and to initiate divorce. It must be noted that her main focus has been on feminism in Reform Judaism (Plaskow 2003)

Thus, Jewish feminism seeks to improve the religious, legal, and social status of women within Judaism and to open up new opportunities for religious experience and leadership for Jewish women. Feminist movements, with varying approaches and successes, have opened up within all major branches of Judaism.

### *Islamic Feminism*

The Qur'an is the Holy book of Muslims. It contains the Five Pillars of Islam - Profession of Faith, Prayer, Fasting, Alms- Giving, and Pilgrimage. In addition to the Five Pillars, Islamic law or *shari'ah* has developed certain sources of these laws like rulings and interpretations or *ijtihad* that touch on virtually all aspects of life and society. Islamic feminism calls for an authentic reinterpretation of the Qur'an and other sources of the Islamic laws to make it relevant and applicable to the current trends. This is advocated by scholars such as Wadud (1999), Barlas (2002), Moghissi (1999), Mernissi (2003), Mir-Hosseini (2006), Mashhour (2005), and Khadduri (1977) and Yamani (1996). Yamani (1996) for instance argues that the theoretical core of Islamic feminism is grounded in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Also, that the central focus remains the clarification of gender fairness in Islam.

The leaders of the movement seek to amend the current ‘patriarchal’ laws into making them more focused on integrating equality for men and women in Islam. Islamic feminism is concerned with the role of women in Islam and aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life (Badran, 2002).

Islamic Feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. Although rooted in Islam, the movement's pioneers have also utilized secular and Western feminist discourses and recognize the role of Islamic feminism as part of an integrated global feminist movement (Badran, 2002).

Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Quran and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Quran, *Hadith* (sayings of Muhammad (SAW)), and *Sharia* (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society (Badran, 2002).

According to Val Moghadam (2000), there are three types of feminist movements in Islam – Islamic Feminists, Muslim Feminists, and Islamist Feminists. As Arshad (2008) argues Islamic feminists ground their arguments in Islam and its teachings, seek the full equality of women and men in the personal and public sphere and can include non-Muslims in the discourse and debate. Secondly, Muslim feminists believe in Islam and feminism but also tend to use arguments outside Islam such as an international human rights agreement to counter gender inequality (Arshad, 2008; p. 4). Finally, Islamist feminists are “advocates of a political Islam, the notion that the Qur’an can mandate an Islamic government; they advocate women's rights in the public

sphere but do not challenge gender inequality in the personal, private sphere” (Arshad, 2008; p. 4).

All three have different strategies but also share a common goal of closing the gap between men and women in Muslim societies. However, this work adopts Islamic Feminism as a theoretical frame work. As Arshad (2008) postulates, Islamic Feminism grounds its arguments in Islam and its teachings, seek the full equality of women and men in the personal and public sphere and can include non-Muslims in the discourse and debate. Therefore this serves as theoretical framework within which this research was carried out to better address the issue of feminism and modern feminist thinking in relation to the issues and concerns raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter*.

### **Methodology of the Research**

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, the qualitative research method was used. The method used by qualitative researchers “exemplify a common belief that they can provide a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data” (Silverman, 2000; p. 89). Similarly Davies, Nutley, and Walter (2005) define qualitative research method as a process used to deepen ones understanding of complex social and human factors in ways that cannot be understood with numbers.

This work entails analyzing texts which is one of the methods used by qualitative researchers. As noted by Silverman (2000) there are different approaches to qualitative research which includes ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological and narrative approaches.

The advantage of qualitative research is its strength of enabling the collection and analyzing of documents in the field of the researchers study area, which is Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities, Cape Coast. This gives the researcher the prerogative to decipher and then come up with a conclusion. This is free from biases since the conclusions stem from the documents or texts consulted (Davies, Nutley & Walter, 2005).

Qualitative research is more concerned with understanding why people behave as they do: their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and fears among others things. So, structured and unstructured interview is used in this study.

Interview is being used as instrument because qualitative research, there are usually wide ranging, probing issues in detail. They seldom involve asking a set of predetermined questions, as would be the case in quantitative surveys. Instead they encourage subjects to express their views at length on a particular phenomenon.

One particularly useful technique is the critical incident study which was used during this research in which subjects are asked to comment on real events rather than giving generalisations. This can reveal more about beliefs and attitudes and behaviour (Teddies and Tashakkori, 2008). The researcher may be able to obtain more detailed information for each subject.

#### *Population and Study Area*

Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities in Cape Coast were chosen since they are relatively accessible yet offer an important background that could help in testing the influence of a number of variables in this study. These communities have a dominant similar religious group (Muslims); this has influence on other social characteristics and behaviour. So



it will therefore provide an empirical ground representing the whole Muslim communities in the Cape Coast Municipality.

### *Sampling and Sample Size*

Purposive sampling technique implies the researcher. According Twumesi (1986) this technique implies the researcher, adhering to the objectives of the study selects respondents who can answer the research question. The author adds that this method is used when one wants to gain a quick insight into a social phenomenon (Twumesi, 1986).

The purposive sampling technique enabled polygynous families within the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities in Cape Coast Municipality were selected and interviewed. This technique allows the researcher to select people he or she knows that falls within the domain of the study, allowing easy access to data relevant to the study (Teddies and Tashakkori 2008).

The sample of this study comprises of women who are married in polygynous family settings in Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko communities in Cape Coast as either first, second, third or fourth wives and includes those previously in such marriages not neglecting the men involved.

The basic rule to choosing sample size, is the law of large numbers, which states that the larger the size of the sample the lesser the bias in the sample (Teddies and Tashakkori 2008). Sixteen (15) women and five (5) men involved or have directly experienced polygynous marriage were interviewed. The exact number of polygynous families in the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities in Cape Coast could not be ascertained due to lack of proper documentation of such marriages.

### *Data Collection Instrument*

The research administered questionnaires and interview guides to the selected sample while the interview guide was used to help interview those within the group who could not read and write. The research also made use of journals, books, and articles. Archival materials from the Department of Public Records and Archives in the Cape Coast Municipality were also used as a secondary source in collecting information on the history of Ayiko-Ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim Communities.

### *Data Collection Problems*

A lot of constraints were encountered during the research: predominantly shyness on the side of most interviewees and the unwillingness on the part the male counterparts to give out information.

The researcher had to keep rescheduling of the interview because of the interviewees were always busy working and most importantly, unwilling to share information which they deem to be private and sacred (religious).

### *Delimitations of the Study*

Studies of this nature are subject to certain delimitations that can impact upon the information collected and the conclusions drawn. Therefore, all issues and discussions were limited to the issues raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter* with regards to Islamic polygyny.

Also, this study was solely conducted on the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba communities and it is limited to a sample size of twenty interviewees in these communities.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Respondents and interviewees were assured that the information they provided were purely for academic purposes and that the information they provided would not be given to third parties without their consent.

### **Literature Review**

This section investigates available literatures on the area of Islam, polygyny and feminism and reviews them so as to find out causes and reasons which may have influenced the application or misapplication of the Qur'anic injunction that allegedly permits polygyny. The reviews will be done under the following topics: Polygyny in Islam and Feminists' view on Islamic polygyny.

#### *Polygyny in Islam*

Since the book *So Long a Letter* had a Senegalese Muslim community as its setting, it was deemed fit to re-examine some issues on polygyny in Islam. Polygyny as used in this research refers to the customary marriage of a man to more than one wife (Horby, 2007)

It must be noted that polygamy is the plurality of mates. That is, either the man or woman marrying more than one husband or a wife. A "custom where a woman has more than one mate is called polyandry. If a man has more than one wife it is called polygyny" (Abdalati, 1975; p. 164). Polygyny is therefore, used in this research as it is the only pattern permitted in Islam.

Polygyny is an ancient practice and it is difficult to trace its origin in that it has always been culturally universal (a feature of every culture) (Altman & Ginat, 1996). It has been common to all known civilizations from classical

Greek to Rome, Eastern and Western civilizations and in African traditional cultures (Mbiti, n.d.; Altman and Ginat 1996).

Similarly, Rattray (1959) holds that “polygamy is legal and in theory universal” (p. 59). This proves that polygyny has always existed in all societies or cultures. However, it is more common in some societies than it is in others (Mbiti, nd; Abdalati, 1975; Altman & Ginat 1996).

In Islam, polygyny is only permissible when certain conditions are met. One of such condition is the man’s ability to treat the women fairly. Here the ‘fair treatment’ is open to interpretation. Nevertheless, this condition makes Islamic polygyny somewhat similar in some Christian communities where it is not encouraged but “considered” only on special occasions (Altman & Ginat, 1996; p. 41).

“Christianity is therefore in favour of monogamy but in the absence of special prohibition in the New Testament, religious leaders at one point advocate plural marriages” as noted by Altman and Ginat (1996, p. 41). So, there is no strict rule that enforces or forbids it since there are varied opinions. However, Effah (1999) indicated that “generally, under the Ordinance and Christian religious marriages, monogamy is the only type of a legal marriage” (p. 1)

Unlike Christianity, polygyny is permissible in Islam and in the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Among the ATR, “polygyny is accepted and it is being practiced” (Mbiti, n.d. p. 137,142, 226). There are proverbs that show and urge respect for polygynous families in African Traditional Religion (Mbiti n.d.). Example among the Hausa, there is a proverb which says “mai maata guda yaafi gubro da kadan de ne” meaning “one with one wife is just a

bit above the bachelor [in social status]'. Among the Akan in Ghana there is a proverb that says "dia onum wo kruwa baaku mu no, num natsie" meaning "one who drinks from one cup, drinks sand". Also, among the Ewe, there is a proverb that translates into English that a standing man does not eat in one bowl. All these proverbs indicate that a man should not stay with one woman.

However, Islam does not permit the practice of polygyny on a large scale. There is a limit to the number of women a man can marry (a maximum of four) unlike other religions like the African Traditional Religion (ATR) and where there are no specific limitations to the number of women a man can marry.

Also, the plurality of husbands (polyandry) and group marriages are forbidden in Islam but practised by some African cultures. However, polygyny is the only practice "permissible with certain conditions and under certain circumstances" in Islam (Abdalati, 1975; p. 164).

Kisimbo, Magesa and Shorter (1977) in their work *Christian African Marriage* explains polygyny in Africa and condemn the Christian west on the negative perception they have of polygyny. Thus they hold that it is regrettable that the second Vatican Council equated polygyny with "the plague of divorce" and "so-called free love" and "disfigurement" of marriage (Kisimbo, Magesa & Shorter 1977; p. 63). They concluded their work by justifying polygyny from all angles. However, recourse was not given to how the women and the men saw or felt about polygyny in their study.

However, Jones (2006) on the other hand argues that polygyny has been misunderstood by many as scholars like Mbiti, Kisimbo, Magesa and Shorter who tried to explain and justify its practice. Their work was mainly

from the male point of view leaving out the feelings and perceptions of women on polygyny. Most of these scholars were interested in the benefit polygyny have on the society and turned a blind eye to the suffering men and women go through because of some men's selfish desire to, as they claim prevent sexual or social crises in the society or fulfil a religious obligation. In my research, the perceptions and feelings of women involved in polygyny were brought to light.

Also, from the reviews already conducted as in the works of Kisimbo, Magesa and Shorter (1977) and Abdalati (1975), it could be observed that even though there are differences between the three main religions in Africa (African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam), with respect to polygyny, ATR and Islam permits its practice. The only difference is that Islam limits the number of women to a maximum of four while, with the African Traditional Religion (ATR), there is no exact maximum restriction on the number of women a man can marry.

As stated earlier, all their explanations and 'justifications' were through the masculine lens. In most of these reviewed scholarly works, how women feel about the practice of polygyny were left out. That is why this research complementarily discussed the issue of Islamic polygyny from a feminist point of view.

This research therefore uses the issues raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter* as a basis to bring out the view of a feminist on the issue of polygyny in Islam.

Jones' (2006) work argues that polygyny is an institution that has been "misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misused" by many (p.1). These

misunderstandings, she adds, have been with both Islamic communities and with their Western critics. She writes:

In Western literature, polygyny is often depicted as a cruel and repressive custom that sacrifices women's freedom for men's pleasure. The ideas of harems and tyrannical husbands are evoked. Yet, the reality of polygynous households is a far cry from these fantasies. As anthropologist Abu-Lughod explains, "Polygyny is an institution oppressive to women in that it causes them pain," yet the stresses that women face are not what an outside observer would automatically think of. Rather, they are heavily influenced by personality and individual relationships and circumstances. Indeed, it is impossible to summarize what *the* experience of a polygynous household is. Indeed, the motivation behind Muslim men's decision to marry multiple women is not necessarily self-evident either. Many supporters invoke verses from the Qur'an as an endorsement of their position, but others focus more on the propagation of their family lineage. Still others point to economic and social factors that make polygyny a more beneficial option than monogamy. This is the case with modern African American Muslims. (p. 1)

Jones (2006) further adds that there is by no means a single opinion on the topic of polygyny among Muslims. Many scholars, including modern feminists such Wadud (1999), Barlas (2002), Moghissi (1999), Mernissi

(2003), Mir-Hosseini (2006), Mashhour (2005), Jones (2006), and Khadduri (1977) considers the practice of polygyny as archaic and misogynistic.

Therefore, by first examining the position of Islam on marriage in general, the positions of Muslim jurists and scholars are contextualized in Rachael Jones work 'Islam and Polygyny' (2006). The discussions and interpretations of the Qur'anic passage (Qur'an 4:3) that mentions polygyny and have influenced current law in Islamic countries have also been discussed in her work. In all, she concludes that there appears to be a "disconnect between rights that women are guaranteed in the Qur'an and rights that they are given in reality" (Jones, 2006; p. 1)

Jones (2006) work is of direct relevance to this study. The reason being that, she postulated in her study that some Muslim feminist have a counter opinion on the issue of Islamic polygyny as opposed to the general belief presented by some Muslim jurist and other scholars. Indeed, this opinion is also as raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter*. This research therefore tried to prove or disprove this very assertion by both Ba (1981) and Jones (2006).

Van Wichelen's (2009) questions as to whether Islamic polygyny is changing Indonesian hegemonic masculinity in the same way as veiling is changing perceptions of Indonesian femininity. She adds that to some extent men are increasingly defining themselves as Muslims, while polygyny can be seen as one way for these men to link their masculinity to their Islamic identity. Her article therefore examines one of these public concerns over "Islam and gender", namely polygyny.



Under this issue, Wichelen (2009) discusses one Puspo Wardoyo's masculinist pro-polygyny discourse which she believes is more masculine than Muslim or Islamic. She further argues that although Wardoyo uses Islamic symbols and theological reasoning to justify his practices, some of his statements go against prevalent (even conservative) Islamic interpretations on polygyny. This is because Puspo Wardoyo dismisses the thought that a man needs to have legitimate reasons to re-marry or that he has to ask for the wife's permission. Also, according to Wichelen (2009), Wardoyo's argument that polygyny is an Islamic right and duty for all Muslim men slams the door for dialogue or other opinions on interpretation. This expression therefore does not engage with theological inquiries; rather, it affirms masculinity. The pro-polygyny discourse of Puspo Wardoyo contributes to reaffirming an Indonesian hegemonic masculinity that feels threatened by changes in society (Wichelen, 2009).

The crux of the article, therefore, was not simply the constellation that with the emergence of political Islam in Indonesia, polygyny is once again a desired practice. Rather it aimed to show how Indonesian citizens are re-imagining Muslim identities between processes of Islamization and democratization (Wichelen, 2009)

This work is very important to this research as some men are perceived to be using polygyny to re-assert their authority over women (both socially and politically) under the guise of Islam. The abuse of Islamic polygyny as presented by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter* was reechoed by Wichelen (2009).

*Feminist View of Polygyny*

Horby (2007) explains feminism as the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; and the struggle to achieve this aim. Feminism is therefore the belief in the political, social, and economic equality of women. It is a discourse that involves various movements, theories, and philosophies which are concerned with the issue of gender difference, advocacy for equality for women, and campaign for women's rights and interests (Hooks, 2000).

Similarly Ardnt (2002) defined feminism as a world view and way of life of women and men who, as individuals, groups and/or organizations, actively oppose existing gender relationships based on discriminating hierarchies and rating. She adds that:

Feminists not only recognize the mechanisms of oppression, they also aim at overcoming them. Changes are visualized in three vital places. First, feminists see to the end of discrimination against women in society and public life. Secondly, gender-specific roles in the family, and with them the oppression and disadvantage of women in the familial sphere must be overcome and finally an amendment of unwholesome individual and collective conceptions of wo/manhood is striven. Feminism reveals that, to speak with Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born a woman (or a man), but becomes one”, and it simultaneously challenges these social constructions (Ardnt, 2002; p. 71-72).

One can argue that feminism is the belief in women's rights or the belief in the need to secure rights and opportunities for women equal to those of men and a commitment to securing these rights.

Equivocally, Islamic feminism is concerned with the role of women in Islam and aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life (Badran, 2002). Some Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Qur'an and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Qur'an, *Hadith* (sayings of Muhammad (SAW) and *Shari'ah* (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society (Badran 2002).

Muslim feminists therefore channel their writings towards achieving this. One such scholar is Mir-Hosseini in her 2006 work titled *Marriage on Trial. A Study of Islamic Family Law*. In this work, her main focus was neither on the classical texts nor modern legislation, but rather on the litigants' approach to the Shari'ah from the orthodox angle. The work goes on to assess how real marital cases are arbitrated. Mir-Hosseini (2006) through her research brings to light how polygyny is carried out in two Muslim countries namely Iran and Morocco. There is the case in Tehran where a taxi driver aged 42 called Hamid submitted a petition to divorce Mahim is wife aged 30. They had two children aged. A boy aged, thirteen and a girl of eleven years. According to Hamid, his wife has bad temper and often used abusive language and this had forced him to take a second wife three years ago. But now he is seeking for divorce. Thus, even after taking the second wife, she was still abusive so he wanted to divorce her.

