

## Constructing “Nobility” around a Later-Married Wife: Natal-Family Meaning-Making under Charismatic Religious Authority in Indonesia

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### Abstract

Polygyny remains a contested religious and social practice in Indonesia, but research has rarely examined how a wife’s natal family participates in legitimizing a subsequent marriage. This article examines how a later-married wife and her natal family constructed “nobility” as a counter-narrative to stigma and how the charismatic authority of a *kiai* (Muslim religious leader) mediated their reception of Qur’an 4:3. The analysis draws on an interpretive qualitative single-case study conducted from January through early July 2026 in an anonymized Islamic study-circle community in West Java. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with the wife, three members of her natal family, and three external informants. The material was coded manually and iteratively, then interpreted through the Living Qur’an perspective and Berger and Luckmann’s social constructionist framework of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The findings show that “nobility” was externalized through material provision, redistribution, giving practices, and domestic hierarchy; objectivated through repeated narratives about religious knowledge, household provision, and social influence; and internalized through marital reasoning, forms of address, spatial conduct, and deference to religious authority. The family’s reception of Qur’an 4:3 was mediated primarily through accounts of the *kiai*’s biography rather than an observed formal exegesis of the verse. External informants questioned his marital conduct, the meaning of consent, and whether material prosperity constituted blessing. The case therefore shows that the natal family actively participated in producing marital legitimacy, although this construction remained contextual and contested rather than theologically conclusive or uniformly accepted.

**Keywords:** *Polygyny; Natal Family; Charismatic Religious Authority; Living Qur’an; Social Construction*

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### A. Introduction

Polygyny remains a contested religious and social practice in Indonesia. Although Islamic family law permits a man to marry more than one woman under specified conditions, state law subjects such marriages to judicial authorization and additional protections for wives and children. The bureaucratization of Muslim marriage further shapes how religious unions

acquire—or fail to acquire—formal state recognition (Nisa 2018). In practice, religious norms, statutory requirements, customary expectations, and household interests do not always converge (Aminah and Muala 2023; Taufiqurohman and Musaffa 2023). Public responses are similarly divided. A survey in Makassar found that some respondents regarded polygyny as a family disgrace or as demeaning to women, while many of the men surveyed had entered subsequent marriages without the first wife's consent (Ridwan, Abdullah, and Idham 2024). Debates over Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation have also identified patriarchal assumptions that position women as objects of polygynous marriage (Hasan et al. 2022). Women associated with an already-married man can additionally be subjected to the gendered label *pelakor*—an Indonesian acronym for *perebut laki orang*, or “a woman who takes another woman's husband.” Studies of Indonesian public discourse show that this term disproportionately sanctions women while obscuring men's responsibility (Martin-Anatias 2019; Rosjayani and Idrus 2024). These legal and discursive tensions make polygyny more than a question of jurisprudence: it is also a field in which religious authority, family identity, gendered judgment, and social legitimacy are negotiated.

Research on polygyny has developed along three main lines. The first examines law, regulation, and the relationship between Islamic norms and state administration, including the grounds on which courts authorize polygynous marriages (Santoso and Nasrudin 2021; Taufiqurohman and Musaffa 2023). The second documents adverse psychosocial outcomes. A systematic review and meta-analysis found a higher pooled risk of depression among women in polygynous marriages than among women in monogamous marriages, although not every psychological outcome differed significantly and most included studies came from outside Indonesia (Shaiful Bahari et al. 2021). The third line moves beyond a single harm-centered account by examining how women interpret and adapt to their marital positions. Research with Indonesian women has identified conflict, accommodation, negotiated divisions of labor, and locally defined forms of happiness within polygynous households (Sukiati and Mohd Nor 2023). A more recent study of unregistered second wives likewise found that participants constructed social recognition, emotional security, and financial security from their positions while developing strategies for managing stigma (Nisa, Jendrius, and Indraddin 2025). These studies do not negate evidence of inequality or harm. They show, however, that women's interpretations of polygyny are produced through social interaction and cannot be inferred from marital form alone.

Two questions remain insufficiently examined. First, studies that foreground wives' experiences rarely analyze the role of their natal families—parents and close relatives who grant, withhold, or retrospectively justify consent—in constructing the meaning of a subsequent marriage. Such relatives

are not merely observers. They may help translate a contested marital position into a morally acceptable family identity. Second, research on polygyny has seldom connected this family-level meaning-making to the social reception of the Qur'an and to charismatic religious authority. The Living Qur'an perspective treats reception as a relationship between scripture and a community that takes shape through discourse, transmission, and practice rather than through formal exegesis alone (Rafiq 2021). This distinction is important in the present case because the available data do not document a sustained, explicit interpretation of Qur'an 4:3. Instead, family members encountered the verse indirectly through accounts of a *kiai* (a Muslim religious leader), his household, and the practices surrounding his authority. Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction provides a complementary framework for examining how these meanings are expressed through action, acquire an apparently objective social form, and return to shape subjective identity through externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger and Luckmann 1991).

