

**POLYGAMY IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES:
AN ANALYSIS OF AMINA WADUD'S FEMINIST THEORY**

Abstract

Polygamy remains a controversial issue in Indonesian Islamic family law, where Q.s. An-Nisa:3 is often interpreted literally as conditional permission, despite contradicting modern gender equality principles such as those in Marriage Law No. 16/2019 and CEDAW. This study examines the impact of multidisciplinary studies (law, biology, sociology, psychology, economics) on the practice of polygamy in Indonesia, which tends to demean women through emotional trauma, financial injustice, and family conflict, and examines Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics, which interprets the verse as a socio-historical response after the Battle of Uhud to protect orphans, rather than an absolute imperative reinforced by the impossibility of perfect justice (Q.s. An-Nisa: 129). Using a literature study method with primary sources from Wadud's work (Qur'an and Woman, A Jihad for Justice) and secondary sources, this study analyses Wadud's contextual approach based on tauhid, Fazlur Rahman's double movement, and maqasid syariah to dismantle patriarchy. The result confirm polygamy as a form of structural discrimination that must be replaced by monogamy for the sake of family harmony and reform of KHI Article 57. The conclusion recommends inclusive ijtihad for substantive equality.

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Introduction:-

Polygamy remains a controversial issue in contemporary Islamic family law. The legal basis for polygamy is derived from Q.s. An-Nisa:3, which grants conditional permission as a foem of social relief in the context of protecting women and family interests, especially in certain social situations such as the existence of orphans. However, polygamy is not an obligation but an option that must be exercised with full moral and social responsibility. In Law No. 16 of 2019 concerning Amendments to Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage harmonies the minimum age of marriage for men and women at 19 years old. This construction is based on considerations of the principle of equality before the law for men and women, the existence of legal protection for women and the guarantee of constitutional rights for women (Yudhanto, 2020). The compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) establishes very strict regulations regarding polygamy through Article requires permission from the Religious Court, the consent of the first wife either verbally or in writing, as well as proof of the ability to provide financial support and material justice. The husband is required to submit an application to the Religious Court in the area where the first wife resides, along with the wife's concent, a of assets, and a written guarantee of responsibility for the children of all wives (Sumaelan, 2024).

From an international law perspective, polygamy is viewed as a practice that is inherently contrary to the principles of gender equality and human dignity, particularly through the lens of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminatio against Women (CEDAW), which Indonesia ratified in 1984, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2005(Nurhidayatuloh, 2018). The CEDAW Committee, in its General Comment No. 21 of 1994, clearly stated that polygamy violates Article 16 of CEDAW, which guarantees equal rights for men and women in marriage, as it creates an inferior hierarchy for additional wives, ranging from uncertainty regarding inheritance rights, alimony, and child custody, to burdening women with emotional, psychological, and financial risks that are often unavoidable. Therefore, States Parties such as Indonesia are obliges to take concrete steps to gradually permits, strengthening sanctions against unregistered marriages, and reforming national laws to protect the vulnerability of women and children (Ainiyah, 2017).

26 **Literature Review:-**

27 As in previous research conducted by Pitrotussaadah and Sayehu, entitled 'Multidisciplinary Interpretation of Q.s.
28 An-Nisa:3 (Polygamy) in the Context of Marriage Law in Indonesia' Vol. 3, No. 1, 2026, Scientific Research
29 Journal. It explains that the interpretation of Q.s. An-Nisa:3 does not require the practice of polygamy, but only
30 allows it under strict conditions of fairness. Buya Hamka emphasizes monogamy as the primary sharia
31 recommendation, while Quraish Shihab emphasizes the social context in Indonesia. Feminist views demand the
32 protection of women's dignity so that they are not subordinate, and Muhammad Syahrur limits the maximum
33 number of wives to four based on asbabunnuzul and the quality of justice (Sayehu, 2026).