The first wife's story revealed that the second wife was her friend and a divorcee who used to visit their house. This led to a secret affair between Hamid and the divorcee which eventually led to a secret wedding. When she heard and protested with the help of her family and his, he divorced the second wife but he later revoked his decision and went back to the second wife. When she protested, Hamid told her to "either accept it or I'll divorce you" (p. 62). The second wife got pregnant and he threatened to divorce Mahim since to him it is his right to marry more than one wife (Mir-Hosseini, 2006; p. 62). Here a clear scenario of the abuse of Islamic polygyny is presented.

Similar cases of abuse of Islamic polygyny are discussed by Mariam Ba in the book *So Long a Letter*. Even though her work is fictional, Mir-Hosseini's (2006) cases are real cases that happened in Morocco and Iran. So using Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities (in Cape Coast, Ghana) as study area, this research seeks to address these issues raised to get a contemporary Islamic feminist opinion on these issues. This is also to find out whether the abuse of Islamic polygyny is limited to Islamic countries alone and how different is Islamic polygyny practices in a secular society with Muslim Minority like Ghana.

Also, Mir-Hosseini (2006) work focuses on going "beyond the conventional Islamic law studies which are largely textual" (p. xiii), and it shows how the Islamic law is being interpreted and administered in Morocco and Iran. This work on the other hand will focus on Ayiko-Ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities in Ghana.

Bell and O'Rourke (2007) advocated that the best intervention that feminism can make to transitional justice is by holding all participants and

framers to the larger dream of ‘securing substantial material gains for women in transition’ (p. 23). Considering that Ghana is not an Islamic state, how are Islamic jurists handling these issues since polygyny was and is still being practiced in Ghana? How are the Muslim communities separating traditional practices from religious practices since we know polygyny is both practiced by ATR and Islam?

Mir-Hosseini’s (2006) work is very relevant to my study. This is because while Mir-Hosseini’s uses court cases in Iran and Morocco respectively, my study uses Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities in the Cape Coast Municipality in Ghana as study areas.

Given that this study driven by feminist driven, there arises the need to review the opinions of some feminist scholars on polygyny.

On the issue of polygyny, Wadud (2006) focuses on intra-Qur’anic methodology (i.e. using the Qur’an to interpret the Qur’an itself) to deconstruct the practice of polygyny as an uncontrolled right of Muslim men. She further affirms that “we rescripted the issue through Qur’anic evidence showing it was a serious and conditional responsibility” (Wadud, 2006; p. 114). Wadud (2006) indicates:

Nowhere had there been such a well-articulated, Qur’anic-supported contradiction to the popular notion of polygamy as a privilege and irrefutable right of Muslim men. Our editorial not only discussed how the Qur’an considers it a responsibility, but also rendered it virtually impossible today to undertake properly such a responsibility while fulfilling the requirements needed (p. 114).

Her work is of great essence to this thesis in that, this is a renowned Muslim feminist who openly argues that the practice of polygyny is cumbersome since it is a responsibility rather than a privilege as presented by “men” and that it is virtually impossible to practice polygyny in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. This indicates that, polygyny should not be encouraged or endorsed. My study of Mariama Ba’s work also brought to light her stance on polygyny which goes parallel to that of Amina Wadud (2006). However, my study gathered contemporary opinions of women who are directly involved, using Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities as a social settings.

Also, on the issue of using the Qur’an to interpret the Qur’an approach as advocated by Amina Wadud, Islamic interpretation of the Qur’anic verses (Qur’an 4:3 and 4:129) which for so many years have been used to justify polygyny has received various interpretations lately. There are many issues in these verses that are not specifically defined. Examples are; what is considered to be ‘just or fair treatment’, in what situation is a man permitted to marry more than one among other issues. All these have allowed scholars and jurists to interpret the practice of polygyny differently.

In ‘Women and the Question of Polygamy in Islam’, polygyny is presented by Jawad (1991) as an institution essentially upheld by the Qur’an. Thus, the first verse (Qur’an 4:3) does permit men to marry more than one wife. And that the verse gives permission to practice polygyny but it does not necessarily encourage it. Also, many restrictions are placed on the implementation of polygyny. Third, this “acquiescence to have multiple wives was originally intended to protect widows and orphans” (p. 185) and that the practice was not for an individual’s pleasure or indulgence (Jawad, 1991)

Jawad (1991) gives us all these opinions on the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse in question. However, whether the practice of Islamic polygyny is relevant in this 21<sup>st</sup> century or not is not pointed out. This makes his work very relevant to this study because this study will bring on board contemporary opinions from Muslim women who are involved in the practice of polygyny. Something Jawad did not tackle.

In the article “Islamic Law and Gender Equality – Could There be a Common Ground? Study of Divorce and Polygamy in Sharia Law and Contemporary Legislation in Tunisia and Egypt”, Mashhour (2005) tries to define the “just treatment” of wives as stated in Qur'an 4:3. Mashhour (2005) further notes that the concept of “justice” in these verses is never explicitly explained. And that, some Qur'anic scholars “unanimously” interpret this type of justice to imply equality in food, clothing, and housing among wives. This is the Muslim law of maintenance (*nafaqa*).

Mashhour (2005) also states that the Mu'tazille school, founded during the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Basra, added love and tenderness to these practical needs. Mashhour concludes, then, that equality is impossible to attain because he believes it is impossible to love multiple people equally (Mashhour, 2005; p. 570). This view is supported by the second verse from Qur'an 4: 129, which states that one can never be just among multiple women.

The first Qur'anic quotation states that men can only have multiple wives if they are just and equal in their treatment to all. Therefore, jurists have argued that it is impossible to allow polygyny because it is impossible to follow the necessary stipulations that are required for its practice (Mashhour, 2005; p. 570).

Amira Mashhour concludes that Islam does not necessarily encourage polygyny and better still, does not permit its practice since it is “impossible to follow the necessary stipulation” (Mashhour, 2005; p. 570) that will make the practice acceptable in Islam.

This work is relevant to my research since she uses Tunisia and Egypt as study areas but this work will focus on Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities to get contemporary views on the issue of polygyny raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter*.

Amira Mashhour's view was also supported by scholars, such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1998) as presented by Mansoor Moaddel in the work “Religion and Women: Islamic Modernism versus Fundamentalism” in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. He writes that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote and argued against Islamic polygyny. This is because he believed that being “just” required the husband to simultaneously be in love with multiple women. He thought this was impossible, and therefore rejected the practice. Khan also believed that Islamic law allows many more rights to women than other religious or secular laws. He held the view that there was no advanced country in the world where women were given the same significance and equality as they are in Islamic law (Moaddel, 1998; p. 115-116). Just as Wadud (2006) argued that, women are offered the ultimate boon: paradise and proximity to Allah by citing the Qur'an as evidence ‘Whoever does an atom's weight of good, whether male or female, and is a believer, all such shall enter into Paradise’ (Q 40:40). The Qur'an provides women with explicit rights to inheritance, divorce and the right to testify in a court of law. It prohibits wanton violence towards women and girls and is against duress in marriage



and community affairs. Women and men equally are required to fulfil all religious duties, and are equally eligible for punishment for misdemeanours.

Majid Khadduri (1977) in an article titled “Marriage in Islamic Law: The Modernist Viewpoints” in *The American Journal of Comparative Law* argues that many do not see polygyny as an institution that is still allowed in certain circumstances today. Rather, these scholars seem to feel that it was not the Prophet’s intention to advocate polygyny as the standard way of life. Instead, they feel that he did not want to promote extreme social change while trying to spread Islam.

Khadduri (1977) further argues that scholars believe that the Prophet wanted to encourage a gradual change in social customs. Therefore, the Qur’anic verses on polygyny were not meant by the Prophet to endorse the practice, but rather to limit it as much as was possible at the time, without alienating prospective converts (Khadduri, 1977; p. 217).

The argument by Khadduri is that polygyny should not be encouraged in modern times. He used the social circumstance in the Prophets’ era to arrive at this conclusion. This research however will consider the social circumstances in the Prophets’ time that led to the permissibility of polygyny against the social circumstance in contemporary times. The Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities will be used to ascertain if the situation that called for polygyny during that time still pertain now.

In contrast, some scholars do not completely agree to the ban on polygyny as addressed by Philip and Jones in their work *Polygamy in Islam* (2005). They provide guidelines for anyone interested in understanding the rights and obligations of males and females in Islamic plural marriages. These

were drawn from the Qur'an, *Hadith* and the opinions of Islamic scholars. They hold that polygyny is a complicated aspect of marriage in Islam in which the "welfare of the community supersedes the desires of the woman" (p. 11). They add that the law on polygyny should not be taken "as a law that is outmoded and in need of being abolished" (p. 11).

Philip and Jones (2005), attempt to justify Islamic polygyny at all costs. Other aspect of polygyny like its effects on the men and women involved are left out. The duties of women are treated while those of men are left out. Also the opinions of the women were not mentioned. Not even the fact that one of the authors is a woman brings out a balance in the work. In my opinion, the work is conservative although they use contemporary examples. This research on the other hand would fill the gap by treating the duties of both the men and women thereby bring to bear the effects of polygyny on both the men and women involved.

### **Significance of the Study**

Even though a lot has been written on Islamic polygyny, most works justify its practice. Most of the research does not "specifically address women's attitudes toward polygyny" (Mekers & Franklin, 1995; p. 1). However a study of the book titled *So Long a Letter* has brought to light the female perception of polygyny and this when addressed will hopefully be significant in the following ways:

1. Jones (2006) and Ba (1981) argue that Islamic polygyny is an institution that has been misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misused (Jones 2006 p 1). So this research will add- up on the existing literature

on Islamic polygyny since it will prove or disprove this assertion thereby widening the scope of the argument.

2. The study will serve as a reference material for government, NGOs and researchers who will be willing to go into the study of Islamic polygyny. Lawmakers will consider the feelings of women when interpreting or passing traditions or laws on Islamic polygyny.
3. This research would offer the opportunity to see Islamic polygyny from the feminist point of view and as it is being practiced in this contemporary time. This will thereby contribute to centuries of patriarchal representation of Islamic polygyny which has come under scrutiny.
4. The issue of Islamic polygyny has been the centre stage of Academic discourse. Jones (2006) argues that in Western literature, polygyny is often depicted as a cruel and repressive custom that sacrifices women's freedom for men's pleasure. Yet, the reality of polygynous households is a far cry from these fantasies. This research therefore clarifies this discussion by Jones (2006).

### **Organization of the Research**

The study will be presented in five chapters. Chapter One will deal with the introduction which includes the background of the study, literature review, statement of problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, methodology, aims and objectives, significance of the study, and organization of the work.

Chapter Two begins with a brief biography of Mariama Ba, the author of the book *So Long a Letter*. This is followed by a review of the book *So Long a Letter* and analysis of main issues.

Chapter three will deal with the feminism and modern feminist thinking in relation to the issues and concern raised by Mariama Ba in the book *So Long a Letter*.

Chapter Four gives an account on contemporary practice of Islamic polygyny. Here, Islamic polygyny will be discussed followed by a brief history of the study areas namely Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities. A discussion on sample of opinions on Mariama Ba's perspective on polygyny is also discussed.

Chapter Five deals with conclusions and summary. This is followed by the major findings and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MARIAMA BA AND THE BOOK *SO LONG A LETTER*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with a brief biography of Mariama Ba, the author of *So Long a Letter*. This is followed by a review of the book *So Long a Letter* and analysis of main issues.

#### **Biography of Mariama Ba**

Mariama Ba was born in Dakar in Senegal in 1929 into an educated and well-to-do Muslim family in which she grew up. Her father was a career civil servant who became one of the first ministers of state. He was the Minister of Health in 1956 while her grandfather was an interpreter in the French occupation regime (Jagne, 1998).

Unlike many other women of her era, she was educated. During and after the colonial revolution period, girls faced numerous obstacles when they wanted to have a higher education. Ba's grandparents did not plan to educate her beyond primary school. However, her father insisted on giving her an opportunity to continue her studies and eventually persuaded them to agree for Ba to pursue to higher education (Jagne, 1998).

As a Muslim, she was raised in a Muslim way and she attended Qur'anic school under the guidance of an Imam of the main mosque in Dakar during holidays so there is no doubt she was a Muslim in faith and practice.

In a teacher training college based in *Rufisque* (a suburb in Dakar), she won the first prize in the entrance examination and entered the *Ecole Normale de Rufisque*. In *Ecole Normale*, she was prepared for later career as a school teacher. The school's principal began to prepare her for the 1943 entrance examination to a teaching career after he noticed Ba's intellect capacity. During this period, she published her first book (Dia, 1979). It was a non-fiction and dealt with colonial education in Senegal which created a stir for its rejection of French policies in Africa. However, later in life, Ba recalled her experience with the French colonial educational system in a positive way (Jagne, 1998).

Ba taught from 1947 to 1959, before being transferred to the Regional Inspectorate of teaching as an Education Inspector due to her poor health. She became involved in several Senegalese women's organizations and it is believed that she was even a pioneer of women's rights in her country (Jagne, 1998).

She married a Senegalese politician, Obeye Diop with whom they had nine children. They divorced and she raised the children alone. It is believed this divorce was the inspiration behind her the novel, that is, *So Long a Letter*, noted for its striking depiction of women in Islamic culture and its blistering treatment of polygyny. The novel has been hailed as the most emotionally realistic portrayal of female life in African fiction of the time (Dia, 1979).

As a divorcee and 'a modern Muslim woman' as she characterized herself, Ba was active in women's associations. She also ardently promoted education. She defended women's rights, delivered speeches, and wrote articles in local newspapers. Thus, Ba's contribution is significant because she

explained and described the disadvantageous position of women in general and especially married women.

Her commitment in eradicating inequalities between men and women led her to write *So long a letter*. She argued that the ‘sacred mission’ of the writer was to strike out ‘at the archaic practices, traditions and customs that are not a real part of our precious cultural heritage’ (Ba, 1981; p. xi).

### **Summary of *So Long a Letter***

The epistolary novel, that is, literally written as a long letter outlines the story of Ramatoulaye Fall, a recent widow who writes a letter to her lifelong best friend Aissatou. The circumstance for writing is Ramatoulaye's recent widowhood. The story therefore revolves round these two characters (Ramatoulaye and Aissatou) and their respective husbands (Moudou Fall and Mawdu Ba). These men married additional wives so how the two women reacted toward this decision is what this summary will focus on.

#### *Ramatoulaye Fall*

In the story, Ramatoulaye's husband, Modou Fall, died of heart attack. Following the guidelines of their Muslim faith, Ramatoulaye must remain in seclusion for a long period of four months, and ten days. That is, approximately a hundred and thirty days. This seclusion is broken, however, by the visits of relatives and friends. During these times “comforting words from the Koran (Qur’an) fill the air; divine words, divine instruction, impressive promises of punishment or joy, exhortation to virtue, warning against evil, and exaltation of humility and of faith (Ba, 1981; p. 5) Shivers run through the writer of the letter at this point of Qur’anic recitation.

During the first days, Ramatoulaye must share her home with Binetou, her rival who is of the same age as Ramatoulaye's eldest daughter. They sit in state to welcome the visitors who console the widows with offering. But their in-laws, Modou's siblings and parents, took the money away from the widows.

In her letter, Ramatoulaye recalls how her husband forced her into the 'awkward' position of co-wife after twenty-five years of marriage and twelve children. According to the story, her husband Moudou Ba sent a message to her one Sunday morning sending his gratitude adding that it is "fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife", and that "there is nothing he can do about it" (Ba, 1981; p. 37). How Ramatoulaye felt was like "drop of poisons" burning within her. "With consternation" she writes, "I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family (myself and the children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mopped out his future without taking our existence into account" (Ba, 1981; p. 9). Ramatoulaye could not understand the reason for her husband acting the way he did. She wondered if it was "madness" or "weakness," "heartless" or "irresistible love" that compelled him to act that way (Ba, 1981; p. 12).

She recounted how her husband would insist on dropping Binetou who was their daughters' classmate anytime she comes over to the house. "She was really beautiful in her adolescent period .... Her shapely contours could not but be noticed" she recalled (Ba 1981 p 35). After some persuasion amidst gifts and promises and most importantly pressure from her mother, young Binetou gave in to the "sugar -daddy's" demand (Ba 1981 p 35). The reason for Binetou's mum forcing her into marriage was to "escape from mediocrity" and



she “regrets so much her past beauty, faded in the smoke from the wood fires, that she looks enviously at everything I wear...”(p 36). Despite this, there was no reception for Binetou’s marriage ceremony as “she cannot bear the mockery of her friends” (Ba, 1981; p. 36).

Two groups of women came to tell her about the marriage of her husband to Binetou. The first group was recognized as those “jealous of the promotion Binetou’s mother would gain from the marriage” while the second group came because of “true friendship” to Ramatoulaye (Ba, 1981; p. 39).

At this juncture Ramatoulaye narrates the circumstances that surround her turning down Daouda Dieng (her former suitor) “despite his presents” and her mother’s advice and married Modou instead who did not pay any dowry (Ba, 1981; p. 16). Yet he had gone to marry a younger woman after she “had lost” her “slim figure, as well as ease and quickness of movement” (p 44). Her stomach now “protrudes from beneath the wrapper that hid the calves developed by the impressive number of kilometres”. She added that “Suckling had robbed my breast of their round firmness” (Ba, 1981; p. 41).

