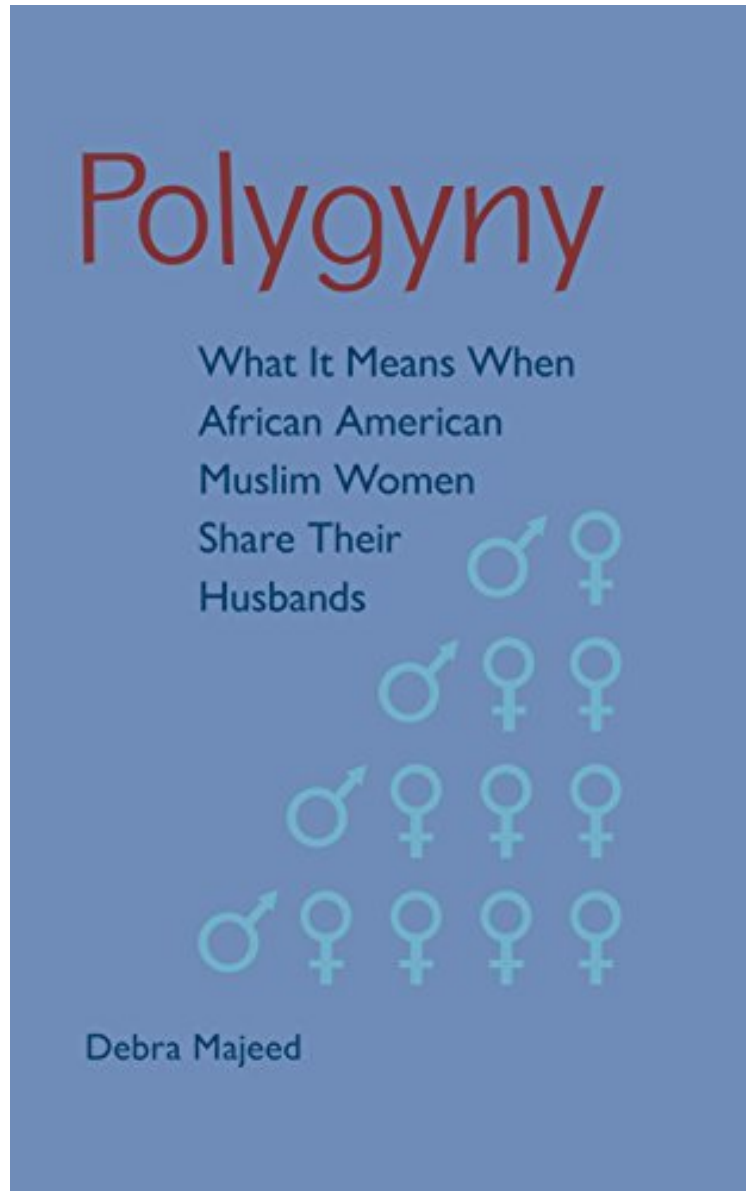


Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands

Debra Majeed

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Debra Majeed : Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. *Multiple-Wife Households from the Perspective of African American Muslim Women* By Sonja Darlington With Polygyny, author Debra Majeed provides a personal yet scholarly investigation into a practice that is not well understood for its complexity, its function within the African American Muslim community, and its relationship to family law within Islam as well as to the American legal system. Her crisp descriptive stories of Muslim women and their families associated with the practice are embedded in a philosophical perspective she identifies as Muslim womanism and in her ethnographic evidence from 2003 to 2013. Readers are introduced to a range of issues that are rich in texture, as they are the basis for examining women's agency and authority in such marital relationships, religious prescriptions in the Qur'an, legal forms of legitimation for polygyny, Imam Mohammed's teachings on polygyny, and psychological factors associated with the well being of women and children in multiple-wife marriages. Throughout the well-crafted six chapters, Majeed stays focused on her intent "to encourage self-examination of Muslim American family life and promote closer attention to the welfare of African American communities, American families, and society as whole" (6). In the Afterword, she also provides practical suggestions that follow up on her intellectual exploration into the lives of her subjects. These suggestions include five recommendations: 1). engage in meaningful dialogue and education about forms of Islamic marriage within the context of the secular United States; 2). require local mosques and Islamic organizations to document marriage registrations; 3). state the relationship a wife envisions in marriage contracts and encourage families to seek advice from knowledgeable and respected community members, marriage therapists, and family law experts; 4). encourage first and potential subsequent wives to communicate with each other prior to any multiple-wife marriage; and 5). remove communal acceptance of marriage ceremonies that take place without a husband's current wife (or wives) knowledge. Of particular interest to this reader are the reasons that African American Muslim women enter into polygyny. For some it is a matter of recognizing that multiple-wife marriage is permissible based on the Qur'an and it ensures the survival of family (Sawdah); for some it is a way to be chaste and avoid bad situations (Zuhara); and for some it is a means to avoid unwanted attention and attain security, status, and honor (Lamisha). Significantly, for all the women in Majeed's fictional performance in chapter two, the method of presentation allows her to use her informants, with whom she had multiple interviews, to discuss issues with each other and to communicate their thoughts about their life circumstances in their own words. In doing so, Majeed ably succeeds in her laudable intent to "link [her] intellectual explorations to practical applications that can benefit communities and subjects [she] stud[ied]" (133). The contributions Polygyny makes to scholarship and to praxis is that it demonstrates an inclusivity that Majeed envisions is needed to open up potential spaces for further examination and development on this topic. So that, while she neither promotes nor condones polygyny, she supports its decriminalization—a book on this topic is what I hope awaits her readers. Audiences for this text include both readers wanting to understand choices available to African American Muslim women within a polygynist family and readers aspiring to understand with greater depth the historical, religious, and sociological context of this particular marital relationship.

"Captivating, provocative, and groundbreaking. Taking up the mandate that women's realities matter, Majeed writes with depth and analytical rigor about a topic we have scarcely begun to understand."—Amina Wadud, author of *Inside The Gender Jihad* "Tackles the contours and intimacies of a much practiced but seldom spoken about quasi-marriage that leaves women without legal support. A much-needed text on an extremely sensitive topic. Majeed excavates this terrain with finesse and a deft scholarly hand."—Aminah Beverly McCloud, coeditor of *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century* "Utilizes ethnographic research methods to imaginatively and constructively complexify the reality of polygyny in the lives of African American Muslim women."—Linda Elaine Thomas, author of *Under the Canopy* "Majeed's womanist approach is critical, yet balanced enough to include the concerns of women, men, and children, affording readers a broad and vital gaze into the lives of these unconventional households."—Zain Abdullah, author of *Black Mecca* "A powerful and long overdue study of polygyny in African American Muslim communities."—Shabana Mir, author of *Muslim American Women on Campus* Debra Majeed sheds light on families whose form and function conflict with U.S. civil law. Polygyny—multiple-wife marriage—has steadily emerged as an alternative to the low numbers of marriageable African American men and the high number of female-led households in black America. This book features the voices of women who welcome polygyny, oppose it, acquiesce to it, or even negotiate power in its practices. Majeed examines the choices available to African American Muslim women who are considering polygyny or who are living it. She calls attention to the ways in which interpretations of Islam's primary sources are authorized or legitimated to regulate the rights of Muslim women. Highlighting the legal, emotional, and communal implications of polygyny, Majeed encourages Muslim communities to develop formal measures that ensure the welfare of women and children who are otherwise not recognized by the state.

"Embarks on a controversial and nuanced topic. . . . An interesting exploration of African American Muslims living polygyny."—*Journal of International Women's Studies*