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35 A similar study was conducted by Aulia Fitriani, Ardiansyah, and Nayla Hidayatuzzahra, entitled 'Amina Wadud's
36 Method of Interpreting the Qur'an in the Context of Polygamy' Vol. 2 No. 1, 2025, Al-Mabahits Journal (Journal of
37 Qur'an, Hadith, and Tafsir Studies). It explains that Amina Wadud, through a feminist hermeneutic approach,
38 understands Q.s. An-Nisa:3 as a humanitarian response to post-war social conditions aimed at protecting orphans
39 and widows, and that it is not an absolute command. Although there are conditions of justice that must be met if one
40 wishes to practice polygamy, these conditions are in fact impossible to achieve, as explained in Q.s. An-Nisa: 129.
41 These essence of the teachings of the Qur'an is justice and benefit, so the practice of polygamy that ignores gender
42 equality is contrary to the noble spirit of Islam (Aulia Fitriani, 2025).

43
44 Similar research was conducted by Aji Febriansyah, Aldi ArmansyahPrayoga, and Siti Maysaroh, entitled 'Gender
45 Equality According to Amina Wadud: Contextual Interpretation in the Qur'an', Vol. 2, No. 1, 2025, Al-Mustofa
46 Journal: Journal of Islamic Studies and Research. It explains that gender equality reflects the spirit of justice
47 described in the Qur'an, namely in Q.s. Ali-Imran: 195 and Q.s. At-Taubah: 71, which upholds the spiritual and
48 social dignity of women, not patriarchal cultural inequality. Amina Wadud re-reads the sacred text from a female
49 perspective through historical, linguistic, and moral contexts so that the verses become a source of collective
50 liberation for human justice for all people (Aji Febriansyah, 2025).

51
52 Research that is consistent with several of these studies was also conducted by Haikal Fadhil Anam, entitled
53 'Polygamy in Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics', Vol. 19, No, 1, 2020, Musawa Journal (Journal of Gender
54 and Islamic Studies). It explains that Amina Wadud, a modern Islamic feminist figure, advocates egalitarianism
55 through feminist hermeneutics that excavates the spirit of liberation in the Qur'an from the perspective of a female
56 scholar who uses polygamy as a reason to perpetuate patriarchy. She emphasizes that Islam actually only advocates
57 monogamy, while polygamy was only permitted in ancient times due to emergency circumstances, namely to protect
58 orphans after war (Anam, 2020).

59
60 Thus, the research question in this study is: how does multidisciplinary study of polygamy in Indonesia affect
61 women's dignity and family harmony, and how does Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics interpret Q.s. An-
62 Nisa:3 in a socio-historical context as a post-war response rather than an absolute imperative for polygamy? Thus,
63 this research is urgently needed given the prolonged controversy in Indonesia between traditional Sharia norms and
64 modern gender equality demands, where the Marriage Law still triggers structural discrimination against women and
65 children. Its novelty lies in Amina Wadud's innovative synthesis of feminist hermeneutics, which understands the
66 verse as a post-war social response rather than an absolute imperative, with a multidisciplinary analysis of law,
67 psychology, economics, and health, filling the polarization gap between conservative and secular interpretations.
68 Thus, the research aims to produce a fair contextual reinterpretation, encourage inclusive Sharia-based legal reform,
69 and protect the dignity of the family for the sake of humane social harmony.

70
71 **Research Method:-**

72 This study utilizes the library research method, which is an approach that priorities the examination of various
73 relevant literature to discuss the topic being researched. This method is highly appropriate given the analytical

74 nature of the research, which requires a deep understanding of the thinking of an intellectual figure, namely Amina
75 Wadud, who has written various works on tafsir, gender, and interpretation of the Qur'an. Thus, the library research
76 approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of Amina Wadud's views on
77 gender equality in Islam (Yasin, 2025).

78
79 The data used in this study consists of two types of sources. The first is primary sources, which come from Amina
80 Wadud's original works, including Qur'an and Woman and A Jihad for Justice, which have different depths of
81 analysis and focus, but both are related to Wadud's efforts to reform the interpretation of Qur'anic texts with an in-
82 depth perspective. Second, secondary sources, which include writings by other people discussing Amina Wadud's
83 thoughts and critical reviews of some of her other books, such as her work entitled *Inside the Gender*. These
84 secondary sources are indirect but very helpful in providing an overview of the social and intellectual context behind
85 Amina Wadud's thinking and the responses of various groups to her views (Firda, 2024).