She had no choice than to prepare herself for the equal sharing, according to the teachings of Islam concerning “polygamic life” (p. 46) but she was left with an empty hand in that her husband forgot about her and the children. It was reported that young Binetou would go ‘all a-quiver’ each time Modou mentioned his first wife’s name or showed the desire to see his twelve children (Ba, 1981; p. 46).

While contemplating on what to do now that her husband has betrayed her, the story of Jacqueline who suffered a nervous breakdown due to her husband’s adulterous life comes to light. She was an Ivorian Protestant who

refused to become a Muslim after marrying Samba Diack (a doctor). Although she tried to fit into the Senegalese system, her husband's family and others did not welcome her. To worsen the situation, her husband "spent his time chasing slender Senegalese women, as he will say with appreciation and did not bother to hide his adventure from his wife and children" (Ba, 1981; p. 42).

The story continued with Ramatoulaye's rejection of Tamsir's proposal to marry her. Tamsir was her late husband's brother, who already had three wives whom he could not even take care of. Here, she took advantage of the opportunity to avenge for the day they came to tell her that her husband had married another woman. She told to them what she had kept within her for some time now.

Her former suitor Daouda Dieng now married also wanted to provide 'security' for her and her children and so proposed to marry her but she rejected that in consideration of his wife and children. It is here that the view of the writer on polygyny really came to light when she explained in a letter to Daouda that "you think the problem of polygamy is a simple one. Those who are involved in it know the constraints, the lies, the injustices that weighs down their conscience in return for the ephemeral joys of change" (Ba, 1981; p .68). Her rejection of the various men, young and old gave her the reputation of 'lioness' or 'mad' woman. The rest of the story dealt with how she single handedly coped with her children and some aspect of Nationhood.

### *Aissatou*

The second major character in the book *So Long a Letter* is Aissatou. Ramatoulaye in her letter reflected on how Aissatou's marriage was also

ruined, by polygyny. The background to Aissatou's problem is the fact that her in-laws looked down upon her as the daughter of a goldsmith. Thus, Aissatou was considered an unfit bride for the doctor, Mawdo Ba, the son of a tribal princess. So Aunt Nabou, who "clung to old beliefs" (Ba, 1981; p. 26) and even believes "school turn girls into devils who lure our men away from the right path" (p. 17) thought day and night to get her "revenge" (p. 26) on Aissatou. According to her, Aissatou has "tarnished her noble existence" (p. 28).

Aissatou, now a divorced woman living in the United States of America, left Mawdo after he married a second wife called Nabou, who her aunt (Mawdo Ba's mother) had "earmarked as the spouse" for her son (Ba, 1981; p. 46). Still in love with Aissatou, Mawdo seems pressured by his mother's demands to take a second wife. But that pressure did not stop the "periodic swelling of young Nabou's belly" and Mawdo justifies it that "how can you expect a man to remain a stone when he is constantly in contact with the woman who runs his house?" So the writer concludes that the "fact demonstrates the force of the instincts on man, instincts that dominate him, regardless of his level of intelligence" (Ba, 1981; p. 33).

Ramatoulaye recalled to mind their (Aissatou and herself) school days and the aim of their headmistress which was to lift them from the "bog of tradition" and "superstition". While "appreciating a multitude of civilizations without renouncing" their own, raise their vision for the world, cultivate their personalities and develop universal morals among other virtues. In all, they were "destined for the same mission of emancipation" (Ba, 1981; p. 15).

*Young Nabou and Binetou*

Also a comparison was made between the two new wives namely young Nabou and Binetou. Young Nabou was indoctrinated by her aunty using folktales at a very tender age. So she turned out to be a caring midwife described as soft, generous, docile, and polite among other qualities. On the other hand, Binetou grew up in an environment where survival was of great essence. Her mother was more concerned about “putting the pot on the boil” than education. She was described as beautiful lively, kind hearted and intelligent young woman, who knew what she was sacrificing by marrying an elderly man. She “raised her demands daily” and Modou exhausted himself to provide (Ba ,1981; p. 48).

*Conclusion of the Summary*

In conclusion, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, both highly educated women, seemed to be victimized by the customs (polygyny in particular) that deny women status equal to that of men. They attended a French-run school at a time when few Senegalese women were given this opportunity yet tradition prevailed over them in a way they never envisaged. For example, both women were sought after in marriage by multiple suitors yet both women had the opportunity to marry for love. These among other privileges other women of their generation did not get. But both women followed their hearts and with their husbands set out to forge new traditions to match their country's new independence.

However, tradition and religion (Islam) proved to be a strong instrument that thwarted their dreams and ambitions. In the end, as Ramatoulaye relates, each woman became successfully independent after all the unexpected

experiences with their families, society, and religion and most importantly with their co-wives.

### **Review of the Book**

The review will be done taking into consideration the various themes raised in *So Long a Letter*. Paramount among the themes is the role of religion in the practice of polygyny, feminism and patriarchy. Others include gender and reparation, and women against women, conflict between the old and young women and clash of cultures and misrepresentation of cultural thought and institutions.

#### *Islam and Polygyny*

Islam is the religion and way of life for over a billion people on this earth. It is a religion defined by its submission to God, a mantra that is personified by prostrating worshippers in picture depictions of Islam (Arshad, 2008; p. 1). It is the fastest growing religion on this earth and the second largest religion after Christianity (Spencer, 2002). Muslims do not believe that the legendary personality of the religion, the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), is the maker of a new religion; rather they believe that he is the final prophet teaching about a Monotheistic faith, and comes from the same line of prophets as Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

The Qur'an is the Holy book for Muslims, containing in it references to the Five Pillars. In addition to the Five Pillars, Islamic law or *Shari'ah* has developed a tradition of rulings and interpretations or *Ijtihad* that touch on virtually all aspects of life and society.

A majority of the world's Muslims are Sunni and fifteen percent are Shiah (Spencer, 2002). These two groups of Muslims were originally founded due to political differences. There are four main schools of thought that determine Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh* in Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, and Hanbali), along with the Jafari school of thought in Shiah Islam (Arshad, 2008; p 1). The Ahmadiyya Sect also forms a number of Muslims in the world.

With this brief introduction to Islam, the role of Islam in the practice of polygyny will be discussed. The setting and background of the novel as shown in the summary suggest a Muslim society which practises polygyny, which Islam has restricted to four wives as the maximum. This, the writer uses Tamsir, the elder brother of Modou Ba to demonstrate. According to the story, he already had three wives and children whom he could not take care of but wanted to marry Ramatoulaye when her husband (his brother) died.

Also, the fact that a wedding reception was not organized for Binetou's marriage ceremony because "she cannot bear the mockery of her friends" (Ba, 198; 1 p. 36) needs to be examined. One wonders why she was mocked. It could be that it is because she was married to an 'old man' who was old enough to be her father or the fact that she is becoming a second wife. Or better still, she was mocked because she married her best friends' father as a second wife.

Considering the setting of the play, which is Senegal, the issue of polygyny should not be a new custom. Polygyny was practised by African societies even before the advent of Islam. Islam just limits its practice to a maximum of four wives. So why was Binetou mocked?

In *So Long a Letter*, while the role of religion in the practises of polygyny was brought to light, the abuse or misuse of the Islamic concept of polygyny is also discussed. Not only did the writer condemn the practise of polygyny but also brought some of the misconceptions and distortions of the practice to light. Example of the abuse is portrayed in the case of Tamsir who could not take care of his three wives and children and yet wanted to add another one (i.e. Ramatoulaye). Also as already mentioned and Daouda Dieng who after thirty years still ran after Ramatoulaye despite the fact that he was married with children. All these instances were used by Mariama Ba to portray how Islamic polygyny is being abused thereby exposing the abuse and contradictions inherent in the patriarchal arguments on polygyny.

Also, Binetou's mother appealing to the conscience of her daughter to give in to polygyny was justified by the writer- she wanted to escape from mediocrity and poverty. Thus the mother could not be blamed. As one can see from the story, tradition and religion are put together as one entity which should be separated.

Polygyny is as old as time, such that it is difficult to trace the origins. According to Abdalati (1975), polygyny is common among every civilization ever known. From classical Greek to Roman civilizations, among the Asian, Eastern and Western civilizations, the Egyptian and African Traditional cultures as it is still manifested today (Abdalati, 1975; p. 186).

During the pre-Islamic periods there were no limits to the number of wives a man could marry but Islam limited it to a maximum of four in Qur'an 4:3. This verse is used to justify polygyny but when interpreting, the condition attached which is "but if ye fear that he shall not be able to deal justly (with

them), then only one” is ignored or not emphasized or better still the men think they can be just but do not take time to consider how much ‘just’ or fairness is just enough. The same *Surah* in verse 129 adds that:

Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire. But turn not away (from your woman) altogether so as to leave her (as it were) hanging in the air. If you mend your ways and practice self restraint, Allah is Oft-Forgiving most Merciful (Qur’an 4:129)

However, the second verse (129) explicitly states that man will never be able to treat the women fairly and justly even if he wishes to. This means that since no man can treat all his wives justly and fairly, they should marry only one for *that will be more suitable to prevent you (men) from doing injustice* Qur’an 4:129).

Here, the intra-Qur’anic interpretation to interpret Qur’an 4:3 as advocated for by scholars like Wadud (2006). That is using the Quran to interpret the Qur’an instead of other sources like *Hadith*, *Ijmah*, *Qiyas*, and *Istihsan*. No wonder on this issue of polygyny Wadud (2006) deconstructs its practice as an “unbridled right of Muslim men” (Wadud, 2006; p. 114).

From these two Qur’anic verses discussed above, some conclusions can be drawn. First, according to Jawad, polygyny as an institution is essentially upheld by the Qur’an. In the first verse, it does permit men to marry more than one wife. Second, all the verse really does is to give permission to the practice of polygyny; it does not necessarily encourage it. Also, many restrictions are put on the implementation of polygyny. Third, this



agreement to have multiple wives was originally intended to protect widows and orphans. The practice was not for an individual's pleasure or indulgence (Jawad, 1991; p. 185).

However, "every religion is open to variant readings; the Christianity of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Conquest bears little family resemblance to the liberation theology of today" (Barlas, 2002; p xi). So the new gender-sensitive, or what can be called feminist hermeneutics renders compelling confirmation of gender equality in the Qur'an that was lost sight of as male interpreters constructed a corpus of *tafsir* (interpretation) promoting a doctrine of male superiority reflecting the mindset of the prevailing patriarchal cultures (Badran, 2002).

Some Muslim women, as seen from the foregoing remarks, describe their project of articulating and advocating the practice of Qur'anically-mandated gender equality and social justice as Islamic feminism. Others do not call this Islamic feminism but describe it as an Islamic project of rereading the Qur'an, women-centred readings of religious texts, or "scholarship-activism" as referred in Denny (2001). Wadud (1999) also is in support of this effort of rereading the Qur'an from a feminist lens Wadud.

From this discussion, the researcher is of the view that the author of *So Long a Letter* presented a "realistic" practice of polygyny in the society where religious practice and traditional beliefs are put together as one entity.

### *Feminism and Patriarchy*

The second theme to be discussed is Feminism. Feminism is often mistaken as something created by the West. Arndt (2002) describes African-

feminist literature which Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is an example of as a "written or oral art which gets to the bottom of African gender relations and problems of African women- revealing their causes and consequences- and criticizes them" (Arndt, 2002; p. 79) . Arndt (2002) adds that in so doing, African feminism seeks at disconcerting the existing atmosphere of domination and overcoming it, thus improving the situation of African women. This criticism can first be expressed in a different way and or secondly, combined with a critical examination of other forms of oppression, inequality and discrimination. Mariama Ba combined all the three methods in her work with one interesting addition, the role of religion, precisely the Islamic religion.

Muslim women have been active in modern forms of feminism since the nineteenth century. *Nisa'ist* is the Arabic synonym for feminist, from the word *nisa* women (Mernissi, 1996; p. 94). Badran (2002) refers to feminism as *nisa'iyya*. As different feminist movements reflect the cultural contexts in which they arise, Muslim feminists have adapted their own ways of working within an Islamic framework, allowing women to counter gender oppression and expectations as part of their faith. Ahmed (1992), Wadud (2006), Barlas (2002), Arshad (2008) and Mernissi (2003) are few examples of scholars whose works addresses the issues of Islamic feminism.

Likewise, Mariama Ba used her work (i.e. *So Long a Letter*) to bring on board some pressing issues regarding women. As mentioned earlier, Feminism is one of the themes in the work under review. The writer used Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou to spearhead this. Their ability and decision to be independent of men who do not appreciate them is of

importance. Their decision not to be following the societal norms specially in areas they deem not to be in their interest and that of their children cannot be ignored. No wonder they urge women to unite and be independent of men who do not appreciate women.

Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou are portrayed as Muslim feminists who made a choice to be single mothers. Ramatoulaye would do anything for her children and did not want to be with a man like Daouda Dieng who might be rich, but had a wife already. Aissatou also made a decision to divorce her husband when his mother married for him. She became a single mother taking care of her three boys single handedly. Thus, they represent a new generation of Muslims who will not let the abuse and contradictions inherent in the patriarchal arguments on Islamic polygyny limit them.

These issues have been raised by most Muslim feminist scholars but the approach differs although in the end, they all come to the same conclusion. In this regard, Mariama Ba is considered as one of such feminists as it is being manifested in her work under review.

Islamic feminism is concerned with the role of women in Islam and it aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Qur'an and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching towards the creation of a more equal and just society (Badran, 2002).

However with regard to *So Long a Letter*, its theme of feminism is a little controversial. Ba's feminism can be questioned in that women are against

each other. Nevertheless, Binetou's mother forced her into marriage to "escape from mediocrity" not forgetting that she is pushing her daughter to be the rival of another woman. That is to share the same husband with someone. The same mother is portrayed as greedy in that she looks enviously at everything Ramatoulaye wears (Ba, 1981, p. 36). These undoubtedly attest to the fact that women are against women

Similarly, Aunty Nabou, who clung to old beliefs, believes Aissatou has tarnished her noble existence by marrying her son, a tribal prince (Ba, 1981). So her punishment which was in a form of revenge was to marry another woman for her son - the worse punishment women dread.

The issue of women being their own enemies is also reflected in the two groups of women who came to tell Ramatoulaye about the marriage of her husband to Binetou. The first group was recognized as those "jealous of the promotion Binetou's mother would gain from the marriage" while the second group came because of "true friendship" to Ramatoulaye. (Ba, 1981, p. 39).

Also, the attitude of Farmata who served as a go-between of Ramatoulaye and Daouda Deing who wanted to marry the former needs attention. Farmata's affection for the man who already had a wife and children cannot be ignored. Trying to persuade Ramatoulaye to accept the position of a second wife even though she would not appreciate someone doing that to her, if she was the wife of Daouda Dieng. This leaves much to be desired. All these instances no doubt attest that women are their own enemy.

According to Mernissi (2003), situations have pushed Muslim women to defend "anachronistic institutions" like polygyny. So some women defend polygyny by arguing that it is better to institutionalize men's polygamous

desires than to force them to have secret mistresses (p. 7). One cannot therefore blame these women as portrayed by Mariama Ba. So there is no need for questioning her feminism since she was being realistic.

Many Muslim feminists look up to the religion for solutions. According to Arshad (2008), this is “as opposed to the Western women’s movements where religion is viewed a chief enemy of its progress, Muslim women view the teachings of Islam as their champion and supporter” (p. 5-6).

For Wadud (2002), Islam brought radical changes regarding women and society, despite the deeply entrenched patriarchy of seventh-century Arabia. The Qur’an provides women with explicit rights to inheritance, independent property, divorce and the right to testify in a court of law. It prohibits unjustifiable violence towards women and girls and is against duress in marriage and community affairs. Women and men equally are required to fulfil all religious duties, and are equally eligible for punishment for misdemeanours. Finally, women are offered the ultimate divine promise: paradise and proximity to Allah as noted in the Qur’an that “whoever does an atom’s weight of good, whether male or female, and is a believer, all such shall enter into Paradise’ (Q 40:40).

Wadud (2002) adds that in the period immediately following the death of the Prophet, women were active participants at all levels of community affairs — religious, political, social, educational, intellectual. They played key roles in preserving traditions, disseminating knowledge and challenging authority when it went against their understanding of the Qur’an or the prophetic legacy (Wadud 1999). A typical example with regards to the role of women is manifested in the Prophet’s wife A’ishah, according to whom the

Prophet is believed to have said Muslims should learn half of their religion (Wadud 2002). She was sought after as an advisor to the early jurists. Unfortunately, this period passed before it could establish a pattern sustainable as historical precedent.

However, during the Abbasid period, when Islam's foundations were developed, leading scholars and thinkers were exclusively male. They had no experience with the revelation first hand, had not known the Prophet directly and were sometimes influenced by intellectual and moral cultures antithetical to Islam (Wadud, 2002). This development according to Amina Wadud has led to the patriarchal nature of Islam which should not be.

So, the discriminatory use of power forced Ramatoulaye to deal with its consequences. This power was what is in the novel, a form of male domination coming from society's construction of a patriarchal ideology as explained Wadud (2002). Because Ramatoulaye was a woman, she seemingly had no right to determine her destiny. However, Aissatou rejected this notion and chose her own life without being denied a life of her own by her husband Mawdo. This strong exploration of feminism is perhaps what makes the novel a strong voice for the oppressed women in Africa.

As stated earlier, Islamic feminism is concerned with the role of women in Islam and aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Qur'an and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Qur'an, *Hadith* (sayings of Muhammad), and *Shari'ah* (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society. (Badran, 2002).

