

PLACE OF CULTURE, RELIGION AND
MODERNITY ON MARRIAGE, POLYGAMY AND
CHILD LEGITIMACY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: A
CRITIQUE OF RAZINAT'S *THE TRAVAILS OF A
FIRST WIFE*

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Abstract.

Like any part of the world, Northern Nigeria, has its fair share of challenges in marriage, polygamy and child legitimacy. And like all the colonized nations, its polygamous home is greatly influenced by the tripartite cultures of African traditions, Islamic tradition and the Eurocentric or Greco-Roman Christian tradition, which has come to be termed as modernity. It is to these challenges of polygamy that this paper turns to critique Razinat's *The Travails of First Wife*, with a view to see the powers of the tripartite cultures in shaping the thinking and the final decisions of women in matrimonial polygamous homes. The thrust of the research is to expose how much has the confluence of African culture, Islamic teachings and modernity imposed some hybridised culture on the so called modern or westernised woman and to also see how much the Islamic and African ways give husbands of the average Hausa homes the prerogative of male chauvinism or what the African womanism prefers to refer to it as male powers against the feeble and powerless Hausa woman who always suffers from 3Ps; pregnant, poor and powerless. Little or no options are left for a woman character to chart a course for her devoid of a man!

Keywords: Culture, Religion, Modernity, Marriage, *The Travails Of A First Wife*

Introduction

One of the common definitions of Literature is a representation of real life or a mirror of life. It is an artistic representation of happenings and events in the actual human society. It mirrors the society with a reflection of itself. It explores the hitherto, good values and the ills therein so that the society adopts the good and fights the evils in order to achieve the change it desires. Albrecht (1954), for instance, submits that, “the idea that literature reflects society is at least as old as Plato’s concept of imitation”. Be that as it may, the northern Nigerian society has serious apathy for literature and art. And this leads it to a very dangerous outcome. It misses out on its potentials benefits of, among other things, improving on those morals, ethics and values that knit the society and that could be deciphered through the reading of these literary artefact and compendiums. Literary artists, who are part of the society they reflect, take upon themselves the task of recreating the society as they know and perceive it in literary works. By implication, their works reflect the happenings in the society as much as possible.

Among the tasks of literary scholars and artists is, they transform “real-life events in their society into fiction and present it to the society as a mirror with which it can look at itself and make amends where necessary”. A typical example is Razinat’s tussling revelation that, a child born out of wedlock could serve as the only means of sustaining a failed marriage! For instance Zahra’s marriage was saved after divorce, solely because of Abubakar, the child she bore to Ibrahim out of wedlock! Ibrahim could not withstand the embarrassment and disgrace the story of the bastard child could cost him. And to Zahra, though a university graduate, in a society where a woman has no dignity without marriage, and more so, with the terrifying knowledge that she cannot bear any fruit of the womb, Ibrahim is the only answer to her travails.

Theoretical Base

Postcolonialism, Poscoloniality or Post-colonial theory as the case may be is chosen as the theoretical base of this study. The paper

evaluates the place of African tradition, Islam and Modernity in hybridizing an average Hausa woman. Thus postcolonialism is applied as the theory. Postcolonial theory is traced to the period of struggle of political independence and self-governance from the colonial Europe. The discussion on the efforts of Mahatma Ghandi of South Africa/India and the likes were termed as postcolonial discourse, and it was the postcolonial discourse that gave birth to the postcolonial theory. The different perspectives of postcolonialism like Edward Said, Hommi Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Albert Memmi, and Jacques Berque among others provide foundation for the postcolonial theory. Hommi Bhabha is the prominent proponent of the concept of Hybridity, Cultural Identity and Mimicry as central to what affect most postcolonial western educated colonized. As hung-up to colonial experience, the colonised are mostly found to be lost into hybridity. They are victims of the lost of culture and identity. Caught in a trap of that lost, the forces of culture and identity will rise to fight the hung up, this is exactly the travails of protagonist, Zahra, the first wife! Being an educated and euro-modern woman, she was under the illusion of fighting the African tradition and the Islamic tradition, not until the African patriarchal culture fought her to the point of submission. Notwithstanding her education and gainful employment, she has economic independence, yet Zahra has to beg her uncle, to convince her patriarchal husband, Ibrahim to take her back after a the pronouncement of a divorce, all due to the forces of culture and religion!