86
87 Once the data has been collected, the next stage is a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of all the information
88 obtained. The analysis focuses on Amina Wadud's thoughts on gender equality through her works. The analysis of
89 Amina Wadud's thoughts needs to consider the socio-historical dimensions that shape her theory, combining textual
90 interpretation with social context through a contextual-historical approach to transform traditional interpretations
91 towards Islamic gender justice. Through a literature study, this research aims to enrich the discourse on
92 interpretative renewal and gender equality for a more inclusive Islamic discussion (Reni Dian Anggraini, 2022).

93

94 **Research Results and Discussion**

95 **Getting to Know the Biography of Amina Wadud**

96 Amina Wadud was born Mary Teasley on 25 September 1952 in Bethesda, Montgomery, Maryland, United States.
97 Her father was a Methodist minister and a devout clergyman, while her mother was a black slave descended from
98 Arab, berber and African slaves. Amina Wadud converted to Islam in 1972, which means she embraced Islam at that
99 time. Two years later, her name was officially changed to Amina Wadud, signifying her religious affiliation
100 (Wadud, 1999).

101
102 The label of feminist has been attached to Amina Wadud, who has been active and productive through her works
103 focusing on the interpretation of the Qur'an, which has earned her global recognition. She was then invited by
104 various renowned universities, including signing a contract as a professor at the International Islamic University of
105 Malaysia. As the saying goes, 'The higher one's position, the more obstacles one must overcome'. One of the
106 challenges she faced was that her book, 'The Qur'an and Women: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's
107 Perspective', was published but then rejected and banned in the UAE. However, the book sold very well in Malaysia
108 and even became a key reference for Muslim activists and academics (Kecia Ali, 2012).

109
110 The intellectual anxiety experienced by Amina Wadud led her to create many works that reflect her thoughts on
111 injustice in society. With great enthusiasm, Wadud sought to redefine the interpretation of the Qur'an and hoped to
112 produce a new interpretation that was more sensitive to issues of gender and justice. She seeks to challenge
113 patriarchal views that prioritise male dominance, thereby hindering the development of feminist thought. The
114 narrow space for interpretation for women is caused by gender bias and the dominance of male interpreters, so that
115 the views that develop tend to be dominated by men. This is what underlies Amina Wadud's commitment to
116 exposing gender-biased interpretations.

117
118 **Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutic Interpretation of Q.s. An-Nisa: 3**

119 The interpretation method developed by Amina Wadud is a hermeneutic approach that focuses on three important
120 elements of the text. First, the background in which the text was written during the period when the Qur'an was
121 revealed. Second, the grammatical structure of the text, and third, the text itself as a whole. These three elements are

122 used to interpret the Qur'an, which is then organized through analysis from various perspectives, primarily based on
123 context. Related to the context of discussing similar themes in the Qur'an, the use of the same language and
124 syntactic structure present throughout the Qur'an, a strong commitment to the principles of the Qur'an, and the
125 context of the Qur'an as the foundation of life's thinking (Nurhidayah, 2025).

126
127 In addition to all that, Amina Wadud also applies a method of interpreting the Qur'an called the double movement
128 based on the thinking of Fazlur Rahman. However, the message contained in the verses is not only bound to a
129 specific time or historical context. Therefore, readers needed to understand the meaning and expressions of the
130 Qur'an in accordance with the time and situation in which the revelation was sent down in order to determine its true
131 meaning. In general, Amina Wadud's criticism of classical interpretations relates to the position of men and women.
132 Amina Wadud believes that men and women are equal. Although there are differences between men and women
133 when the Qur'an discusses the creation of humans, Amina Wadud argues that there is no fundamental difference in
134 the value given to women and men. Thus, there is no evidence that women have more or fewer restrictions than
135 men. The Qur'an does not position women as a version of men in the presentation of its main themes (M Alfatih
136 Mubarakh, 2025).