It is worthy to note that the basic methodologies of Islamic feminism are the classic Islamic methodologies of *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources), and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an) (Badran, 2002). Used along with these methodologies are the methods and tools of linguistics, history, literary criticism, sociology, anthropology and others. However, these sources are mainly influenced by male interpretation so that is why women like Wadud (1999) for example is using her intra-Qur'an approach to address feminist issues (Wadud 1999). Using this approach to Islamic law, women bring on board their own readings and experience and questions as women. Modern Muslim Feminists point out that classical, and also much of post-classical, interpretation was based on men's experiences, male-centered questions, and the overall influence of the patriarchal societies in which they lived (Badran, 2002).

So, many Muslim scholars have found ways of addressing the issue of patriarchy just as Mariama Ba did. Barlas (2002) for example want "not only to challenge oppressive readings of the Qur'an but also to offer a reading that confirms that Muslim women can struggle for equality from within the framework of the Qur'an's teachings, contrary to what both conservative and progressive Muslims believe" (p. xi).

Also, Wadud (2006) uses the intra-Qur'anic approach to courageously "struggle against gender prejudice" and condemns the various institutions of patriarchy within Islam (p. viii). She adds that as a social order, "patriarchy feeds on the eradication of women's moral agency; it erases and marginalizes women; and most significantly, it negates the possibility of true surrender to God" (p. xii).

Wadud (2006) main reason for engaging in the *jihad*, struggle for gender justice, is because “justice and full human dignity granted to us by Allah has been ignored or abused” (p. 262). She adds that:

The history of nearly exclusive male and andocentric Islamic interpretation and the codification has not nearly recognized the importance of women’s contribution from their specific experience of being female and fully human with the intellectual capacity to contribute to the holistic understanding of what it means to have a relationship with both the divine and other humans...” (p. 262)

In conclusion, Muslim feminists seek to amend the current ‘patriarchal’ laws into making them more focused on integrating equality for men and women in Islam. As opposed to the Western women’s movements where religion is viewed as a chief enemy of its progress; Muslim women view the teachings of Islam as their champion and supporter (Ashad, 2008; p. 5) but the patriarchal laws is what needs to be amended. The prescriptions that are found in the Qur’an and in anecdotes from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) are regarded are the paradigm to which modern Muslim women wish to return.

With regard to Muslim women, the source of impediments to progress experienced today are not in Islam and its traditions, but in alien ideological intrusions on our societies, ignorance, and distortion of the true Islam, or exploitation by some individuals within the society.



*Other Themes*

Other themes raised by Mariama Ba which will be discussed are the issues of gender and reparation, women against women, conflict between the old and the young, role of women in keeping their families together and misrepresentation of cultural thought and institutions.

Gender and reparation constitute one of the themes raised by Mariama Ba, who advocates urgent consideration and reinvigoration of African life. This consideration and reinvigoration are essentially founded on the social construct of the relationship between man and woman. Indeed, there is an unequal and unbalanced power in the male/female relationship. According to Ba (1981), these facts can help us become aware of Africa's needs for societal change.

Ba (1981) also shows that women are suspicious and that they separate themselves from each other. For instance, they are afraid of being replaced by younger wives. Therefore, there is disunity among women and so Mariama Ba urges women to come together because numbers will increase the strength of women. To demonstrate how males are instinctive, Ba uses female rationality and responsibility. She also portrays men's 'irresponsibility' in their sexual exploitations through the character of Mawdo Ba (Ba, 1981).

Ba also echoed how insensitive some men can be when Ramatoulaye emphasized the bestiality of men's instincts and urges her daughter against them. She argues that a man's instinct is "through his self-control, his ability, to reason, to choose his power to attachment, that individual distinguishes himself from animal" (Ba 1981). These represent a modern feminist idea.

The importance of women, their role in bringing up families and keeping them together in time of calamity is clearly brought out by Ba. This is a powerful expression of the unheeded voice of the previously silent woman in Africa considering the setting of the story. Ba is actually calling on women to take responsibility for their lives throughout the novel. That is why she is considered as a modern Muslim feminist.

The story of Jacqueline who suffered a nervous breakdown due to her husbands' adulterous lifestyle which the writer cleverly inserted and used as one of the sources of Ramatoulaye's strength to overcome her betrayal needs to be examined. Did Jacqueline's refusal to become a Muslim after marrying Samba Diack (a doctor) account for why the society did not welcome her? Is it that the society supported the husband in his adulterous adventure with no one sympathizing with her because of her refusal? Could the situation have been saved if the husband did not spend his time chasing slender Senegalese women? The slender Senegalese women in question knew that Samba Diack was married; so women are presented here as their own enemies. Also, Could the situation have been better if Sama Diack was hiding his adventures from his wife and children. The researcher is of the view that the writer at this point would prefer polygyny in this instance to solve the problem at hand. No doubt her feminism is doubtful to some extent.

The next theme worthy of attention is the fact that there is a conflict between old and young women. The young women are perceived as the enemies in the novel. That is, the youthful new wives who displace the middle-aged women. It is worthy to note that, the two new wives (Young Nabou and Binetou) were brain washed into accepting that position according

to the story. Does that mean that second wives do not agree willingly but are coerced into that position by various factors? Few women will like to be a second, third or even the fourth wife. Most of them agree due to circumstances which force them into accepting that position and this most Muslim feminist agree to (Ashad, 2008). As noted, situations have pushed Muslim women to defend “anachronistic institutions” like polygyny (Mernissi, 2003; p. 7).

The misrepresentation of cultural thought and institutions is the next theme to be examined. The writer thought that distortions of cultural thoughts and institutions are made to masquerade as tradition and culture. Societies have been seduced into accepting the continuation of these customs. This is clearly shown in the case of Aunty Nabou who clung to old beliefs. It is also reflected in the case of Arame, Yacine, and Dieynaba, Ramatoulaye's daughters who smoked, drank alcohol, attended parties, and wore pants instead of lady-like dresses. So there is a clash of European and African culture. Ramatoulaye's daughters smoking and drinking of alcohol is not considered as Islamic. This leads to the clash of the two cultures. Although these are not bad since society is dynamic, religion and cultural practices should be separated.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**FEMINISM AND MODERN FEMINIST THINKING IN RELATION**  
**TO THE ISSUES AND CONCERNS RAISED BY MARIAMA BA IN *SO***  
***LONG A LETTER***

**Introduction**

This chapter discusses the Muslim feminist issues raised by Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter*. The issues are then discussed highlighting the modern feminist point of view.

**Islamic Feminism and Modern Feminist Thinking**

As stated in earlier, there are three types of feminist movements in Islam – Islamic feminists, Muslim feminists, and Islamist feminists (Moghadam, 2000). Islamic feminists ground their arguments in Islam and its teachings, seek the full equality of women and men in the personal and public sphere and can include non-Muslims in the discourse and debate. The Muslim feminists believe in Islam and feminism but also tend to use arguments outside Islam such as international human rights agreement to counter gender inequality. Islamist feminists are advocates of a political Islam, the notion that the Qur'an can mandate an Islamic government; they advocate women's rights in the public sphere but do not challenge gender inequality in the personal, private sphere (Arshad, 2008; p. 4). All three have different strategies but they share a common goal of closing the gap between men and women in Muslim societies.

However, this research adopts the concept of Islamic feminist (feminism) whereby Muslims are concerned with the role of women in Islam. Islamic feminism aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Qur'an and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Qur'an, *Hadith* (sayings of Muhammad (S.A.W)), and *Shari'ah* (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society (Badran, 2002)

Some other issues that Islamic feminism targets in many Muslim societies existing today are the roles of women in the family system; individualism verses the larger organization, the differentiation of sex roles, the separate legal status of women, and polygyny (Arshad, 2008; p. 3). So such issues raised by Mariam Ba in her book *So Long a Letter* are going to be discussed from a modern feminist perspective.

**Modern Feminist Thinking in Relation to the Issues and Concern Raised  
by Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter***

With this understanding of what the concept of feminism is, these concepts in relation to the issues and concern raised in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* will be analyzed. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the setting and background are in a Muslim African society where Islam was practiced and examples could be seen in the burial and funeral arrangement. The practice of marriage and the issue of polygyny and divorce were also in accordance with the Islamic system Islam. These and other issues raised by Mariama Ba will be discussed in this chapter.

Some scholars argue that the first feminist of Islam was the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) himself (Wadud, 2002) since during his Prophethood, many radical reforms were instituted that concerned the treatment and place of women. Thus, under his leadership, the society abolished female infanticide, allowed women to possess and implement full control over their wealth and guaranteed women the right to inherit and bequeath property. Strict limits were placed on polygyny with certain conditions, and women were allowed to keep their dowry among other benefits (Young, 1987, Wadud, 2002). However, years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), the leading intellectuals were entirely males and were sometimes also influenced by cultural and intellectual doctrine (Wadud, 2002). All these coupled with other factors have led to the patriarchal view of Islam which should not be.

In relation to the Book *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Ba presented some situation and her approaches to such situations suit Islamic Feminism. So, she is regarded as an advocate of Islamic feminism. This could be seen in how for example, she tackles certain issues like polygyny.

In her work, Ramatoulaye stayed following the guidelines of the Muslim faith in seclusion for a long period of four months, and thirty days. That is, approximately a hundred and ten days. She did not have a problem with Moudo Fall's marriage to young Binetou even though she did not like the idea of a co-wife but she prepared herself for 'polygamic marriage'. She knows the religion so she conformed to it. But the main problem is with how the husband left her without taking care of their children. No wonder she also turns down Douda Dieng's proposal to become his second wife.

So, Mariama Ba does not have a problem with Islam as a religion but how the society or some communities put into practice what Islam teaches. For example, Moudo Fall's decision to concentrate only on the family of his second wife is not Islamic in anyway. Islam does not teach a man to take care of one wife and her family leaving the other wife or wives. That is why Qur'an 4:3 talks about 'just treatment' of wives. Here is the case Moudo Fall did not make any effort to take care of his first wife and children less we argue on the issues of "just treatment". This notwithstanding, polygyny is practiced because Islam endorses it and that the Prophet of Muhammad (S.A.W) even practiced it.

One of the reasons given by some scholars for why the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) married more than four wives was to teach the Muslim Ummah some lessons by living an exemplary life. So to teach that one can marry a widow in order to cater for her and her children, he married Sawda whose husband had died after they had migrated to Abyssinia in the early years of persecution (Abdalati, 1975; p.175). Also, he married Zainab when Zaid b. Harith divorced her (Muslim, 1971; 2 p.552).

This contains three lessons for Muslims. One, a widow can re-marry, two one is allowed to marry a widow, and three the man is to take care of and protect the widow. However, with regard to Ramatoulaye, she chose to be a single mother rather than to be the second wife of Daouda Dieng. It can be opined to represents a modern feminist thinking. Considering the reasons she gave, that is, "you think the problem of polygamy is a simple one. Those who are involved in it knows the constraints, the lies, the injustices that weighs down their conscience in return for the ephemeral joys of change" (Ba,1981;

p. 68). Thus, talking from the perspective of women who had experienced polygyny before, polygyny should not be endorsed.

Also, the fact that Aissatou's in-law's looked down upon her as the daughter of a goldsmith is not a new issue since similar issues have occurred even in the Prophets' time. The Prophet of Islam is believed to have emancipated slaves and married them. His wife Safiyya, the daughter of Huyayy b. Akhtab, the chief of Quraiza and al-Nadir is a typical example (Muslim, 1971; p.552). Thus, the Prophet's reason for marrying some of his wives was to eliminate the caste system, the racial and national vanities, and religious prejudices. So He married a "Coptic girl from Egypt, a Jew from a different religion and race and a Negro girl from Abyssinia" (Abdalati, 1975; p. 178). So he put into practice what he preached.

The fact that Aissatou's husband still married her regardless of the opposition from others and more especially his mother shows that the Islamic teachings were being upheld. However, the fact that the mother and society did not accept her after the marriage is very significant. Thus, what is advocated by Islam is not practised by the people.

Also, Mariama Ba's emphasis on the gender of the children of Aissatou as boys is very significant. This is because in most African and Muslim societies great importance is attached to childbirth and most importantly the male child since it is believed this will ensure the continuity of the families' name.

The marriage of Aissatou and Mawdo was complete in the sense that the family could not use her inability to provide a male child as an excuse to maltreat her since she has three boys. However this did not prevent Aissatou's



in-law from marrying another woman for her son. Thus, her social status was used as a basis.

This represents a modern feminist thinking in that Assiatou's ability to give birth to only boys which should have saved her marriage did not. So, the emphasis on the male child only is waning and that implies the male child is not more important or better than the girl child as had been the practices in most Muslim societies (Kassim, 2006).

The next point is the issue of divorce. In Islam, divorce is believed to be the most detestable of all permitted acts. All the same it is permitted and divorcees are allowed and even encouraged to re-marry again since the Prophet of Islam who is seen as the ideal model for mankind is believed to have married for legislative purposes to abolish certain corrupt practices. As seen in His marriage to Zaynab, divorcee of the freed slave Zaid. It is worthy of note that before Islam, the Arabs did not allow divorcees to re-marry (Abdalati, 1975; p. 178).

Therefore, the decision by Aissatou to remain single after divorcing her husband represents a modern feminist thinking. Thus, divorcees do not view re-marrying or polygyny as the solution to the problem facing them or as the reason for the institutionalization of polygyny. In essence, the reason for such practise as protecting the woman is losing its essence.

This leads to the issue raised in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, which is the issue of polygyny. Islamic interpretation of the Qur'anic verses (Qur'an 4:3 and 4:129) which for so many years have been used unquestionably to justify polygyny has received various interpretations lately. There are many

areas in these verses that are not specifically defined, allowing scholars and jurists to interpret the practice of polygyny differently.

For Jawad for example, polygyny is essentially upheld by the Qur'an. Thus, the first verse does permit men to marry more than one wife. Second, although the verse gives permission to practice polygyny but it does not necessarily encourage it. Also, many restrictions are put on the implementation of polygyny. Third, this acquiescence to have multiple wives was originally intended to protect widows and orphans. The practice was not for an individual's pleasure or indulgence (Jawad, 1991; p. 185). However, in Mariama Ba's book, the widow did not see polygyny as a 'protector' that will protect her and her children. In fact, polygyny was seen as the institution that brewed problems both for the wives and the children involved or within the family.

With regard to the interpretation of the verse (Qur'an 4:3), the main point of contention among scholars is how to define the "just treatment" of wives. While the definition used by Jawad above is quite common, Mashhour (2005) notes that the concept of "justice" in these verses is never explicitly explained. However, Qur'anic scholars "unanimously" interpret this type of justice to imply equality in food, clothing, and housing among wives. This is the Muslim law of maintenance (*nafaqa*).

Mashhour (2005) also notes that the Mu'tazille school, founded during the eighth century in Basra, added love and tenderness to these practical needs. Mashhour concludes, then, that "equality is impossible to attain because he believes it is impossible to love multiple people equally" (Mashhour, 2005; p. 570). This view is supported by the second verse in Quran 4:129, which states

that one can never be just among multiple women. The first Qur'anic quotation states that men can only have multiple wives if they are just and equal in their treatment to all. Therefore, some jurists have argued that it is impossible to allow polygyny because it is impossible to follow the necessary stipulations that are required for its practice.

This view according to Moaddel (1998) was also supported by modern scholars such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who wrote during the nineteenth century. He argued against the right of men to have multiple wives because, like the Mu'tazille school, he believed that being "just" required the husband to simultaneously be in love with multiple women. He thought this was impossible, and therefore rejected the practice. Khan also believed that Islamic law allows many more rights to women than other religious or secular laws. He held the view that there was no advanced country in the world where women were given the same significance and equality as they are in Islamic law (Moaddel, 1998; p. 115-116).

However, many scholars do not completely agree to Moaddel (1998). They do not see polygyny as an institution that is still allowed in certain circumstances today. Rather, these scholars seem to feel that it was not the Prophet's intention to advocate polygyny as the standard way of life. Instead, they feel that he did not want to promote extreme social change while trying to spread Islam. These scholars believe that the Prophet wanted to encourage a gradual change in social customs. Therefore, the Qur'anic passages on polygyny were not meant by the Prophet to endorse the practice, but rather to limit it as much as was possible at the time, without alienating prospective converts (Khadduri, 1977; p. 217).

Finally, Islamic law provides women with various ways of preventing their husband from practicing polygyny. In the Hanafi School, the Qur'anic verses on polygyny are thought to be permissive, not obligatory. Therefore, it was not contrary to the spirit of marriage for a man to have a single wife. This belief allowed the Hanafi School to endorse the use of contractual agreements between spouses that do not allow the husband to take more than one wife. However, three other juristic schools – Shafi'i, Hanbali, and Maliki – believed that the husband's right to marry multiple women was of the “essence of marriage” (Ahmed, 1992; p. 91). Consequently, these schools did not allow contractual agreements between husbands and wives that denied the husband the ability to marry multiple women.

On the issue of how males are instinctive, Mariama Ba uses female rationality and responsibility to portray men's irresponsibility by using their sexual instincts. Ba emphasizes the bestiality of men's instincts, while she urges her daughter against them. She argues that a man's instinct is “through his self-control, his ability, to reason, to choose his power of attachment” (Ba, 1981; p. 32). Thus, for the sake of “variety, men are unfaithful to their wives” (Ba, 1981; p. 4).

This view claims that men have greater sexual potential than women, which they are not able to control when their wife is unable to have sex (because of menstruation, recent delivery, etc.). Therefore, the main point of argument is that, men should be allowed to have more than one wife so that they are not driven to affairs outside of the marriage contract during times when their wife cannot satisfy them. This is an argument that does not have a basis in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah (Mashhour, 2005; p. 571).