Marriage Institution.

Marriage is the bedrock and backbone of a descent and responsible family. It is equally the only difference between humans and the other beings in terms of procreation and family setting. It equally brings about a respectful socio-economic and political development of the family and largely, the society. In many societies, the road to enter family life is marriage, which invariably is the first social unit of organization. Depending on the value and norms of the

society, there are different forms of arrangements to start a family life and its continuation is ensured by teaching children values and by discouraging its dissolution according to societal beliefs and ideas. Marriage is a union of couples committed to one another with the expectation of stable and lasting intimate relationship, and this is socially recognized and approved. A marital relationship usually involves some kind of contract, either written or specified by tradition, which defines the partners' rights and obligations to each other, their children, and relatives. In Africa, marriage is sacrosanct and thus, most societies uphold its sanctity to the latter. The different ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria believe in the sanctity of the marriage institution. Divorce is one of the social phenomena that no human society is devoid of because of its close association and intricate ties with social relations between individuals and groups. Such relations are governed by various internal and external influential factors and determinants.

Divorce is a widespread social problem that has negatively affected the sanctity of the marriage institution particularly in Northern Nigeria. The rampant nature of divorce, especially among the Hausa, Fulani is an indication of the abuse of the norms and values that served as control mechanisms of marriage institution in the society. These abuses range from early girl child marriage, forced marriage, illiteracy and deceit during courtship among other factors. Divorce is a common phenomenon, which has attracted global attention. Government and non-governmental organizations have played and are still playing vital roles in the elimination of this menace because of the psychological and social problems that make victims of marital breakdown to exhibit strange and unguided behaviours.

Studies have shown that a large percentage of the youths are products of broken homes. The menace of these youths is not restricted to their divorced parents rather, the larger society suffers. The high rate of youth restiveness in Northern Nigeria ranging from shoplifting, thieving, rape, drug abuse, cultism, prostitution and other social vices calls for a research geared towards ameliorating the problems of rampant divorce and the sanctity of the marriage institution especially

in Northern Nigeria. The neglect and abuse of the inherited norms guiding the sanctity of marriage and the due process of divorce among the people, has resulted to psychological trauma on the divorced couples, their children and the larger society. This has called for a sociological investigation and possible solution. For many centuries, marriage was regarded as virtually indissoluble. A divorce was granted only in very limited cases, such as non-consummation of marriage. Today, however, divorce is possible in virtually all of the industrialized and developing societies of the world (Giddens, 2010).

This paper therefore, studies Razinat Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife* from the perspective of realistic criticism in order to explore disillusionment, disenchantment and despair as is all over the major characters in the novel. This work aims to look at the entire sphere and all round shift in the psychological make-up and culture of the 21st century Northern Nigerian wife in the face of repression, exploitation, violence and bad company. The study further aims to analyse how the understanding of the society and the various marital issues help in interpreting the structure of the novel in question or looking at the behaviours of the novelist, their actions and inactions and construct out of these a theory of their personalities- their struggles, frustrations, traumatic experiences, neuroses and other frustrations that open lead to depressions. Specifically, the study seeks to answer some questions like: why, how, when, and what makes a marriage in Northern Nigeria to be side-lined and destroyed; and also why parents and husbands remain a force to reckon with, despite their what women go through in their hands.