This article examines an anonymized *jemaah pengajian* (Islamic study-circle community) in West Java, focusing on a later-married wife—locally described as an *istri muda* ("young wife," used here for a wife married later in a polygynous union)—three members of her natal family, and three external informants. Within the family, a position commonly exposed to stigma was reclassified through the language of "nobility," marital compatibility (*kafa'ah*), and the pursuit of blessing (*tabarruk*). The article asks: How did the wife's natal family construct and internalize this counter-narrative, and how did the *kiai*'s charismatic authority mediate their reception of Qur'an 4:3? It argues that "nobility" was not an inherent property of the marriage or proof of its theological validity. It was a contingent social construction produced through material symbols, domestic practices, reciprocal recognition, and deference to religious authority. Because external informants expressed moral and theological ambivalence, the construction should be understood as contested rather than as a uniform belief shared by the community or by West Javanese society. By centering the natal family, the analysis extends research on polygynous marriage from wives' adaptation and public stigma to the relational processes through which a family attempts to convert a vulnerable marital identity into legitimate social status.

## **B. Methods**

This study employed an interpretive qualitative single-case study design informed by social constructionism and the Living Qur'an perspective. The bounded case was the process through which a later-married wife and three members of her natal family constructed her status within one polygynous marriage under charismatic religious authority. The unit of analysis was this

family-level process of meaning-making rather than the religious leader's entire household or the study-circle community as a whole. Fieldwork was conducted from January through early July 2026 in an anonymized *jemaah pengajian* (Islamic study-circle community) in West Java, principally at the wife's residence and her natal family home. These sites were selected purposively because they provided access to the domestic interactions, practices, and narratives through which a socially stigmatized marital position was reframed as "noble."

Seven participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in or knowledge of the marriage. The four focal family participants comprised the later-married wife (R4) and three members of her natal family: her mother (R1), aunt (R2), and uncle (R3). Three external participants provided comparative and potentially critical perspectives: a local resident unaffiliated with the community (EX1), a Muslim religious teacher from a different theological and organizational background (EX2), and a business owner with economic ties to the community (EX3). EX3's account was interpreted cautiously because this economic relationship could affect its independence. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Observation focused on domestic etiquette, spatial arrangements, responses to the *kiai* (a locally recognized Muslim religious leader), and the circulation of material and religious symbols. The interviews explored initial family resistance, the development of marital approval, perceived blessing and material well-being, religious authority, and responses to external stigma. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Indonesian and Sundanese expressions were retained when analytically important and translated into English. Because the researcher did not directly observe a Qur'anic exegesis session specifically addressing polygyny or Qur'an 4:3, the study does not claim to reconstruct the *kiai*'s formal interpretation of the verse.

The interview transcripts and observational data were coded manually and iteratively to identify patterns concerning material practices, religious narratives, domestic hierarchy, social recognition, stigma, and contestation (Braun and Clarke 2006; Nowell et al. 2017). The Living Qur'an perspective directed attention to how Qur'an 4:3 was received through lived practices, family narratives, and perceptions of the *kiai*'s biography rather than through formal exegesis alone. These patterns were then interpreted through Berger and Luckmann's (1991) dialectic of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Source triangulation compared the four family accounts with the three external accounts and observational data, while method triangulation compared interview accounts with observable practices. Divergent accounts were retained rather than forced into a consensus. The researcher practiced reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis by critically examining how prior moral judgments and assumptions could shape interpretation, while remaining

attentive to asymmetries of authority and competing accounts. Participants provided verbal informed consent for the anonymization of their accounts. Personal names, institutional identifiers, the community's precise location, and distinctive biographical details were withheld or generalized to reduce the risk of deductive disclosure. Direct quotations were translated into English; material requiring substantial generalization for anonymity is presented as paraphrase rather than as a verbatim quotation. "Nobility," blessing, and related expressions are presented as participants' interpretations rather than as the researcher's theological or ethical endorsement.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

Family members repeatedly associated the *kiai*'s religious knowledge with deference, blessing, and elevated status. Research on polygyny among Indonesian *ulama* similarly shows that religious authority, culture, and sexuality can jointly shape marital meanings and family relations, although such authority is neither static nor uniformly accepted (Afandi et al. 2024; Faisal et al. 2022; Rosidi, Yazid, and Amril 2021). In the present case, the principal evidence for the construction of "nobility" comes from participants' accounts and the domestic practices observed during fieldwork. The analysis therefore treats charismatic authority as a relational process documented in this family rather than as the continuation of an assumed regional aristocratic tradition.