Just as Mariama Ba did in *So Long a Letter*, Nassef made a point of condemning polygyny, as well as unlimited divorce by men, marriage of girls at a young age, and marriages in which there was a large gap between the spouses' ages. She describes polygyny in severe terms:

It [co-wife] is a terrible word – my pen almost halts in writing it – women's mortal enemy...How many hearts has it broken, how many minds has it confused and homes destroyed, how much evil brought and how many innocents sacrificed and prisoners taken for whom it was the origin of personal calamity? ... [It is] a terrible word, laden with savagery and selfishness.... Bear in mind that as you amuse yourself with your new bride you cause another's despair to flow in tears...and children whom you taught to sorrow, weep for her tears.... You hear the drums and pipes [at a wedding], and they hear only the beat of misery (As cited in Ahmed, 1992; p.182).

This evocative and mournful depiction of polygyny has its roots in a distinctly Muslim women's approach to Modern feminism. Yet, unlike Islamic jurists, Nassef and Mariama Ba focus on the experiences of the women involved rather than on interpreting verses from the Qur'an or *shari'ah*. Indeed, there appears to be a trend in modern scholarly work that emphasizes the secular reasons behind decisions to participate in polygyny rather than religious ones.

In all, no matter how Mariama Ba portrays her opinion on Islamic polygyny that has earned her the title 'Muslim Feminist', she will have

supporters and opposers as revealed by this discussion. The next chapter will gather contemporary opinions on the issue she raised in her book *So Long a Letter*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF ISLAMIC POLYGyny

#### Introduction

This chapter deals with the Islamic concept of polygyny. Here, the views of selected Muslim families specifically Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba in the Cape Coast Metropolitan area on polygyny will be discussed.

#### Islamic Concept of Polygyny

Polygyny has been practiced from time immemorial. According to Hammuda Abdalati, polygyny is common among every known civilization. From classical Greek to Roman civilization, among the Asian, Eastern and Western civilizations, the African Traditional and Egyptian cultures as it is manifested today ( Abdalati, 1975; p. 186).

During the pre-Islamic periods at Arabia, there were no limits to the number of wives a man could marry but Islam limited it to a maximum of four as the as stated in Qur'an 4:3.

Islamic scholars are divided on the interpretation of this verse. While some scholars like Abdalati (1975) use it to justify polygyny, others like Amina Wadud think otherwise. In the same *Surah* of the Qur'an in verse 129 Allah states that:

Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women. Even if it is your ardent desire. But turn not away (from your woman) altogether so as to leave her (as it were) hanging in the

air. If you mend your ways and practice self restraint, Allah is Oft-Forgiving most Merciful (Qur'an 4:129).

In all, scholars are divided on the interpretation of this verse but majority of Muslim scholars such as Haneef (1982), Abdalati (1975), Philip and Jones (2005), Al- Fauzan (2003), and Muslims in general agree that polygyny is permissible and that a man is allowed to marry up to a maximum of four. "Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918) also supports polygyny" (Ahmed, 1992; p. 179-180)

However scholars like Stowasser (2004) contend that Western critics, such as Smith and Cromer, have caused conservative Muslims to defend polygyny. However, she believes that while modern Islamic scholars who write in support of polygyny seem to direct their arguments to the West, they are actually aimed at Muslims who have come to reject polygyny because of the Western influences (Jones, 2006).

Notwithstanding this, scholars like Wadud (2006), Mir-Hosseini (2006), Mashhour (2005), and Khadduri (1977) do not support the practice of polygyny. For example, in the early twentieth century Muhammad Abduh, an Egyptian scholar, introduced new and innovative interpretations of the Qur'an and wrote legal opinions (*fatwas*) that supported the dissolution of polygyny in Islamic societies. He believed that the practice had been positive and practical during the early years of Islam, but he felt that over time polygyny had become distorted into "a corrupt practice of unbridled lust, devoid of



justice and equity, and thus was no longer conducive to the community's welfare" (Stowasser, 1994; p. 121).

Similarly, Wadud (2006) used an intra-Qur'anic, (that is using the Qur'an to interpret the Qur'an) method of interpretation and concluded that the practice of polygyny is not an 'unbridled right' of Muslim men. She examined the issue of polygyny through Qur'anic evidence showing that it was a serious and conditional responsibility. Thus on the issue of polygyny she writes:

Nowhere had there been such a well-articulated, Qur'anic supported contradiction to the popular notion of polygamy as a privilege and irrefutable right of Muslim men. Our editorial not only discussed how the Qur'an considers it a responsibility, but also rendered it virtually impossible today to undertake properly such a responsibility while fulfilling the requirements needed (Wadud, 2006; p. 114).

In interpreting the Qur'anic text which is used to justify polygyny (Qur'an 4: 3), the condition attached which is "...But if ye fear that he shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one..." is not taken into consideration. This condition is ignored or not emphasized thus making the practise seem so simple to the ordinary mind. But the Qur'an 4: 129 emphatically added "Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women. Even if it is your ardent desire..." In this regard, monogamy is the rule and not polygyny.

Despite all these different reaction toward polygyny, it is still practised by some Muslims. It is against this backdrop that this research tries to examine

and understand how polygyny is being practised in contemporary times with regards to the issues raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So long a letter*. Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities in the Cape Coast Municipality in Ghana is used as a research area to find out opinions on the issues raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Longa Letter*.

### **Brief History of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities**

Since the book *So Long a Letter* has a Muslim settings (in a Muslim community in Senegal), two Muslim communities in the Cape Coast Metropolitan area in Ghana have been selected as study areas. These are Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities. This will facilitate the contemporary understanding of the issues raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So long a Letter*.

#### *Kotokuraba Muslim Community*

Kotokuraba is the area located between Mfantshipim Junction and Coronation Street, precisely where the Central Mosque is. The famous Kotokuraba and Kotoka markets are all located there. This Muslim community is believed to have come into being in the late nineteenth century. It was founded by Hausa soldiers brought into Ghana from the Northern part of Nigeria by the British Colonial administration. However, some put the time of its establishment during the First or Second World Wars. That is 1914-1918, 1934-1945. (M. Bidmas, personal communication, July 20, 2012).

It must be noted that some travellers had already settled in this location as early as the eight century (M. Bidmas, personal communication, July 20, 2012). It is recorded in the annals of the *West African Frontier Force* dated

24<sup>th</sup> April, 1925 to 16<sup>th</sup> July 1944, that some of the soldiers joined these settlers while others returned to their homelands in Nigeria. It must be noted that Ghana (the then Gold Coast) and Nigeria were both British colonies. So, these soldiers joining the already Muslim settlers who were made up of “Logosians, Hausas, Wangaras and several natives” made the area to be recognized as a Muslim community or a Zongo as it is normally called.

The names of some early leaders of the Muslim settlers were given as Alkali also called Chief Musa Amardu Jimama, the sub-chief was Mama Mazawujay, Mallam Tailley and Mallam Garba who was a great Islamic scholar and the founder of the Komenda Islamic school (named after his son). Evidence concerning the early settlers could also be found in this extract “Mosque No. 2 near Mr. S. D. Basons house was built by Lagos elders namely Lawan Marsha, Chief Mamadu Bisirwa (Lagos chief), Mama Latazan, Zenadu and Mama Dziwa....Imam Garba whose full name is Imam Hadji Mohammed Ameen Kuds is our current imam” (Mazawujay 1924).

Presently, there are various groups of people (mostly Muslims) living in the Kotokuraba Muslim community. Some claim their descendants came from the following Hausa states in Nigeria namely Gobir, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Yawri, Katsina, Kwararafa, Yoruba and the Kanure. The house of Alhaji Onasis claims their descent from the Gobir and so they are called Gobirawa. There are also in the area Wangara, Baribari, Dagomba, Mossi, Fulani, Sisala and Gao. The current deputy Imam, Alhaji Yusif Mohammed is a Wangara and Alhaji Talatu is a Goa.

All these ethnic groups irrespective of their background practise polygyny. For example, the Sarkin Zongo currently has two wives, one

businessman called Alhaji Talatu has four wives while Alhaji Yusuf Mohammed who is the deputy chief imam of Kotokuraba Muslim community has two wives.

*Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Community*

Ayiko-ayiko Muslim community lies between Brofuyedur to the south, Tantre to the East and Ashanti Road to the north. This suburb is believed to have come into being in the late nineteenth century and made up of Nigerian traders and soldiers who were brought into the Gold Coast by their British colonial master during the First and Second World Wars (1914-18, 1939-45) (in an interview with Mallam Ishaku on 21<sup>st</sup> of July of 2012).

Another account says that the soldiers were brought into the Gold Coast in the late 1800's to help the British and their local allies, specifically, the Fantes to fight their enemies, the Ashanti. Regardless of these two accounts, it is on record that by the 1900's; the Ayiko-ayiko Muslim settlement existed and formed part of the Central Provinces' authority (in an interview with Salisu Ahmed on 21<sup>st</sup> of July of 2012).

According to Salisu Ahmed (in an interview on 21<sup>st</sup> of July of 2012), medals were given to three of the Muslim soldiers. One settled at Eguase, the second settled at Kotokuraba and the third settled at "Kokoaro Bisa"- part of Ayiko-ayiko. It must be noted that Ayiko-ayiko is made up of two parts namely "Kokoaro Bisa" (combination of Fante and Hausa meaning on top of the mountain in Hausa) and Kokoaro Kasa (combination of Fante and Hausa meaning the base or bottom of the mountain).

Various Hausa groups and more importantly Muslims who were mostly traders used this area as a transit point but some eventually stayed. This

might have accounted for the lack of proper organization of the area leading to the emergence of “Ayiko-ayiko slum area”. This is supported by a document from the Public Records and Archives Administration Department dated 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1974.

Gidan Nufawa, Gidan Kasa, Gidan May Kumatu are some of the few Muslim household families. The Gidan Kasa family claim they are Sisala and Alhaji Seidu family are Fulani. Polygyny is practised in this community. For example, the late Alhaji Seidu, (the father of the current Sarkin Fulani) had two wives and his son who is now the Sarkin Fulani also has two wives. Mallam Muniru had three wives but two divorced him and he recently re-married making his wives two. Mr. Akilu also has two wives.

#### *Social Activities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities*

Like any Muslim community, they are guided by Islamic ethos. The people act according to the teachings of Islam. Social activities such as marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies, the celebration of the two *Eids* and funerals and burial services are organized in accordance with the Islamic teachings.

There are many ethnic and tribal groups that make up these Muslim communities. These various groups one way or the other have influenced each other. Thus, they have adopted certain practices from each other. As already mentioned, the communities are made up of almost all the different Hausa states, the Wangara, Fulani, Dagomba, Gao, Mossi, Beriberi, among others. So, it is difficult to trace the originator of certain practices such as *Kunshi taro* whereby a dye called *lalle* is used to decorate the feet of a bride-to-be amidst drumming and dancing, *wanka amarya* where a bride-to-be is bathed with

perfumed water and *lalle*, naming a child after seven days among others. In all, they all have similar if not the same social, political, cultural and political activities.

Marriage is considered by the people of Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities as a religious duty and a social necessity. Thus, the marriage is recognized after certain requirements spelt out in the Qur'an and the *Hadiths* of the Prophet of Islam are met. These requirements include the mutual agreements between the couple, payment of dowry (bridal gift), the presence of a matrimonial guardian, and two witnesses from both sides of the families involved. The marriage feast called *walimah* is usually followed. It is quite common to find the people wearing the same cloth to commemorate the pomp and pageantry of marriage ceremonies.

With regard to naming ceremonies, the child is named after the seventh day either in the Mosque or in the man's family house. When a child is born in a Muslim family, the child is taken to *Muallim/ Imam/ Sheikh* who recites *Adhan* and *Iqama* in the child's right and left ears respectively. This is called *Tahnik*. This is believed that this practise will imbue the child with religious piety. Dates or other things of similar kind are chewed and rubbed on the palate of the child. The idea behind these actions is that, the new-born infant should at the very outset of his or her life receive through the ears and mouth something sacred and that too from the lips and hand of a pious person (Muslim Vol. 3: 895).

Gifts are presented to the child and the mother amidst merry making. A Goat is usually slaughtered and specific parts given to the mother of the child and the old lady in charge of bathing the baby. This is to congratulate

them for the good work done. The rest of the meat is shared among the witnesses or the people present at the ceremony in appreciation for their presence.

Funeral and burial ceremonies are all structured according to the Islamic teachings. The deceased is usually buried within twenty four hours after the pronouncement of death provided the hospital releases the corpse. Prayers are offered for the deceased before burial and at times the ceremony ends the same day after the burial or three days after burial. It is a practice of some other people to meet and pray for the deceased and give gifts out to those who attended the funeral.

The two known Muslim festivals, *Eid ul Adha* and *Eid ul Fitr* celebrated all over the world by Muslims are also celebrated by the people of these two communities.. Islamic schools locally called *makaranta* can be found in these communities. Madarastu Hifzul Islamiyya (in Kokoara Bisa) in Ayiko-ayiko and *Madarasatu Bikiriyya* which is commonly called Makaranta Komenda are few examples of the Islamic Schools in these communities.

Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities are predominantly made up of two main Islamic groups namely the Tijaniyyah and the Ahlus Sunnah Waljamaa. There is also the Ahmadiyyah and a neutral group who do not belong to any of these doctrinal groups.

According to Hamid (2010), the main difference between the Tijaniyyah and the Ahlus Sunnah Waljamaa (also known as Wahabiyyah) is that the Wahabiyya religious ideology is grounded on the uncompromising unity of Allah to the exclusion of any intermediary while the Tijaniyyah think otherwise. He concludes that the Tijaniyyah are more accommodating to

traditions than the Wahabiyyah. The Wahabiyyah is a purist and reformist doctrinal group which rejects all forms of syncretism.

According to Mallam Yusif Mohammad, who is the current deputy imam of the Muslim community in Cape Coast, he believes the Wahabiyyah group have led to break down in the moral fibre in the Muslim community since they condemn traditional practices like kneeling down to greet an elderly person. This for instance is regarded as an act of unbelievers by the Wahabiyyah in the sense that it may lead to people worshiping human beings which is against Islamic teachings of Tawhid. Thus, the Wahabiyyah “regard all form of adaptation as *bid'a* (innovation)” (Hamid, 2010; p. 124) In spite of these differences, all the different groups co-exist harmoniously.

Although they have separate mosques but it is not exclusive to their members. Any Muslim is welcome to pray in them. Various big and small mosques can be found in these areas. The central mosque can be found in Kotokurba. The Ahlus Sunnah Waljamaa also has a big mosque around Ewim Nursing Flat, on the road to Kotokuraba. It is common to see Muslim congregating in small groups to pray during prayer times especially during *Maghreb* (sunset prayer) and the *Isha* (evening prayer) prayers when most of the Muslims in that area have returned from work.

Islamic laws are encouraged while immorality and other social evils are frowned upon. For example, the seriousness attached to the call to prayers and punishment meted out to disobedient children attest to this. Every child is encouraged to pray at the early stages and anyone who does not perform *Salat* is looked down upon. This is because every child is taught that the five daily



prayers of Muslims are obligatory; so anyone one who thinks otherwise is considered as wayward.

Even though Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba are considered as Muslim communities, there are certain cultural or traditional things that are being practised in the area. Examples of such practices are soothsaying and fortune telling commonly called *bouka*. These *bouka* men are believed to have spiritual powers and it is even said that some of the local indigenes consult them for charms and amulets which are believed to guard them from gunshots and knife wounds. Vanishing charms are also available in the area and they are mostly made for chiefs. Some of the people patronize the *bouka* men for other personal purposes.

It is worthy of note that, there are different positions with regards to this issue of soothsaying or divination in Islam. According to Hamid (2010), these differences even lead to the breaking away of some group of people from the Tijaniyyah fraternity to form or join the Wahabiyyah fraternity led by Afa Yussif Ajura in Ghana in the 1940s (Hamid, 2010). The Wahabiyyah believe that humanity should send their petition to Allah directly. Therefore, considers the intercession of diviners as *bid'a* (innovation) which they evoke a Hadith from al-Bukhari saying it is un-Islamic. The hadith states:

Narrated by Aisha, I heard Allah's apostle saying, the angels descend in the clouds and mention this or that matter decreed in the heaven. The devils listen stealthily to such matter, and come down to inspire the soothsayer with it, and later would add to it one hundred lies of their own (Al-Bukhari, 1971, 4: 291-292).

They also quote Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as saying that, “beware of innovation, for innovation is going astray and going astray leads to hell fire” (An –Nawawai n.d: p, 40). Also, Qur’an 5:90 which talks about the prohibition of divination by arrow is interpreted by Wahabiyyah as meaning Allah prohibits divination of all kinds (Hamid, 2010). So the Wahabiyyah group do not endorse and courage divination, hero and Saint worship (Hamid, 2010).

One the other hand, the Tijaniyyah fraternity also uses a Hadith on the authority of Muawiya Ibn Hakami al- Sulamee, who reports that the Prophet of Islam said: “...there was a Prophet of Allah who use to divine, by Allah, if the divination of any one of you conforms to his, then surely it is accepted” (Sheikh Nasif, 1975; p. 225). This prophet is believed by Muslim diviners as Prophet Idris (Enoch) (Hamid, 2010). This hadith is believed by Afa Tanko and Afa Yusiff to be *Daif*, that is, it is weak in authenticity (Hamid, 2010). Also, those in support of divination interpret Qur’an 5:90 to mean Allah prohibits only divination by arrow not the other kinds of divination.