About the Author

Razinat Talatu Mohammed holds a PhD in Literature and is also an award winning author of *A Love like a Woman's and other Stories* (2005). She is the author of two novels, *Habiba* (2013), which attains a finalist at the 2014 Association of Nigerian Authors' prize for prose and *The Travails of a First Wife* (2015). Her articles and book chapters have been published in foremost international Journals on African

Literature, the *African Literature Today* series, UK and other highly esteemed publishing houses like Routledge. She is currently, the Head of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Abuja.

About the Book

The Travails of a First Wife is generally, a narrative about Ibrahim and his three wives: Zahra, Kellu and Fantere and also about a secret bastard child that ironically keeps a marriage from collapsing. The story first begins with Zahra as Ibrahim's only wife. Zahra is at home when Ibrahim comes in to break the news of his intended second marriage to Kellu. As hard as the thought of sharing her husband with another woman is to accept, Zahra has to respect and accept Ibrahim's decision, plus it is his prerogative right as a Muslim man to marry as many as four wives. While Zarah is yet to absorb the reality of having to share her husband with another man, Ibrahim heightens Zarah's worry when he discloses his intention of marrying not one but two wives simultaneously on the same day. Meanwhile, Ibrahim keeps his relationship with Zahra, before their marriage, a secret to Kellu all through their courtship. Kellu who thinks she has been the only woman in Ibrahim's life only discovers five days to Ibrahim's marriage to Zarah that he has been dealing with another woman all along. Kellu is distraught but talked into forgiving Ibrahim with promises to be married one year later. Years later, when Ibrahim is ready to fulfil that promise, he intends to fulfil it by marrying a third wife (Fantere) on the same day with Kellu. Kellu is even more pained this time, she feels disregarded but accepts Ibrahim's decision notwithstanding. In the house, Ibrahim becomes the single object of attraction of all his three wives, with each of them craving for his undivided attention. Their longing for the single object of attraction leads to the jealousy and the hatred they show to one another, especially as Ibrahim is found to sometimes be partial in his treatment of the wives. These issues, from the standpoint of realities possible in polygamous marriages are

portrayed by Mohammed in *The Travails of a First Wife* and form the subject of analysis in this paper.

African culture, Islam, Marriage and Family

In African societies, marriage is a complex affair which involves economic, social and religious aspects which often overlap such that it becomes difficult to separate one from the other. But most importantly for Africans, marriage is the focus of existence. Marriage brings together members of a given community; the departed, the living and those yet to be born. With this perspective in mind, marriage for the African according to Mbiti is:

A duty, a requirement from the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he/she who does not participate in it is a curse to the community; he/she is a rebel and a law breaker, he/she is not only abnormal but under human. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him/her in return, (P69).

Furthermore, marriage and procreation in African societies are a unity. This implies that without procreation, marriage is incomplete. Similarly, the Tiv also consider children as the consummation of the matrimonial union. As a result, it is only when children are born of a marriage that the Tiv believe *Aondo* (God) has blessed it for the happy and perpetual survival of the spouses. Thus, as Tarbo correctly observed, the strong desire for children is one of the reasons for polygamy among the traditionalists. Also, childless union has been one of the factors for instability, separation and divorce in the society. They will go to any length to avert childlessness which is seen as a curse.

For the Muslim north, therefore, marriage fulfils the obligation, the duty and the custom that every normal person should get married

and bear children. This is believed to go back to the very beginning of human life. Failure to get married is like committing a crime against traditional beliefs and practices (Mbiti, *Introduction to...*) Africans similarly have high regards for the family institution. However, as Mbiti pointed out, for the African people the family has a much wider circle of members as opposed to what the word suggests in Europe and the Americas (*African Religions*). It is this perspective that Adasu posits that African traditional life is centred around the family. It is in the family that life is generated and the values of the clan are transmitted. It is thus, the centre of learning. The African family according to him is an extended family that embraces the Grandparents and grandchildren, as long as they are traceable as well as the in-laws and the intermediaries on both sides of the married couple.