#### **1. The Dialectical Construction of "Nobility"**

The construction of "nobility" among the later-married wife's natal family involved a continuing relationship between subjective interpretation and socially recognizable practices. Following Berger and Luckmann (1991), this process can be examined through externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization occurred as family members expressed religious meanings through material arrangements, giving, and domestic hierarchy. Objectivation developed when these expressions were repeatedly narrated and treated within the family as an established reality. Internalization occurred when family members incorporated that reality into their marital reasoning, language, identity, and bodily conduct. These moments overlapped rather than unfolding as a strictly linear sequence.

##### **1) Externalization**

Externalization was most visible in the family's interpretation of the wife's residence, cultivated grounds, animals, food crops, and facilities. During an observation visit, R1 invited the researcher to see what she called her daughter's *taman surga*, or "garden of paradise." She described its extensive collection of birds, fishponds, food crops, and recreational facilities and presented the garden as a source of enjoyment and pride (R1, January 2026). Details concerning the

quantities and specific varieties have been generalized to reduce the risk of deductive disclosure. Family members interpreted this abundance not simply as economic ownership but as a visible expression of *tabarruk*, the pursuit or reception of spiritual blessing. In this sense, economic resources were converted into religious-symbolic claims that could be seen and discussed by visitors. The observation documents how the family represented prosperity; it does not establish prosperity as objective proof of divine favor.

This case should be read against research documenting depression, anxiety, family conflict, and unequal resource distribution in many polygynous households, although outcomes vary across settings and socioeconomic conditions (Dashtiane, Zare, and Khorramdel 2021; Shaiful Bahari et al. 2021). Indonesian studies also show that financial security can shape how women interpret and adapt to a subsequent marriage (Nisa, Jendrius, and Indraddin 2025; Sholihin and Koentjoro 2023), while Usman (2026) describes productive maintenance in financially established polygynous families. In the present case, material abundance functioned as an emic resource through which the family narrated blessing and status; it does not demonstrate that polygyny generally produces economic well-being.

EX2 partly affirmed the connection between material provision and religious responsibility. The participant used the Sundanese concept *masagi*, referring to a person considered well-rounded or mature in religious, social, and economic responsibility:

“Looking at this material abundance, God willing, the *kiai* is already *masagi*. He has prioritized his family and made his wife happy. . . . Wives are understood to have an inclination toward material provision, and this *kiai* has fulfilled that inclination. This is what God commands as the best form of *infag* [charitable spending] for one’s family.” (EX2, July 2026)

The gendered assumption in this statement belongs to EX2 and is not adopted as the researcher’s position. EX2 also qualified this approval by arguing that material circulation remained religiously defensible only if it did not become personal exploitation and if it contributed to wider communal benefit. The external theological assessment was therefore conditional rather than an unrestricted validation of the family’s claim.

Material meanings also entered relationships among the wives. R2 described the later-married wife as receiving considerable affection, wealth, and respect while continuing to share produce with the *kiai*’s other wives:

“Although she is the later-married wife, she is the one most loved by the *kiai*, because wealth and honor seem to be poured upon her. But she remains kind to the other wives and routinely shares the garden’s produce with them.” (R2, May 2026)

The family interpreted this redistribution as evidence of generosity and relational responsibility. It may also have helped manage potential tensions

within the polygynous household. The data cannot demonstrate that it eliminated conflict, however, because the other wives were not interviewed. The account therefore documents the natal family's interpretation of redistribution rather than the experiences of all women in the household. This limitation matters because research on Indonesian polygynous families reports both negotiated accommodation and unequal emotional or material consequences (Ritonga et al. 2025; Sukiati and Mohd Nor 2023; Wirastris and van Huis 2021).

Externalization was also visible in domestic authority. During field visits, the researcher observed that *santri*—students or disciples serving in the household—responded to instructions from both the *kiai* and the later-married wife. Members of her natal family also received marked respect from those serving in the residence. The family's incorporation into this hierarchy suggests that the *kiai*'s authority extended through kinship. It elevated the natal family's access to the community's symbolic center, although it should not be interpreted as evidence of their inherent superiority.

Giving practices extended beyond the household. Family members described sharing produce and other resources with relatives and neighbors, while followers gave material support to the *kiai* and his family. Participants referred to some of these gifts as *shadaqah al-najwa*. In this article, the expression is reported as a participant term for charitable giving associated with private consultation or access to a religious teacher; it is not presented as a universal doctrinal definition. Because the study did not examine financial records, it cannot determine the amount or distribution of these exchanges. The data nevertheless indicate a reciprocal flow in which generosity, recognition, and material support reinforced the family's public expression of blessing and status.