Regardless of the arguments on this issue of divination, it is being practiced in the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities. It is up to the Muslim to decide. So, one can conclude that the two Muslim communities are made up of different ethnic groups who, because of a common religion, have come together. They have adopted each other’s culture to suit Islamic laws and principles in their opinion. Thus, they are regarded by all as a model of an Islamic society.

*Economic Activities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities*

Generally, the people in the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim communities are traders who deal in the buying and selling of goods like kola, cereals, food stuffs, cattle and other goods from the three Northern regions of Ghana and the interior. Some also bring goods outside Ghana from places like Dubai, Togo and other places. Others also engage in the selling of local foods like *wakye*, *tuo zaafi*, *kenkey* and fish, rice and stew, tea, porridge and others. So it common to find some households noted for specific occupations. For example, Gidan Kasa in Ayiko-ayiko is noted for *wakye* preparation and selling, Gidan May Komatu is noted for the preparation of *kooko* and *kose*, while Gidan Nufawa is noted for the selling of *tuo zaafi*. It is interesting to note that they have organized themselves into various associations and groups. For example those in the cattle business have the *Sarkin Fawa* as the chief of Butchers, and the various food stuffs have their associations and leaders to help them in their various ventures.

In the communities, Islamic schools commonly called *Makaranta* have been commercialized in order to pay the teachers. However, what they get is small when compared with what their colleagues in the formal public schools receive. Here, a child at a very tender age is enrolled to be educated on the tenets of Islam in order to fit into the society. Madarasatul Hifzul Islamiyya which is located at Kokoaro Bisa in Ayiko-ayiko is an example of such *Makaranta*. Mallam Mohammed Zainudeen is believed to be the founder. There is also Madarasatu Bikiriyya located at Kotokuraba and is commonly called Makaranta Komenda. There are also public and civil servants who work in the various government agencies and other private institutions.

The people in the two Muslim communities engage in all sorts of economic ventures and they usually benefit from each other. It is only when it is beyond them that they go outside the community. For example, they would prefer someone from their communities to make their clothes for them since they understand each other and they share similar fashion taste.

*Political Activities of Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities.*

Like every society, there are leaders for the people in these communities. The Sarkin Zongo is considered the chief of the Muslim community. But there are sub-chiefs for each of the major tribes or ethnic groups. One therefore hears for example, Sarkin Beriberi for the Beriberi people, Sarkin Wangarawa for the Wangara people, Sarkin Dagombaawa for the Dagomba people among others. They have the authority to settle matters within their group but they appeal to the *Sarkin Zongo* when they are not successful.

The Chief Imam is recognized as the religious head of the Muslim regardless of one's theological affiliation. He is supported by the *Naib* (deputy), secretary, treasurer and a board in charge of the administration of the mosque. All the other mosques also have a similar system to ensure the effective administration of the mosque. For example, Alhaji Yusif Muhammed is the current *Naib* (deputy) of the Central mosque, with Mallam Abubakar Hassan as the chief imam.

Ayiko-ayiko also has two main mosques. One is at *Kokoaro Bisa*, which is, opposite Wiseway Cleaners, close to the Tantre Bus station. The other is at *Kokoaro Kasa* between the "Flats" which was built during the Acheampong and Akuffo regimes (1972-75) (Gadzepko, 2005).

### **Polygyny in the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko Muslim Communities**

As stated earlier, Muslim scholars are divided on the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse which is believed to have permitted polygyny (Qur'an 4:3). But majority of Muslim Scholars and Muslims in general agree that polygyny is permissible (not necessarily a duty) and that a man is allowed to marry up to a maximum of four wives. This view is not different from those of Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities located in Cape Coast which are being used as the area of this study.

As to why they believe in the permissibility of polygyny, most take consolation in the fact that the Qur'an is *Kalamullah*- the words of Allah which must be accepted. Thus, to the ordinary Muslim woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what has been 'endorsed by the Qur'an and interpreted by the Aimah (*Imams*) and scholars' (with regard to polygyny) is quite clear. That is, polygyny is permissible in Islam and a man can marry up to a maximum of four wives. Emphasis is not on whether the interpretations by the various schools of thought or Aimah (imams) are right or wrong, or whether the Qur'an is patriarchal in nature or not.

Once this has been established, it is assumed that this has solved the problem of the disagreement in the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse with regards to polygyny as discussed in the Literature Review (page 21- 28). With this background, one understands the issue of Ramatoulaye agreeing to polygyny when her husband married Binetou. As a Muslim woman, she had no choice than to prepare herself for "equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life" (Ba, 1981; p.46). So, once the men are permitted, although with some restriction, the women have to concur not

because they are happy with it but because they have no choice (H. Habiba, personal communication, July 18, 2012). So what is the problem with Islamic polygyny?

### **Contemporary Reasons for the Practice of Polygyny**

The main problem with polygyny seems to emanate from how polygyny is practiced. Various reasons account for this. One of such reasons is procreation and most importantly with regards to a male heir (as most societies are patrilineal when it comes to the system of inheritance).

So, one common reason in contemporary times given by some of the women in Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities for practicing polygyny is to produce male heirs. This was in the case of Hajia Safiya (personal communication, July 20, 2012) who is the first wife and whose husband has faithfully exhausted his right to marry up to four wives in his quest for a male heir. As to whether his ambition has been fulfilled, they are still waiting.

This kind of reason is very common according to Jones (2006) who thinks that the reason given by the men of the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin community in Egypt for practicing polygyny was also to produce male heirs (p. 17). However, this reason did not reflect in Ba’s work. In fact Ramatoulaye had twelve children (both boys and girls) while Aissatou had three boys. This means that the reasons for practising polygyny differ from one cultural setting to the other. A reason in a particular social setting may not apply to the other.

Apart from producing male heirs, some Muslim women see polygyny as “right” of a man. This came to light in an interview with Aunty Lamie, Aunty Khady and about six other Muslim women in the Ayiko-ayiko and

Kotokuraba Muslim communities (personal communication, July 18-20, 2012). That is, a man is required to marry up to four if he thinks he has the means to do so as portrayed by Ba in *So Long a Letter* who used Daouda Deing and Moudo Fall's brother (Tamsir) to represent. No wonder Moudo Fall boldly married Binetou. According to the story, he was successful by all standards – the technical adviser in the Ministry of Public Works and an executive and an active member of the trade union (Ba. 1981; p.9). So, he qualifies to marry according to even contemporary views regarding those who could marry more than one wife. The same applies to Mawdo Ba, a successful doctor. He did not need his mother to even encourage him to marry more than one wife. This misconception is very common among some Muslim women and one is tempted to believe it is as a result of lack of proper education or as a result of improper indoctrination in attempt to brainwash women.

Although Islam encourages all (both men and women) to seek knowledge, the reality in the Muslim communities is that women and most especially the girl child is sidelined in their quest for knowledge according to Mallam Bidmas (personal communication, July 20, 2012). Women are encouraged to a certain level and not motivated to move very high. No doubt, scholars especially Muslim Scholars in the Muslim communities are mostly men, he adds.

So we see each society setting its own criteria for practising polygyny other than the religiously justifiable reasons. Some people in the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities see polygyny as one of the Pillars of Islam that needs to be fulfilled just as one is expected to pray five times a day or to perform *Hajj* if he/she has the means. So a man considered to be “rich”

according to the society is expected to marry more women to fulfil a religious obligation. Or it may be that marrying is seen as a favour for the women who seem to be in desperate situations. That according to them, it is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Of course it is the *Sunnah* to protect women but that does not mean it should be abused. A man who is “rich” but knows he cannot fulfil the condition attached to polygyny (that is treating the women fairly) should not marry more than one wife. Here, one can see an extreme case of misapplication of Islamic polygyny.

Marrying a widow to help her take care of her and her children seems a justifiable reason for polygyny but it is not so in reality just as portrayed by Ba. This kind of belief is reflected in the characters of Douba Dieng and Tamsir (Moudo Ba’s brother). Tamsir for instance had three wives and children whom he could not take care of. So, the wives had to engage in various economic activities to support the family as the writer recalls Ramatoulaye telling Tamsir when he proposed to her. “What of your wives? Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of your numerous children. To help out with your financial obligations,, one of your wives dyes, another sell fruits, and the third untiringly turns the handle of her sewing machine....” (Ba, 1981; p. 58). However, he openly showed his desire in Ramatoulaye who he described as “my good luck” and that preferred her to the younger Binetou who according to him was “too frivolous, too young” (Ba, 1981; p. 57)

In an interview with Hajiah Fulera Mikaidu, a widow who re-married to become third wife but had to seek for divorce when she realized the man was not treating her fairly in that the women were always suspicious of each other because of the way the husband treated them. She said that husband



exhibited open likeness or preference to one neglecting the others. She added that since she was a widow, the man made her and her children feel like he was doing them a big favour by bringing them into his family. This he sometimes said in public and this made the other women insult her and her children. Thus, they felt unwanted and unsafe. She acknowledged that polygyny is not as bad as it is perceived adding that the way it is being practiced in reality makes it unattractive (F. Mikaidu, personal communication, July 20, 2012)

Similar to Hajiah Fulera Mikaidu's case is that of Aunty Lamie who married first as a second wife but divorced later. She later re-married as a third wife but had to divorce again because it was not fulfilling to her. She added that the institution of polygyny is good but how it is practiced in reality is full of deceit and lies on the part of the man and the women involved (A. Lamie, personal communication, July 21, 2012).

All these stem from the "just" treatment which the Qur'an encourages but in reality difficult if not unachievable. No wonder Allah knowing the nature of men said "Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire (Qur'an 4:129). This means that it is not easy to practice even if those involved (i.e. the man and his wives) genuinely wish to be honest and sincere to themselves. So it is highly appropriate to marry only one wife.

However, another former widow, Hajiah Halima holds a different view. She re-married to become a second wife when her first husband died. In her view, it was a successful marriage in the sense that the man helped her to take care of her four children. She added that the success was partly due to the

fact that she was contributing financially to the up-keep of the house. Thus, she was working to support the family. She is currently married to the third husband where she is his third wife when her second husband also died. (H. Halima, personal communication, July 20, 2012)

Surprisingly, Aunty Lamie, a business woman at Kotokuraba who also married first as a second wife and later as a third wife but now divorced supports this view. She claims that her marriages did not work because she was not economically independent in that she always depended on her husband for sustenance. This led to the problem of one feeling not being treated fairly especially if the man was not capable of meeting their demands. But when the woman is working and earning something, she will support herself and the children with the little that she earns (A. Lamie, personal communication, July 21, 2012). This was portrayed by Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter*. Ramatoulaye was teaching (a teacher) so was capable of taking care of her children after her husband married a second wife, Binetou, who did not want the man to take care of his elder children so “raised her demands daily” (Ba, 1981, p.48). Also, Young Nabou, the second wife of Mawdo Ba was a midwife who took her work seriously and the three wives of Tamsir who were dyeing clothes, another selling fruits and the third untiringly turning the handle of her sewing machine.

Men are expected to take “special care” of their women (wife or wives) (Adelabu, 1995; p. 47). But here is the case whereby the woman had to support herself and her children when in Islam it is the man who is supposed to provide for and protect the woman and not the other way round. This seems to be like the norm even in contemporary times. Should this really be the case?

Allah asked men to take special care of the women. Women are expected to stay at home and take care of the house and the children except when they want to work. If they want to work, they have to seek and obtain permission from their husbands and whatever she earns is hers unless she wants to assist the husband. Otherwise it is solely hers (Adelabu, 1995; p. 47). Although women are to be protected and cared for by the husband, it is the other way round according to BA who addressed the issue through Daouda Dieng who was already married with children but felt it his obligation to come to the aid of the widow (Ramatoulaye) who happened to be her former suitor. Thus, in his opinion he was 'fulfilling a religious obligation' if not a selfish desire to have more than one wife. He is presented as a sincere man who genuinely loves Ramatoulaye but did he return to her when she turned down his proposal and instead offered him friendship? He became very angry and never came back so how sincere can he be if he could not offer this poor widow friendship but was ever ready to marry her?

One can conclude that he just wanted to fulfill his desire if not a fantasy to marry a woman he thought he once loved. So, the true intent of polygyny which is to offer security and support for women and in this case a widow (Ramatoulaye) is not what it was meant for. This is supported by K. Zibo (personal communication, July 20, 2012). What is Islamic about a widow re-marrying and having to work tirelessly to take care of her children? She asks. She might as well remain single and look after her children.

Most of the women in polygynous marriages saw the need to be economically independent after their husbands marry other women just as Ba portrayed using Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. With the exception of one woman,

Hajiah Safiya who continued to be a housewife after her husband had married three other women, all the women are engaged in various economic ventures. With Hajiah Safiya, because she has only one daughter who is married now, she does not see the need to earn more money since the little housekeeping money she is given by her husband is enough. As proved by the women of Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities, one can say that the women who are busy working in a way reduce the problem of rivalry and hatred among the women married to one husband.

Also, there are instances where mother-in-laws intentionally trained and groomed young women and persuaded their son to marry as his second wife as in the case of Young Nabou who was groomed by her aunty (Nabou) to marry Mawdo Ba , Aissatou's husband. Are women their own enemies?

This kind of scenario came to light during an interview with Mallam Bidmas (personal communication, July 20, 2012) whose family married a second wife for him because in their view the first wife does not respect him and some of his family members. He added that it was his aunty and sisters who spearheaded the organization of the second marriage ceremony.

Also, while some of the women interviewed accepted that rivalry among women is common and they do experience it, others denied its existence. This is because rivalry is considered as a "necessity" as far as polygyny is concerned. Thus, the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities understand rivalry to be normal. No wonder Hajiah Halima is of the view that a man can marry another woman to check or punish the already existing wife or wives (this is supported by Mallam Bidmas). This is when the

rivalry issue becomes necessary and important in that every woman dreads it. So because of the fear of rivalry, some women treat their husbands well.

The men also use polygyny to threaten the women to put them under control (H. Halima, personal communication, July 20, 2012) Thus, polygyny is considered as a mechanism for social control in polygynous societies instead of a mechanism for helping women or the man or as it was instituted by Islam. So in the end, rivalry among women is expected and should be tolerated which should not be the case since that is not what Islam institutionalized polygyny for.

Another reason that came up was that because other men in the community had multiple wives, other men also want to marry more. Religion, while ever present in their minds, was not used explicitly as a justification. It was not recorded in the book *So Long a Letter* that he married because some of his friends had married more wives.

One wonders if there is an established procedure to follow if a man wants to marry another woman in addition to the already existing one or ones. Should he discuss it with his first wife or seek her consent before or he could send some group of people to tell her after it has been carried out? Can he choose not to tell her at all or tell her himself after he has already married another woman? In Ba's story, the imam played this role of being present whenever information is delivered to Ramatoulaye which is very significant. The first was to tell her husband was getting married to another woman that morning and that they are even coming from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place (Ba, 1981, p. 37). Also, when Tamsir wanted to propose marriage to her after she had celebrated her husband's fortieth day of

death, the imam was present. Why is the imam always brought along to deliver and witness all these?

The imam represents the mouth piece or a representative and proof of the presence of Islam in the community and acceptance and approval of the message being delivered. Thus, the imam approves of Moudo's marriage to the second wife and Tamsir's decision to marry his late brothers' wife to join his already existing three wives even though the latter could not take care of his three children.

Women in the Kotokuraba and Ayiko-ayiko communities are divided on what is supposed to be done regarding this issue. While some women think their husbands should seek their consent before marrying other women, others think they should be compensated by their husbands before. Women themselves are divided on the issue of how their husbands should go about to marrying other women. In the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities, there is no established procedure. So it varies from household to household. In the case of one Sister Zulatu, her husband did not tell her that he was getting married neither did any of his family members or representatives delegated to tell her. She said that she heard rumours on the day of the marriage and so she called the husband on the telephone and he denied that he was getting married. But later she said the husband came explaining that had not married the second wife himself and that his family organized the ceremony on his behalf. According to Sister Zulatu, her husband added that the woman was economically independent so she was the one who is even helping him financially and so there was no need for her to worry (S. Zulatu, July 21, 2012).

According to Hajiah Kande, (personal communication, July 20, 2012), the second of four wives, when her husband wanted to marry her, her family insisted on the consent of the first wife before they agreed to give her away in marriage. But when her husband wanted to marry his third and fourth wives, he did not ask of their (i.e. the first wife and herself) consent. They just heard he wanted to marry and he married before telling them. So, they have no control over whom and when their husband wanted to marry.

According to Hajiah Halima, (personal communication, July 20, 2012), in most cases, the women would not willingly agree to their husband's decision to marry another woman in addition to them so the men rather do it before telling them. So to avoid all the troubles, some men prefer marrying before telling their wives.

Hajiah Fulera was also of the view that the society we live in does not give women the kind of respect due them. This is because Muslim women know it is permissible for a man to marry more than one, but it is also every woman's' right to know before her husband marries another woman. Nevertheless, hardly will husbands discuss it with their wives. "You the wife or wives are always the last to know" she said and in her view is not right (personal communication, July 20, 2012).

According to Hajiah Habiba (personal communication, July 18, 2012), when the man decides to marry another woman, it is not open for discussion whether the wife is happy with his choice or not, it is not open for discussion. No wonder a man eventually infected his two innocent wives with HIV when he unknowingly (or knowingly) married a widow as his third wife. This widow's late husband was believed to have died from the AIDS so the man

was warned by his wives and others but he felt it was a ploy to discourage him from taking another wife. Although the third wife recently passed on, the harm cannot be erased. At least this could have been averted if his choice of wife was open for discussion.