The African family similarly includes the departed relatives also called the living dead. These as the name implies are those who are alive in the memories of their surviving families, and are thought to be still interested in the affairs of the family to which they once belonged in their physical life. Misfortune follows the surviving family members of a departed if they are forgotten. This explains why people still give offerings of food and libation to the living dead because they are still part of the family. African concept of the family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. These are the buds of hope and expectation, therefore each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished. As such the family provides for its continuation, and prepares for the coming of those not yet born.

The family is so much important that the word family in other traditions is called an umbilical cord. As Wegh observed, the umbilical cord is treated with respect because it symbolizes the union between mother and child. As such before birth, the child is joined to the mother by *tsombur*. He maintained that what is implied in this metaphor is that the family members are joined together in a sort of

organic unity. The family is made up of one common blood. As members with the same common blood, members of the African family cherish helping or assisting of family members who are particularly less privileged. Based on this egalitarian and communal posture the problem of one member of the family translates to the problem of the whole family members. Members of the African family can thus be said to be united both in moments of grief and joy, celebration, mourning or adversity.

Islam, Marriage and Family

Islam is an intensely monotheistic religion that was founded by Prophet Mohammed in the 7th century AD in *Arabia*. Islam is now one of the world's largest religions drawing its adherents from Asia and Africa majorly; but also spreading its tentacles to Europe and the Americas. Marriage is a very important social necessity in Islam. As such, Islam strongly advocates for marriage. In this respect, celibacy has no place in Islam. The necessity of marriage in Islam is premised on the fact that; through marriage, families are established and the family is the fundamental unit of society. Marriage also, legitimizes (*halal*) a couple to indulge in sexual intimacy.

In Islam, marriage is a legal contract between two people. In this respect, both the groom and the bride consent to the marriage willingly. Following the consent of the intending couples, a formal, binding contract which is considered integral to a religiously valid Islamic marriage is observed.

The binding contract outlines the rights and responsibilities of the groom and the bride. Furthermore, the Islamic marriage makes provision for two witnesses of the marriage contract. Also, Islamic marriage permits divorce (*tallaq* in Arabic) and this is a prerogative of the husband, however, the bride also has the right to initiate and actually demand for divorce (*Islam's women. fiqh of marriage- Dowry.*

Islamwomen.com. retrieved 22 March, 2016). But while the husband has the right to just divorce his wife at will and for no cause, the wife is asked by sharia to pay some amount to the husband, much as her demand for a divorce is not backed by any acceptable reason by the Sharia, the Islamic law. Such example is impotency or inability of the husband to feed her.

It is to be noted that while these provisions are made available to Muslims; the actual rules of marriage and divorce (often part of personal status laws) differ from country to country, based on codified law and the school of jurisprudence that is largely followed in that country. Similarly, in addition to the usual marriage which is to last until death or divorce, there is a different fixed-term marriage which is known as *zawajal-mut'ah* (temporary marriage) permitted only by the Twelver branch of *Shia* Islam for a pre-fixed period. In addition to the *zawaj almut'ah* is the *nikah misyar* (a non-temporary marriage with the removal of some conditions permitted by the *Sunni* Muslims). In this latter form of marriage, the woman/wife waives her right of sustenance from her husband. Before the advent of Islam in Arabia, (i.e. pre-Islamic Arabia), a variety of marriage practices existed. Some of the most common forms of marriage practiced then were: marriage by agreement; marriage by capture (*Ba'al* in Arabic); marriage by purchase (*mahr*) and marriage by inheritance, etc. In the latter kind of marriage, (i.e. marriage by inheritance); women had no status of any kind in pre-Islamic Arabia. At the dawn of Islam in Arabia, most of these pre-Islamic Arabian marriages were reorganized. For instance, during the Arabian pre-Islamic law, no limitations were set on men's right to marry or to obtain a divorce. Islamic law, however, restricts polygamy to four (4) wives who must be treated fairly and justly (cf Quran 4:3). Certain rights were also accorded women.