137 138 **A Multidisciplinary Approach to Polygamy**

139 **Women are not just about biology**

140 The biological approach to polygamy refers to arguments that use scientific facts about biological differences
141 between men and women to justify the practice. This approach often highlights variations in hormones, brain
142 structure, and sexual drive, which tend to be higher in men, so that polygamy is considered a natural response to
143 these biological needs (Nahari, 2022).

144
145 Because the main difference between women is based on their ability to give birth, this is considered their primary
146 function. The use of the word 'primary' has negative connotations because it implies that women can only be
147 mothers. Therefore, all women's education must be aimed at shaping them into faithful wives and ideal mothers in
148 preparation for this function. There is no term in the Qur'an that indicates that giving birth is "primary" for a
149 woman. There is no indication that raising children is her exclusive role. This shows that women (although certainly
150 not all) are the only human beings capable of giving birth to children. This ability is essential for the survival of
151 humanity. This function is primary only in relation to the survival of the human race. In other words, because only
152 women can give birth to children, this becomes a top priority. Although the Qur'an does not limit women to being
153 mothers, it emphasizes the respect, sympathy and responsibility that must be given women as creators of life. 'O
154 mankind.....fear Allah, through whom you claim rights over one another, and (fear) the wombs (that gave birth to
155 you).' (4:1) this verse is often interpreted as a sign of respect for women in general. Amina Wadud specifies this
156 verse as a sign of respect for the reproductive abilities required of women (Wadud, 1999).

157
158 Amina Wadud highlights this verse as a sign of respect for the reproductive abilities required of women without
159 diminishing respect for women as a group, but highlighting it from the perspective of the Qur'an. the importance of
160 the function of bearing children, which is exclusively performed by women. The respect given to the fulfilment of
161 this function helps explain how the Qur'an explicitly establishes functions for men that create balance in human
162 relationships. No other function is exclusively given to one gender or the other (Wadud, 1999).

163 164 **The Status of Women in the Social Environment**

165 The approach to the status of women in the social environment in polygamy discusses how this practice affects the
166 status, honour, and dignity of women in society. An individual or group can obtain or be given a higher status than
167 others. The Qur'an mentions, for example, that by fighting in the way of Allah with wealth and soul or by migrating
168 for the sake of Allah, one can obtain status. However, most degrees are obtained through undefined categories of
169 "good" deeds. Distinguishing between individuals or groups based on "deeds" raises issues regarding the value of
170 women in society and as individuals. Although the Qur'an distinguishes based on deeds, it does not assign value to

171 specific deeds. This leaves each social system to determine the value of various types of deeds as it sees fit. They
172 always do so and “every society distinguishes men’s work from women’s work”. The problem is that men’s work is
173 usually considered more valuable than women’s work, regardless of how arbitrary the division of labour is. On the
174 one hand, it does not determine the actual value of specific deeds. This leads to the interpretation that the Qur’an
175 supports the values of deeds determined by individual societies. In fact, the neutrality of the Qur’an allows for
176 natural variation. However, with regard to the degree obtained through deeds, the Qur’an has established several
177 points that should influence judgement in society. First, all deeds done with piety are more valuable. Second, “to
178 men belongs a share of [deeds], but rewards are given based on what is done. It does not matter how actions are
179 divided between men and women in a particular social context. Another implication of “a share of what is earned” is
180 that whenever someone performs a task that is usually associated with another (Wadud, 1999).
181

182 **Post-War Polygamy: Multidisciplinary Cracks in Dignity and Hermeneutics Wadud**