How society perceived single mothers, both widows and divorcees cannot be ignored. According to Ba, Aissatou eventually got some respect after becoming successful when she divorced Mawdo Ba when he married young Nabou. She even became a role model for Ramatoulaye's daughter Daba who even advised her mother to also divorce their father when he also married Binetou. But how did the society see her? In fact, Aissatou is used to represent the liberated educated African Muslim woman who took a bold step of rejecting polygyny even though she knows that Islam permits it practice. Thus, she could not accept what her husband is offering her (polygyny) today in place of the happiness she once had (Ba, 1981, p. 31)

Also, men (both old and young) looking for easy revenue and adventure to occupy their leisure proposed to marry Ramatoulaye and her persistent refusal did not go on well with the men and society. This earned her titles like 'lioness' or 'mad woman' (Ba, 1981; p.70). The attitude and comment of her friend, Farmata summarizes the attitude of society on this issue.

You have rejected the messenger sent to you by God to reward you for your suffering. God will punish you for not having followed the path towards peace. You have refused greatness! You shall live in mud. I wish you another Moudo to make you shed tears of blood. Who do you take yourself for? At fifty, you



have dared to break the *wolere*. You trample upon your luck. Daouda Dieng, a rich man, a deputy doctor, of your own age group, with just one wife. He offers you security, love and you refuse! Many women, of Daba's age, (Ramatoulaye daughter) would wish to be in your place. You boast of reasons. You speak of love instead of bread (Ba, 1981; p. 69).

Thus, her refusal to re-marry is seen as a crime from all angles. No wonder one can say women are their own enemies. One wonders how Farmata will feel if her husband decides to marry someone like Ramatoulaye. This is quite different on the field. There is no much pressure on widows to re-marry especially if she is a career woman.

In the book *So Long a Letter*, we saw Ramatoulaye being persuaded to do something about the “bewitchment” of young Binetou and that she is letting the young girl to pluck the fruit of her labour. So they recommended “marabouts” that had proved to be able to bring husbands back from the fold by separating them from evil women” (Ba, 1981; p. 48). However, Ramatoulaye rejected this supernatural power on the basis of her Islamic faith.

This issue is not rare in contemporary Muslim societies and Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities are not exempted. Although not all the women interviewed agreed to this practice, some acknowledge the efficacy of such “spiritual powers” commonly called *bouka* in these communities. While others condemn it, some justify it, arguing that it is not used to harm but to protect one's self.

One area that cannot be ignored is the attitude of Ramatoulaye's children towards their fathers' marriage to Binetou especially the attitude of

the eldest daughter, Daba. She was furious and her pride was wounded with an overwhelming anger (Ba, 1981; p. 39). She encouraged her mother to break up with her father and that she cannot see her mother fighting over a man with a girl of her age (in fact her friend and classmate). However, on the field, most of the women claim their children were supportive and that they did not encourage them to leave since the children had grown to accept that polygyny is acceptable in Islam so they dare not challenge this sacred institution.

However, Sister Zainab added that some of the older children especially the girls sympathize with their mothers and fight in the form of rivalry for their mothers' discreetly. This according to her is so because the fathers will not be happy to know his daughter is challenging his authority as a father and his right to marry another wife or wives (S. Zainab, personal communication, July 18, 2012).

It is worthy of note that in the Book *So Long a Letter*, both men married younger women. Binetou, the second wife of Moudo Fall for example, is described by Ramatoulaye as "really beautiful in this adolescent period....her shapely contours could not but be noticed" (Ba, 1981; p. 35). The first wife is however described as someone who had lost her figure as well as ease and quickness of movement. Her stomach protrudes from beneath the wrapper that hides the calves developed by the impressive number of kilometres she walked since the beginning of her existence. Suckling has also robbed her breast of their round firmness (Ba, 1981; p. 41). So, it is presented that the younger women came to replace the old women who are "no more attractive". In Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Communities, it was not always the case. According to Hajiah Nura (personal communication, July 18, 2012),

some of the co-wives are even older if not the same age as the man they married. It is in rare cases that you will see the man marrying a younger wife since most of the young girls do not succumb easily to becoming second or third or fourth wives in the communities.

One can then conclude that Islamic implementation and practice of polygyny have varied over time. It seems they are always influenced by the cultural context in which they occur. Current trends seem to be tending toward the social utility of the institution, rather than its religious validity.

As is reported by Aub-Lughod's anthropological fieldwork (Jones, 2006), it seems that a disconnection has developed between the rights allowed to women in the Qur'an and the rights that women are given in reality. This is not different from what is happening in the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities. This disparity is apparent in many of the writings of modern Islamic scholars. This first became an issue in the early twentieth century when Muhammad Abduh, an Egyptian scholar, introduced new and innovative interpretations of the Qur'an and wrote legal opinions (*fatwas*) that supported the dissolution of polygyny in Islamic societies. He believed that the practice had been positive and practical during the early years of Islam, but he felt that over time polygyny had become distorted into "a corrupt practice of unbridled lust, devoid of justice and equity, and thus was no longer conducive to the community's welfare" (Stowasser, 1994; p. 121).

Advocating for the dissolution of polygyny is too radical; however, strict adherence rules to ensure it is practised as sanctioned by Islam maybe a step further in ensuring that it is practised well. The fact is that, there is a very

big gap between what Islam teaches with regard to polygyny and how it is practised in reality as shown by the field work.

With the exception of one issue, which is the practice of men using their desire for male heirs to marry more wives, all the issues raised by Mariama Ba are prevalent in the Ayiko-ayiko and the Kotokuraba Muslim communities. Thus, polygyny is permissible so a male Muslim can marry more than one wife up to a maximum of four. Also, a rich man according to the society is eligible to marry more than one wife. Widows are expected to re-marry but unlike Mariama Ba who seems not to be in favour of this, the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim Communities attribute the widows' economic independence to the success of the marriage. Also, many of the women saw the need to be economically independent after their husbands marry another wife and families of the man sometimes marry on behalf of the man. Rivalry did exist among the women and this was considered to be necessary. No wonder some men used polygyny to threaten their wives to put them in check. Also, just as Ba presented, there is no established procedure that is followed with regards to when a man wants to marry another wife. He can choose not to tell his wife and no one can hold him accountable. Also, the issue of the use of spiritual powers to bewitch and defend marriage is prevalent in the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba communities just as daughters sympathize with their mothers should the father marry other woman.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the summary of the discussions in the study, major findings, main conclusion of the thesis and some recommendations.

#### Summary

The research tried to find out the modern feminist perceptions of polygyny as practiced by Muslims since relatively little research has specifically addressed women's attitudes toward polygyny despite the wide spread interest in polygyny (Mekers & Franklin, 1995). The study was therefore undertaken using Marima Ba's *So Long a Letter* as a basis to bring a better understanding of the practice of polygyny from the feminist perspective.

Islamic feminism was adopted as a theoretical framework. As Arshad (2008) argues, Islamic feminism grounds its arguments in Islam and its teachings seek the full equality of women and men in the personal and public sphere and can include non-Muslims in the discourse and debate. Therefore this serves as theoretical framework within which this research was carried out to better address the issue of feminism and modern feminist thinking in relation to the issues and concerns raised by Mariama Ba in her book *So Long a Letter*. With this theoretical framework, the research was carried out using Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities in Cape Coast (Central Region, Ghana) as a study area.

As to why the people in the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotikuraba Muslim Communities believe in the permissibility of polygyny, most take consolation in the fact that the Qur'an is *Kalamullah*- the words of Allah which must be accepted. Thus, to the ordinary Muslim woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what has been 'endorsed by the Qur'an and interpreted by the Aimah (imams) and scholars' (with regard to polygyny) is quite clear. That is, polygyny is permissible in Islam and a man can marry up to a maximum of four wives. Emphasis is not on whether the interpretations by the various schools of thought or imams are right or wrong, or whether the Qur'an is patriarchal in nature or not.

Among the issues raised with regard to *So Long a Letter* are the role of religion in the practice of polygyny, feminism and patriarchy. Other issues dealt with include gender and reparation, women against women, conflict between the old and young women and clash of cultures and misrepresentation of cultural thought and institutions.

With the exception of one issue, which is the practice of men using their desire for male heirs to marry more wives, all the issues raised by Mariama Ba are prevalent in the Ayiko-ayiko and the Kotokuraba Muslim communities. Thus, polygyny is permissible in Islam so a Muslim can marry more than one wife up to a maximum of four. Also, a rich man according to the society is eligible to marry more than one wife and the misconception that women are in abundance, exposes vulnerable single mothers and widows to the mercy of some men, as they are used in polygynous marriages by such men for sexual gratification and other avenues for pleasure.

Widows are expected to re-marry but unlike Mariama Ba who seems not to be in favour of this, the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim Communities attribute the widows' economic independence to the success of such marriage. Also, many of the women saw the need to be economically independent after their husbands marry another wife. This is because women who are economically independent have a sense of security in polygynous marriages in terms of rivalry and other related problems unlike their counterpart who depends solely on their husbands.

The families of the man sometimes marry on behalf of the man in this community just as addressed by Ba. Rivalry did exist among the women and this was considered to be necessary. No wonder some men used polygyny to threaten their wives to put them in check. Also, just as Ba presented, there is no established procedure that is followed with regards to when a man wants to marry another wife. He can choose not to tell his wife and no one can hold him accountable. Also, the issue of the use of spiritual powers to bewitch and defend marriage is prevalent in the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba communities just as daughters sympathize with their mothers should the father marry other woman.

One concludes that advocating for the dissolution of polygyny is too radical but strict adherence rules to ensure it is practised as sanctioned by Islam maybe a step further in ensuring that it is practised well. The fact is that, there is a very big gap between what Islam teaches with regard to polygyny and how it is practised in reality as shown by the field work.

In a nutshell, nine out of the fifteen women which forms sixty percent of the respondents want polygyny to continue since they consider the rationale

behind it as good. Although the mode of practice of polygyny in reality leaves much to be desired, only few of the respondents want polygyny to be abolished. It should be noted that those who want it to continued call for rules and regulations that will make it adaptable to modern trends because of the apparent abuse inherent in its practise.

### **Major Findings**

The study reveals that the Islamic implementation and practice of polygyny vary among Muslims. It is influenced by the cultural contexts in various communities. This means that the reasons for practising polygyny differ from one cultural setting to the other. A reason in a particular social setting may not apply to the other.

Another finding is that Muslim scholars are divided on the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse which is believed to have permitted polygyny (Qur'an 4:3). But majority of Muslim Scholars and Muslims in general agree that polygyny is permissible (not necessarily a duty) and that a man is allowed to marry up to a maximum of four wives. This view is not different from those of Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim communities just that they believe a man who is 'rich' according to the society's standard has the right if not an obligation to marry more than one wife

Also, current trends seem to favour the social utility of the institution, rather than its religious validity as echoed by Jones (2006) in her work *Islam and Polygyny*. As revealed by the research in the Ayiko-ayiko and the Kotokuraba Muslim communities, thirteen (13) respondents out of the twenty which represent 65% are of the view that the reason why polygyny is practised



is 'the social prestige syndrome'. This means some men in the community have multiple wives and that has influenced others and encouraged them to practice polygyny as a source of prestige. Religion, which is at the back of their minds, was not used explicitly as a justification. So, there are a lot of cultural or societal influences which encourage polygyny but men hide under the guise of the Islamic religion to practice it.

Also, Muslim women are divided on the issue of polygyny but majority support its practice. Nine out of fifteen women support its practice. Thus, sixty percent (60%) of the fifteen respondents interviewed are in favour of polygyny while the rest are against it with various reasons like polygyny is not fair in reality, the men are biased and always prefer one woman to the other or others, the women use "juju" on each other and their children, fighting and misunderstanding over the man's property among others. Interestingly, those who are in favour recommend that some reforms are needed to compel those involved to practice it fairly. Thus, the main problem with polygyny is with its practice and implementation rather than its concept as a permissible act in Islam.

As to why Muslim women believe in the permissibility of polygyny, twelve (12) respondents which form 80 % of the respondent take consolation in the fact that the Qur'an is perceived as *Kalamullah* (the words of Allah) which must be accepted. Thus, to the ordinary Muslim woman of the twenty first century, what has been endorsed by the Qur'an with regard to polygyny and interpreted by Muslim scholars is clear and therefore a man can marry up to a maximum of four wives. However, the remaining 20% are indecisive on the issue due to reasons such as the Qur'an is open to interpretation so since

society is dynamic, the interpretation should be dynamic to suite current situations and that should the need call for polygyny, they will practice it but will not encourage it practice.

With the exception of one issue, which is the men using their desire for male heirs to marry more wives, all the issues raised by Mariama Ba are still prevalent in the Ayiko-ayiko and the Kotokuraba Muslim communities. also, widows are also expected to re-marry but unlike Mariama Ba who seems not to be in favour of this, the Ayiko-ayiko and Kotokuraba Muslim Communities attribute the widows being economic independence to the success of such a marriage. In all, the practice of polygyny varies among Muslim. It is influenced by the cultural contexts in various communities.

### **Main Conclusion**

In conclusion, Muslim women seek to amend the current ‘patriarchal’ laws into making them more focused on integrating equality for men and women in Islam. Muslim women view the teachings of Islam as their champion and supporter (Ashad, 2008; p. 5).

Also, it be concluded that the source of impediments to progress experienced today by Muslim women are not in Islam and its traditions, but in alien ideological intrusions on our societies, ignorance, and distortion of the true Islam, or exploitation by some individuals within the society. Muslim women’s approach to Modern feminism is to address these issues. So, Mariama Ba focuses on the experiences of the women involved rather than on interpreting verses from the Qur’an or *shari’ah*. Indeed, Ba’s emphasis is on

the secular reasons behind decisions to participate in polygyny rather than religious ones.

From the discussion, the researcher is of the view that the author of *So Long a Letter* presented a “realistic” practice of polygyny in the society where religious practice and societal beliefs are put together as one entity.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- There is little or no researches being conducted to bring out a universally accepted rule and a regulation regarding how polygyny should be practiced as it is not well detailed in the Qur’an. This gives room for different interpretations and practices. Specific rules will have been spelt out in the Qur’an just as it was done for inheritance in chapter 4 verses 7, 11, 19 and 33; divorce in chapter 2 verses 227, 229, 231, 232 and 236. Thus, scholars and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) should work with the Muslim leaders and Aimah (imams) to draw-up specific rules regarding how polygyny should be practised to make it adaptable to modern trends. These write ups should be put in place and made available to all.
- Although Polygyny in a way may control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, it can also lead to their spread if caution is not taken. HIV test should be recommended before every marriage is officiated by the religious officials and the courts

- Also, CHRAJ and NCCE in partnership with Radio Central should embark on education programmes to sensitize the people on the effects of polygyny and also compel to those involved to practice it fairly by appealing to their conscience.
- Women should take active interest in Islamic studies especially in the study of the Qur'an and to bring on board *tafsir* from the feminine perspective to curb the patriarchal *tafsirs* that has flooded the mosques, radio and television stations.
- The NCCE should work with imams and Muslim leaders to educate the Muslim *Ummah* and non-Muslims about the fact that although the Qur'an makes polygyny permissible marriage, it does not make it obligatory
- Certain criteria should put in place by the Aimah (imams) as a way of counselling both men and women before practising polygyny.
- Pre-marital counselling should be emphasised as a requirement before any Islamic marriage takes place.

## REFERENCES

- Abdalati, H. 1975. *Islam in focus*. Indiana: Islamic Teaching Centre,
- Abudu, A.O. 1996. *Islamic economics for the layperson*. Accra: Dyno-Media Ltd.
- Abudu, A.O. 1999. *The Islamic system of inheritance*. Accra: Dyno- Media Ltd.
- Adelabu, A.R.H. 1995. *Islamic awareness in women*. Lagos: Centre for Islamic Education and Propagation.
- Ahmed, L. 1992. *Women and gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Al- Qaradawi. Y. *The Lawful and the Prohibited*. Washington: Amereican Trust Publication.
- Anderson, P. S. and Beverley, C. 2004. eds., *Feminist philosophy of religion: critical readings*. London: Routledge .
- Arndt, S. 2002. *The dynamics of African feminism: defining and classifying African-feminist literatures*. Trans Cole, Isabel. Trenton: African World Press.
- Arshad, H. 2008. Islamic Feminism and the Role of UNESCO. *George Washington University EDUC*, 228.
- Al- Fauzan, F. S. 2003. *Rulings pertaining to Muslim women*. Loqueman, B. trans. Riyadh: King Fard National Library Cataloguing.
- Ali, Y.A. 1997. *The meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (new ed. with revised trans, commentary and newly compiled comprehensive index). Maryland: Amana Publication.

- Altman, I., Ginat, J. 1996. *Polygamous families in contemporary society*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Amini, I. 2008. *Principles of marriage family ethics*. Nigeria: Cultural  
Consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Nigeria.
- Ba, M. 1989. *So long a letter*. Johannesburg: Heinemann Education  
Publication.
- Badran, M., & Rohe, M. (2007). *Feminism beyond east and west: New gender  
talk and practice in global Islam*. Global Media Publications.
- Barlas, A. 2002. *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading patriarchal  
interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Beasley, C. 1999. *What Is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*.  
Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Butler, J. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge
- Brown, R. 1952. *Structure and function in primitive society*. London:  
Routledge.
- Davies, H., Nutley, S., & Walter, I. (2005, May). Assessing the impact of  
social science research: conceptual, methodological and practical  
issues. In *ESRC Symposium on Assessing Non-Academic Impact of  
Research, London*.
- Dawda, A 2005. *Women's perception of their roles in household: a case study  
of Yendi Township*. An unpublished thesis submitted to the department  
of sociology, faculty of Social Sciences, University of Cape Coast in  
partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the master of  
philosophy degree in sociology.
- Doi, I.R.A. 1990. *Shari'ah the Islamic law*. Ibadan: Iksan Islamic Publishers

- Foss, Karen A., Foss, Sonja Kand and Griffin, Cindy L. 1999. *Feminist rhetorical theories*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Freud, S. (1950). *Totem and taboo*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Gadzepko, K.S. 2005. *History of Ghana since pre-history*. Accra: Excellent Publishing.
- Greta K. W. 2009. *From sexism to feminism: arguments of definition in a return to modesty and girls' gone mild*. Unpublished thesis submitted to the Graduate Degree program in Communication Studies and the Graduate Faculty. University of Kansas.
- Hammer, R. 2002. *Antifeminism and family Terrorism: A critical feminist perspective*. Lanham Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Haneef, S. 1982. *What everyone should know about Islam and Muslims*. Chicago: Kazi Publication.
- Hiti, P.K. 1975. *History of the Arabs from the earliest time to the present*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Hooks, B. 2000. *Feminism is for everybody: passionate politics*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- Hook, B. 2000, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: South End Press Classics.
- Horby, A. S. 2007. *The oxford advanced learner dictionary*. Sally W., Collins. T. M., eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jagne, S. F. 1998. 'Mariama Bâ (1929-1981)' in *Postcolonial African Writers*, ed. Pushpa Naidu Parekh.