The foregone analysis underscores the importance of marriage in Islam hence Allah says in the Holy Quran 30:21: "and among his signs

in this, that he created for you mates from amongst yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them and he has put love and mercy between your (hearts): Verily in that are signs for those who reflect". The Quran also describes the depth of a marital relationship by its invocation of the metaphor of garments for the husband and wife: "they are your garments and you are their garments" (Quran 2:187).

It was also due to its importance that Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) specifically mentioned marriage to be of his traditions and even equated it to completing half of one's faith. In Islam, both men and women have rights over each other when they enter into a marriage contracted with the husband serving as protector and supporter of the family from his means; while the wife safeguards the husband's possessions and protects how the wealth is spent.

Also, even though Islam stipulates polygamy; it nevertheless, has provisions for prohibited marriages including inheriting women forcefully (Quran 4:19). Muslims are not to marry *Kafir* (non-Muslims) or *mushrik* (idolaters/polytheists) (Quran 5:5; 60:10) i.e. prohibition based on religion. Furthermore, Islam prohibits marriage between people of the same sex and all forms of marriage between people of close kinship and consanguinity; for example, a man and his sister, half-sister, mother, father, step mother, aunt, grandmother, etc. Forced marriages are also not encouraged in Islam. This explains why the marriage contract is anchored between the *wali* (guardian) of the bride and the bridegroom; not between the bride groom and the bride. Thus, the *wali* of the bride can only be a free Muslim and is normally a male relative of the bride, preferably her father. If the bride is a virgin therefore, the *walimujbir* (her father) or paternal grandfather, cannot force her into marriage against her.

On the other hand, the family is said to be the building blocks of society. This is also true of the family in Islamic conception. This makes the family an important component in Islam.

With respect to its importance, all elements of a family are given due significance; from parents to children to spouses to kith and kin. In the conception of Islam, a sensible and well-balanced family system is the very foundation of a happy life. It is the root of an advancing civilization. For Islam, no religion can be regarded as complete unless it has a well-defined code of family life which expressly dictates the exact responsibility and role of each member of the family. Islam also acknowledges the fact that as a closely-knit unit of human society, the family and its proximity creates eminent danger of friction and conflict if each member is not told in clear and unambiguous terms his/her duties/rights.

The Islamic Sunni (Maliki Law) jurisprudence therefore, holds that, if a religion shuts its eyes to the intricate of family life and its concomitant problems, its followers soon revolt against it and destroy all the religious tenets in the wake of that rebellion. The reason behind the revolt would not be farfetched to explain in the sense that the prevalent environment and social system would not be in harmony with that religion; and the influence of inharmonious society would gradually pull them away from that religion. The resultant effect is that a time would come when the religion would have no more than ceremonial function with little or no effect on life.

It is in recognition of the catastrophe of turning a blind eye to the family that Islam makes basic provision for each member of the family. For the parents, the Holy Quran reminds them of their duties to their children. It advises the parents to treat their children with mercy, love and equality. Parents are to provide proper education to their children along raising them to be morally upright and responsible individuals of society (Quran 63:9). Children on their part are to take proper care of their parents especially in their old age. The Quran states unequivocally:

And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve (any) but Him, and goodness to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them (so much as) “ugh” nor chide them, and speak to them a generous word. And, out of kindness, lower them the wings of humility, and say: “My Lord! Bestow on them the mercy even as they cherished me in childhood (Quran 17:23-24).

However, it is to be noted that though Islam sanctions obedience to parents, this does not translate to disobeying Allah and his commands. For Allah says: “*and if they contend with you that you should associate (others) with me, of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them, to me is your return, so I will inform you of what you did*” (Quran 29:8). In addition to the above stipulations, Islam gives much respect and importance to the father and the mother. This has to do with the mother’s travails. It is stated in the Quran that; “*with trouble did his mother bear him and with trouble did she bring him forth; and the bearing of him and the weaning of him was thirty months* (Quran 46:15).