183 Amina Wadud, in her work *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (1999),
184 develops tawhid hermeneutics as a tool for reinterpreting the Qur’an that rejects polygamy as a norm of gender
185 equality, because the verse An-Nisa:3 was contextually revealed after the Battle of Uhud to address the crisis of
186 orphans and widows, not as an absolute right of men. She criticizes traditional literal interpretations, dominated by
187 male exegetes, for creating patriarchal bias: polygamy is permitted on condition of “justice” (*‘adl*) in the distribution
188 of financial support, time, and affection, whereas Wadud argues that this perfect justice is biologically and
189 emotionally ‘nearly impossible’ men cannot divide themselves proportionally without causing harm such as
190 psychological trauma to wives, competition among children, and family instability so the verse should be read as a
191 strict limitation or even an effective prohibition in the modern era. Wadud’s hermeneutics are based on four main
192 principles: (1) tawhid as essential equality (Q.s. Al-Hujurat: 13; Q.s. Al-Ahzab: 35), in which men and women are
193 equal in moral responsibility and worship, not hierarchical; (2) the historical-social context of the verse, which limits
194 polygamy to conditions of post-war economic-reproductive emergency, not universally; (3) the ethics of substantive
195 justice (maqasid syariah: *hifz al-nasl* and *rahmah*), which prioritizes the prevention of injustice over textual
196 permission; and (4) the perspective of women as-subjects of interpretation, integrating life experiences to dismantle
197 patriarchy in which women are reduced to objects of reproduction (Wardana, 2023).
198

199 Wadud defines patriarchy as a ‘masculine system of exploitation’ that limits women to biological roles (bearing
200 children), in which polygamy reinforces male hegemony by disregarding women’s right to sexual, emotional, and
201 economic autonomy for example, wives have no significant say in consenting to polygamy according to classical
202 fiqh. She compares this with Q.s. An-Nisa: 129 (‘It is impossible for you to be fair between wives.....’), which
203 affirms the impossibility of complete justice, so that polygamy contradicts the principle of tawhid which demands
204 mutuality of rights (egalitarian human rights). Unlike reactive feminism (which only rejects without reconstruction),
205 Wadud offers three models of interpretation: traditional (gender bias), reactive (destructive criticism), and holistic
206 (contextual integration), which result in a progressive understanding: polygamy is not the sunnah of the Prophet
207 (because most of his wives were widows), but rather a temporary social response (Muhammad, 2022).
208

209 In the Indonesian context, Wadud’s thinking is relevant to revising Article 57 of the Compilation of Islamic Law
210 (KHI), which limits polygamy with the wife’s consent, as it still allows for injustice. Wadud encourages monogamy
211 as a form of *rahmatan lilalamin*, freeing women from being ‘male slaves’ and building a society free from patriarchy
212 through inclusive *ijtihad*. Her criticism also targets domestic fiqh such as *qiwamah* (Q.s. An-Nisa: 34), which makes
213 the husband the dominant leader, replacing it with shared *mas’uliyah* (proportional responsibility), so that polygamy
214 is seen as a form of structural oppression that must be abolished for the sake of substantive gender equality (Eko
215 Prasetyo Budi, 2025).
216

217 **Conclusion**

218 Multidisciplinary studies reveal that polygamy in Indonesia undermines women's dignity through a patriarchal
219 biological approach, the social degradation of additional wives, and psycho economic impacts such as depression
220 and dependency, which disrupt family despite strict regulations in Articles 56-71 of the KHI. Amina Wadud's
221 feminist hermeneutics offers a revolutionary reinterpretation of Q.s. An-Nisa:3 as a equality in tawhid (Q.s. Al-
222 Hujurat: 13), historical context, substantive justice ethics, and a female perspective that dismantles maculine
223 hegemony thus making monogamy the ideal model of rahmah. This research encourages inclusive legal reform,
224 revision of the KHI based on modern maqasid syariah, and Islamic feminist discouse to protect women and children
225 from structural oppression, towards an egalitarian society in line with the spirit of the spirit of the contemporary
226 Qur'an.

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228 This study has demonstrated that a multidisciplinary examination of polygamy in Indonesia reveals the fragility of
229 this practice in term of women's dignity and family harmony, while Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics provides
230 a contextual reinterpretation of Q.s. An-Nisa:3 as a humanitarian response after the Battle of Uhud, rather than an
231 absolute imperative that perpetuates patriarchy. Thus, progressive legal reforms are needed, such as the revision of
232 Article 57 of the KHI based on modern maqasid sharia to prioritise monogamy as a form of rahmah and substantive
233 equality. Future research is recommended to explore the implementation of inclusive ijtihad among Indonesian
234 female scholars in order to strengthen the discouse of contextual Islamic feminism and build a harmonious and just
235 family society.

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