- Kassim, R. 2009. *Polygamy among Ghanaian Muslims and its effects on girl-child education: a case study of Kotokuraba And Ayiko-Ayiko zongo community*. Unpublished thesis presented to the Dept. of Religion and Human Values. University of Cape Coast. (first degree).
- Kisombo, B., Magesa, L., & Shorter, A. 1977. *African Christian marriage*. London. Macmillan Publishers Ltd: London.
- Konighofer, M. 2008. *The new ship of Zion: dynamic diaspora dimensions of the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem*. Berlin: Deutsche National Bibliothek .
- Lasswell, H. 1930. *Psychoanalysis and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levy, R. 1971. *The social structure of Islam*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Mbiti, S. J. 1990. *African religious Philosophy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers..
- Mernissi, F. 2003. *Beyond the veil: male –female dynamics in Muslim society*. London: Saqi Books.
- Mir-Hosseini, Z. 2006. *Marriage on trial. A study of Islamic family law*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.
- Moghadam, V. 2000. Islamic Feminism and the Politics of Naming (Iran Bulletin) in Hiba Arshad's *Islamic Feminism and the role of UNESCO*.
- Moghissi, H. (1999). *Feminism and Islamic fundamentalism: The limits of postmodern analysis*. New York: Zed Books.
- Mortley, R. 1981. *Womanhood: the feminine in ancient Hellenism gnosticism Christianity and Islam*. Sydney: Delacroix.



- Ochs, C. 1977. *Behind the Sex of God – "Toward a New Consciousness - Transcending Matriarchy and Patriarchy"*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Oduyoye, M. 1998. *Patrilineal spirits: the ntoro of the Akan, the tro-wo of the Ewe in Traditional Religion in West Africa*. ed. Ade-Adegbola A.E. Ibadan: Daystar Press.
- Opoku, A.K. nd. *West African traditional religion*. Jurong: FED International Private Ltd.
- Philip, A.A.B, Jones, J. 2005. *Polygamy in Islam*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House.
- Plaskow, J. 2003 "Jewish Feminist Thought" in Frank, Daniel H. & Leaman, Oliver. *History of Jewish Philosophy*. London: Routledge
- Plumwood, V. 2002. *Understanding Feminists and Their Fantasies*. Dallas: Spence Publishing Company.
- Rattray, S.R. 1923. *Ashanti*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Rattray, S.R. 1959. *Religion and arts in Ashanti*. Chapters by Bennett, T.G., Blake, V., Buxton, D.H., Marret, R.R., Seligman, G.C. London: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, D. 2004. *Muslim societies in Africa history: new approach to African history*. Cambridge: Press syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- Saeed, A. 2006. *Interpreting the Qur'an towards a contemporary approach*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Schlafly, P 1977. *The power of a positive woman*. New York: Arlington House
- Schuld, P. F. 1977. *The simple squeeze bridge*. Drake Publishers

- Silverman, D. 2000. Analyzing talk and text. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2, 821-834.
- Spencer, Robert. 2002. *Islam Unveiled*. New York: Encounter Books
- Stowasser, B.F. 1994. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, an Interpretation*.  
New York: Oxford University Press.
- Teddies, C. and Tashakkori, A. 2008. *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approach in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. California: Sage Publication Inc.
- Twumasi, P. A. (1986). *Social research in rural communities: the problems offieldwork in Ghana*. Ghana Universities Press.
- Wadud, A. 1999. *Qur'an and women. Reading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Wadud, A. 2006. *Inside the gender jihad. Women's reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Walker, R. 1995. *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. York: Anchor Books.
- Yamani, M. 1996. *Feminism and Islam*. New York: New York University Pres.
- Zeitzen, K.M. (2008). *Polygamy: A cross- cultural analysis*. Oxford: Berg Publisher.

### **Journals**

- Anderton, L.D., Emogh, J. R. 1989. Polygynous fertility: sexual competition versus progeny. *The American journal of sociology*. Vol. 94. No. 4, pp 832-855. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Badran, M. "Islamic feminism: what's in a name?" *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*.  
Jan 17-23 02.
- Bandaraga, Asoka. 1989. 'Women in Development: Liberalism, Marxism and Marxist Feminism'. *Journal Development and Change*. Vol 15.
- Bove, R, Vallengia, C. 1990. Polygygy and women and apos health in sub-saharan africa. *Social sciences ansd medicine*. Vol. 68, issue1, pp. 21-29.
- Craswell, R. 2003. In That Case, What Is the Question? Economics and the Demands of Contract Theory. *The Yale Law Journal*, 112(4), 903-924.
- Denny, F. M. 2001. Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America, edited by Gisela Webb. *Journal of law and Religion*, 15(1/2), 535-540.
- Effah, B.K. 1999. A formulation of polygyny- fertility hypothesis. *Journal of comparative studies*. Vol. 30.
- Falen, J.D. 2008. Polygyny and Christian marriage in Africa: The Case of Benin. *African studies review* .Vol. 51.pp. 51-74 .
- Gray, B.P., 2004. HIV and Islam: is HIV prevelance lower among Muslim? *Social science & medicine*. Vol. 58. Issue 9.
- Gwanfogba, N.P., Shumm R.S., Smith, M., Furrow L.J. 1997. Polygyny and marital life satisfaction: an exploratory study from rural Cameroon. *Journal of comparative family studies* , vol.28.
- Haddad, M. 2006. Egalitarian Pioneers: Betty Friedan or Catherine Booth? *Priscilla papers*, Vol. 20, No. 4.
- Hamid, A.M. 2010. Muslim 'Priesthood' in Dagbon: in search of a definition. *Journal of philosophy and religion*. Vol. 4, No.1

- Jawad, H. A. 199.1 Women and the Question of Polygamy in Islam. *The Islamic Quarterly* 35(3): 181-190.
- Jones, R. 2006. Polygyny in Islam. *Macalester Islam journal*. Vol. 1. Issue Aricle ii.
- Kavka, M. 2002. Feminism, Ethics, and History, or what is the “Post” in “Postfeminism”? *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21. No. 1 2004
- Kamali, H.M. 1989. Source, nature and objectives of Shari’ah. *Islamic Quarterly*.
- Kavya, M. Feminism, Ethics and History, or what is tyhe “Post” in “Postfeminism”? *Tulsa studies in women’s Lliterature*. 21. No. 1. 2004.
- Kempen L. C. 2001. *Mariama Bâ, Rigoberta Menchú, and Postcolonial Feminism*. Currents in Comparative Romance Language and Literature. Vol. 97. Michigan: P. Lang.
- Khadduri, M. 1977. Marriage in Islamic Law: The Modernist Viewpoints. *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 26(2): 213-218
- Kramarae, Cheri; Spender, and Dale. 2000. *Routledge international encyclopedia of women: global women's issues and knowledge*. New York: Routledge, 746. ISBN: 0415920906.
- Lang, G., Smart, J. 2002. Migration and the “second wife” in south China: towards cross- border polygyny. *International migration review*. Vol. 36, issue 2, pp. 546-569.
- MacKinnon, A. C. 1982. Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory. *Feminist Theory* Vol. 7, No. 3 (pp. 515-544).

- Makgwe, P. 2006. Theorizing African feminism(s): the colonial question. *QUEST: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* Vol. XX, No. 1-2, 2006. *Special issue on African Feminisms*.
- Mashhour, A. 2005. Islamic Law and Gender Equality – Could There be a Common Ground? A Study of Divorce and Polygamy in Sharia Law and Contemporary Legislation in Tunisia and Egypt. *Human Rights Quarterly* 27: 562-596.
- Meekers, D., Franklin, N. 1995. Women's perceptions of polygyny among the Kaguru of Tanzania. *Ethnology*. Vol. 34, 1995
- Moaddel, M. 1998. Religion and Women: Islamic Modernism versus Fundamentalism. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37(1): 198- 130.
- Nes, A. J and Ladicola. 1988. Toward a Definition of Feminist Social Work: A Comparison of Liberal, Radical and Socialist Models. *Oxford Journals*. Vol. 43 Issue 1.
- Nes, J. A. Iadicola, P. 1989. Toward a definition of feminist social work: A comparison of liberal, radical, and socialist models. *Social Work*, 34(1), 12-21.
- Plant, D. G. 1996. Mythic Dimensions in the Novels of Mariama Ba in *Research in African Literatures* 27.2.
- Kramarae, C. & Spender, D. (Eds.). 2000. *Routledge international encyclopedia of women: global women's issues and knowledge* (Vol. 1). Taylor & Francis.

Sichona, J.F. 1993. The polygyny –fertility hypothesis revisited: the situation in Ghana. *Journal of biosocial sciences*. Vol. 25, pp. 473-482

Van Wichelen, S. 2009, 'Polygamy Talk and the Politics of Feminism: Contestations over Masculinity in a New Muslim Indonesia', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1): 173-187.

Welch, E.C. & Glick. C.P. 1981. The incident of polygamy in contemporary Africa: a research note. *Journal of marriage and family*. Vol. 43, No. 1

### **Internet Materials**

An Interview of Mariama Bâ by Alioune Touré Dia was published in *Amina* in November 1979.[<http://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/AMINABaLettre.html>].

Bundesen, L. 2007. *The Feminine Spirit: Recapturing the Heart of Scripture*. Wiley. com.

Dr. Lois Lamy' al Faruqi, *Islamic Traditions and the Feminist Movement* ([www.jannah.org](http://www.jannah.org))

Hussain, A. *Islamic laws of inheritance*. <http://www.islam101.com/sociology/inheritance.htm> (Accessed 16/03/2011)

Ibrahim, M. 2000. At Tafsirul-Muqaran:Dirasah. Tasiliyyah. *Journal of Shariah and Qanoon*. <http://sljournal.uaeu.ac.ae/issues/26/docs/2.swf> (Accessed: 16/03/2010)

Klomeqah, R. 1997. Socio-Economic characteristics of Ghanaian women on polygamous marriages. *Journal of comparative family studies*. Vol. 28 <http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5000559028>. Assessed, 16/12/10

- Wadud, A. 2002. *A'ishah's legacy*: Amina Wadud looks at the struggle for women's rights within Islam - Islam: Women. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0JQP/is\\_2002\\_May/ai\\_8742438](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_2002_May/ai_8742438)  
7/ Accessed 10/09/11
- Mbiti, J. *ATR special topics*: The role of women in African traditional religion. [www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/atr-women.htm](http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/atr-women.htm). (Accessed 19/11/10.)
- Moosa, N. 2009. *Polygynous Muslim marriages in South Africa: their potential impact on the incidence of HIV* . <http://www.saflii.org.29/journals/PER/2009/13/html>. (Accessed 16/12/10)
- Roth, A.E, & Kurup, B.K. 1990. Polygyny as social and biological differentiation among Toposa agro-pastoralist of Southern Sudan. *Social indicators research*. Vol. 22. Number 4, pp. 385-398. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q4j1124p2q45nu>. (Accessed 16/12.10)
- Powers, S. D. 1993. The Islamic Inheritance System: A Socio-Historical Approach. *Arab Law Quarterly*. Vol. 8, No. 1 pp. 13 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3381490>. (Accessed 8/3/ 2011)

## Primary Sources

1. A visit to the Public Records and Archives Administration Department.

Title of material:

- Hausa Zongo, Cape Coast (1<sup>st</sup> March 1919 to 1944)
  - Cape Coast Native Affairs (31<sup>st</sup> August 1944 to 11<sup>th</sup> March 1948, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1944 to 19<sup>th</sup> 1948) Sackey, K. (1919, March 24). [Letter to the acting commissioner of the Cape Coast Castle]. Public Records and Archives Administration Department. (Collected from 1<sup>st</sup> march 1919 to 1944).
  - Acquisition of Land (4<sup>th</sup> November 1915-February 1956)
  - West African Frontier Force (24<sup>th</sup> Aprils 1925 to 16<sup>th</sup> July 1944)
  - Hausa Wangara settlers in Cape Coast (23<sup>rd</sup> September 1920 to 29<sup>th</sup> February 1944) Mazawuyaje, M. (1924, January 24) [letter to the commissioner of the Cape Coast Castle] public Records and Archives Administration Department. (collection from 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1920 to 29<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1944)
  - Congested areas in Cape Coast(23<sup>rd</sup> September 1920 to 29<sup>th</sup> February 1944)
2. A visit to the Town and Country Planning Department.( 7<sup>th</sup> October 2011)



**Those Interviewed**

## Women Interviewed

Name	Age	Marriage Position	Occupation	Date of interview	Community
Hjiah Alimah	71	Second of two wives	Trader	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Kotokuraba
Hajiah Habiba	42	First of two wives	Dress maker	18 <sup>th</sup> July, 2012	Ayiko-ayiko
Karima Hamidu	38	Second of three wives	Caterer	18 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Ayiko-ayiko
Mariam Nuhu	37	Third of three wives	Trader	18 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Ayiko-ayiko
Khadijatu Zibo	58	First of two wives	Trader	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Ayiko-ayiko
Sister Mariam	26	First of two wives	House wife	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Kotokurba
Hajiah Safiya	44	First of four wives	House wife	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Kotokuraba
Hajiah Fulera	52	Divorced (3 <sup>rd</sup> of three wives)	Trader	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Kotokuraba
Aunty Lamie	42	Divorcee 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> wife	Trader	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Kotokuraba
Hajiah Kande	39	Second of four wives	Business woman	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Kotokuraba

Sister Zualtu	54	First of two wives	Trader	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Ayikoayiko
Hajiah Nura	48	Divorcee (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Business woman	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Kotokuraba
Ummi Hanni	38	First wife of three	House wife	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Kotokuraba
Hajia Hassana	46	First wife of three	House wife	18 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Ayiko-ayiko
Hajiah Aminat	48	First wife of two	House wife	18 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Ayiko-ayiko

Men Interviewed

Mallam Ishaku	76	Married	Imman	21 <sup>st</sup> 2012	July	Ayiko-ayiko
Salisu Ahmed	54	Married	Designer	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Ayiko-ayiko
Mallam Bidmas	62	Married	Spiritualist	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Kotokuraba
Alhaji Kassim	65	Married	Businessman	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Ayiko-ayiko
Jamil Ahmed	35	Married	Businessman	20 <sup>th</sup> 2012	July	Ayiko-ayiko

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE / QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE RESEARCH ENTITLED; ISLAM, POLYGYNY AND MODERN FEMINIST THINKING: AN APPRAISAL OF MARIAMA BAS' *SO LONG A LETTER*

Date of interview: .....

Location: .....

Name: .....

Age: .....

Occupation: .....

Marital status: .....

Marital position: .....

Telephone Number: .....

1. Understanding of polygyny in African culture

- i. Allowed*
- ii. Allowed with certain conditions*
- iii. Forbidden*
- iv. Not allowed*

2. Understanding of Islamic polygyny

- i. Allowed*
- ii. Allowed with certain conditions*
- iii. Forbidden*
- iv. Not allowed*

3. Perception of polygyny before marriage

- i. Explained*
- ii. Misconceived*
- iii. Properly understood*
- iv. Misunderstood*

4. Perception of polygyny after marriage
  - i. *Explained*
  - ii. *Misconceived*
  - iii. *Properly understood*
  - iv. *Misunderstood*
  
5. Main reason for agreeing to polygyny
  - i. *Religion*
  - ii. *Social*
  - iii. *Economic*
  - iv. *Other reason.....*
  
6. Experience of polygyny after marriage
  - i. *Happy*
  - ii. *Regrettable*
  - iii. *Sad*
  - iv. *Others.....*
  
7. Dependence on men (feminism)
  - i. *Complete Independence*
  - ii. *Partial independence*
  - iii. *Non independence*
  - iv. *Others.....*
  
8. Envy/jealousy among women (rivals and others)
  - i. *Being Experienced*
  - ii. *Not being experiencing*
  - iii. *Never experienced*
  - iv. *Others*

9. Conflict between the old and the young women

- i. Being Experienced*
- ii. Not being experiencing*
- iii. Never experienced*
- iv. Others.....*

10. Unity among women

- i. Suspicious of other women*
- ii. Not suspicious of other women*
- iii. Indifferent*
- iv. Others.....*

11. The role of Islamic religion in polygyny

- i. Justice*
- ii. Fair play*
- iii. Injustice*
- iv. Others.....*

12. European culture verses African Traditions

- i. Total Submissiveness to husband*
- ii. Partial submissiveness to husband*
- iii. Prefer monogamy to polygyny*
- iv. Prefer polygyny to monogamy*
- v. Other.....*