One of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad strongly supports the above Qur’anic instructions in the sense that a companion once asked the prophet, “Who deserves my good treatment most?” ‘Your mother said the prophet’. ‘Who next?’ “Your mother, he replied again, “who next”? Your Mother.

Muslim Women in Polygamous Marriage

Jealousy is a human feeling, and although it is a general human attribute, it can be suppressed. It is exhibited (especially) when people feel insecure about situations or things that they feel they should have absolute control over. In *The Travails of a First Wife* Razinat’s portrayal reveals the inevitability of jealousy as a reality among women in polygyny; particularly in the Islamic culture where it is an acceptable norm for men to marry as many as four wives. Kellu is jealous when she

discovers, only five days to Ibrahim's wedding to Zahra that she is not the only woman in his life after all. The realization comes to her in sudden bouts of shock that result in unconsciousness, as "painful memories of how she had never known of the existence of another woman in his life came to her in flush" (Mohammed 2015, p. 20). Ibrahim further deepens Kellu's anguish when he announces his intention to marry his third wife, Fantere, on the same day he intends to marry Kellu. Kellu's reaction again reveals a jealous state of mind, "she began to cry aloud...she wiggled on her seat in pains" (Mohammed 2015, p. 44).

Zahra is also jealous when Ibrahim breaks the news of his marriage to Kellu. Her feeling is better described when she metaphorically claims that "Ibrahim had literarily, stabbed her with a doubled edged dagger..." (Mohammed 2015, p. 27). Set within the Islamic culture that permits polygyny, one might be tempted to question Zahra and Kellu's attitude towards Ibrahim's decision to marry more women, but this can be seen as Mohammed's way of being honest to her representation of reality as experienced by women in polygyny, while the man; the single object of interest appears to be less worried about the women's feelings. This is illustrated in the following statement by Hajja Dana to a distraught Kellu: "calm down my child, these things do happen you know... Men are wont to do such things without knowing what the women involved feel..." p. 45). She further adds that "It is a man's world my dear" (Mohammed 2015, p. 46), trying to open Kellu's eyes to the reality she is born into. With this, the paper does not agree less with Catherine Bennett's topic statement, when she says that "polygamy...is affront to women".

Writing from a woman's perspective, Mohammed's narrative shows how women in polygamy in turn still bear the consequences of their jealous feelings towards one another. Kellu is firmly advised in respect to her co-wives to learn to keep to her side of the house.

Do not attempt to be too close to anyone of them because you have to understand that *a co-wife can never be your friend* however she claims to love you. The single object of interest that stands between you all is enough reason for spontaneous hateful feelings towards the other. (Mohammed 2015, p. 83)

Hajja Saudatu's marriage experiences also point to the adverse effect of jealousy among women in polygamous marriages. It could drive them to vicious extents as described by Hajja Saudatu below:

...in all the marriages that I contracted, I came across all kinds of women who would go to any length to send a mate out of the house; especially, if the mate was considered a threat. Unimaginable diabolic activities are carried out by some women; some accept witchcraft in order to have the upper hand and gain the husband's favours (Mohammed 2015, p. 149).

In Ibrahim's house, there is no textual evidence to prove that his wives live peacefully with one another. Rather, they plot evil against one another and try to ridicule one another before their husband. Fantere is said to, every once in a while, find a reason to quarrel with someone (Mohammed 2015, p. 150), on the other hand, when "Fantere was struck by a bout of vomiting" (Mohammed 2015, p. 193) on the dining table, Zahra and Kellu do not give her a helping hand. They simply watch with careless abandon; how Ibrahim does all the helping. The preceding episodes also portray the effect of jealousy among women in polygyny, which can lead to hatred and enmity as Mohammed evidently portrays in a realistic manner.

In the above episodes, Mohammed puts reality openly before her readers. Her representation of jealousy among Ibrahim's wives is a depiction of most women's emotional state of being when their husbands want to marry other women. This portrayal shatters the false

perception that women in the Islamic faith do not feel jealous when their husbands intend to marry other wives because polygamy is an acceptable norm in Islam. Jealousy is natural to all human beings, not just women. Mohammed's portrayal also reveals the true attitude of some men when they show a careless and carefree attitude towards their wife's feelings about their decision to take a second wife. They appear only to be selfish.

Polygamy and Timetabling in Scramble for the Husband

Another prevalent issue that Mohammed brings to her readers' notice is the battle over sex timetable among women in polygamy. This is obviously because the women share one husband who is expected and obligated to give his physical attention to all the women equally. When a husband is unable to fulfil this obligation on equal terms, there is bound to be contention and misery among the women who in turn fight themselves for it, "especially when they think you prefer the other wife over them" (Falayi, 2016). Mohammed illustrates this when Kellu attempts to take Zahra's turn to be with Ibrahim for the night. She also illustrates it when Zahra remembers the occurrence of a similar encounter "between Fantere and Kellu some four or five months back when Ibrahim had returned from a two weeks journey and there was a brawl over who was to visit his room that night" (Mohammed 2015, p. 188).

Mohammed's portrayal of women in polygamy battling themselves over sex timetables is as a matter of fact. She is being realistic to the existence of women's desire for sexual attention and the need for that desire to be satisfied. Her depiction is also being realistic to the fact that women in polygamy are likely to be living with this human need unsatisfied, or even unattended to for long durations. When this happens, such women might battle themselves over it as Mohammed portrays among Ibrahim's wives. On the other hand, the novel draws

attention to the inevitability of preferential and unfair treatment of husbands among their wives. It states how Zarah categorically makes the following statement, “I have been watching you give preferential treatment to your wives as though I was a mere servant to all of you” (p. 153). Zarah earlier observes that: Ibrahim “attended to Kellu the most” (p. 148). It is also noticed that Ibrahim Sometimes feigned headaches...” (p. 150) when Zahra is to visit his section.

These incidents prove the argument of the husband’s preferential and unfair treatment of wives in polygamous home. The novel’s portrayal shows that one woman, if not all, at some point, feels cheated and trampled upon for the sake of the other woman or women. And this fuels their hatred for one another and threatens their collective unity as it is seen all through Mohammed’s narrative. While some Muslim men like Ibrahim, think that it is their “prerogative right to marry as many as four wives” (Mohammed 2015, p. 50), Mohammed’s representation in *The Travails of a First Wife* reveals the fact that some of these men do not have the capacity to do so. They, like Ibrahim, violate the injunction of *verse 4:3*, which allows Muslim men to marry more than one wife, only when they can be fair and just to all of them.

Conclusion

The Travails of a First Wife demonstrates that, although polygamy is a global practice, and that the predicaments, leading to the emotional reactions of the wives involved in it leading to their individual travails are normal human trajectories. But there are distinct peculiarities to do with an average northern Nigerian educated woman. She is caught in the quagmire brought about by the confluence of African culture, Islam and modernity. She ends p more of a hybrid of these cultures and a victim of all of them. The jealousy and onward hatred of one another exhibited by Ibrahim’s wives is reasonably understandable and their

battle for what could be seen as struggle for equitable distribution of nights for sex, thereby calling for a timetable and Ibrahim's preferential attitude towards his wives as alleged by Zahra are also parts of human frailties. As such, just like Schipper could say, readers can easily bring their own experiences to bear on the stories.

According to Culross, art is at the service of man. It is crafted for human purpose and any good story, any good novel carries with it, a message; it has a purpose (p. 11). Thus, *The Travails of a First Wife* presents some of the realities within polygamy to the society as a mirror with which the society can look at its actions and inactions and the attending consequences and make amends where necessary. The novel reveals that polygamy still remains an obstacle to women emancipation. It entraps the women's growth, aspirations and ambitions in many parts of the world. Another area of interest, which remains hibernated, is the crisis of the child out of wedlock.

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