## 2) Objectivation

Objectivation occurred as the family's interpretation became increasingly taken for granted through repeated stories about the *kiai*'s religious knowledge, domestic life, and capacity to provide for a large household. R1 reported that, during a study session, the verse on polygyny was illustrated through the *kiai*'s polygynous life and his perceived ability to provide for a large household (R1, March 2026). The size of the household has been generalized to protect the family's identity. R1's account indicates that she encountered the verse through the perceived example of the *kiai*'s domestic life. It does not document a sustained interpretation of the verse's wording, its condition of justice, or competing exegetical positions. The researcher did not directly observe a session of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* that specifically addressed polygyny. Accordingly, the available evidence supports a mediated form of Qur'anic reception: the leader's biography was treated by the family as an embodiment of the verse's meaning, but the study cannot attribute a formal interpretation of Qur'an 4:3 to the *kiai* himself.

This pattern accords with the Living Qur'an perspective, which recognizes that scriptural reception may take shape through practices, narratives, and social relationships rather than formal exegesis alone (Rafiq 2014, 2021). At the same time, interpretive and legal scholarship emphasizes that the permissibility of polygyny remains conditional on justice and protection from harm, while popular religious authority may reproduce gendered assumptions when women's experiences receive insufficient attention (Hasan et al. 2022; Humaira et al. 2025; Latifah et al. 2025; Yazid 2023). The family's biographically mediated reception should therefore be analyzed as a social process, not accepted as proof that the marriage fulfilled the normative requirements of Qur'an 4:3.

EX2 placed the preference for a large family within a religious discourse that values a numerous Muslim community. The participant contrasted this position with state family-planning messages and referred to early Islamic precedents. This contrast represents EX2's theological framing. The study did not independently verify the size of the household or examine the economic and emotional experiences of all its members. The relevant finding is that the ability to support many dependents was repeatedly invoked as part of the family's construction of religious legitimacy.

Within the natal family, repeated narratives of provision and religious knowledge helped create a boundary between insiders and outsiders. R2 explained how she responded to criticism:

"Although his name and influence are considerable and the later-married wife receives substantial economic facilities, our family does not seek attention. We remain ordinary and simply admire her. Whenever I hear people speaking badly about the *kiai*, I can only laugh, because we know what actually happens." (R2, May 2026)

Her statement claims privileged knowledge for the family and positions external criticism as insufficiently informed. This boundary made the family's interpretation more resistant to stigma. It did not remove disagreement, but it reduced the authority granted to outside judgments.

Family members also compared the *kiai*'s spiritual authority with formal political status. R3 reported that the wife had previously attracted the attention of a local political figure but chose the *kiai*. Within the family narrative, this comparison positioned religious knowledge and piety above political office. Because the political figure was not interviewed and the claim was not independently verified, it should be treated as a family narrative of status rather than as an established biographical fact. Its analytical significance lies in the hierarchy of values expressed by the family: spiritual capital was presented as more desirable than formal political authority.

The *kiai*'s authority was also reported to influence economic conduct. EX3, a business owner with economic ties to the community, stated:

“The *kiai*’s followers regularly buy water here in bulk. If the *kiai* says A, they immediately compete to act on it.” (EX3, April 2026)

This account suggests that the leader’s preferences could coordinate followers’ consumption. However, the study did not examine transaction records or interview the purchasers, and EX3 benefited economically from the relationship. The statement therefore documents EX3’s perception of collective economic compliance, not the independently verified scale or motivation of that behavior.

More importantly, objectivation did not produce complete consensus. EX2 distinguished the *kiai*’s religious knowledge from his marital conduct:

“They do not actually approve of his behavior, but they approve of his knowledge. *Geuleuh tapi masih aya keneh nu di alana* [they feel disgust, yet still believe that they receive something from him]. People dislike it – *beuki kawin beuki kawin ceunah* [they say that he keeps marrying] – but they still feel the blessing. *Duka berkah duka istidraj* [whether it is blessing or *istidraj*].” (EX2, July 2026)

*Istidraj* refers here to worldly favor that may be understood as a spiritually dangerous test rather than a blessing. EX2’s account shows that followers could recognize the *kiai*’s religious learning while questioning his repeated marriages. It also challenged the epistemic status of prosperity: the same material conditions could be interpreted as either *tabarruk* or *istidraj*. This ambivalence corresponds with research showing that religious authority in Indonesia can remain influential while also becoming fragmented and contested (Rosidi, Yazid, and Amril 2021).

EX1 offered a second counterpoint through a separate family history involving polygyny by an earlier-generation religious figure:

“He was wealthy and owned a successful business. . . . In those days, polygyny required the senior wife’s permission. In the end, she gave permission—I do not know whether because of a religious argument, patience, or because she was coaxed.” (EX1, July 2026)

This example does not establish how consent operated in the household studied here. It nevertheless demonstrates why expressed permission cannot automatically be treated as evidence of an entirely free theological conviction. Indonesian research has similarly documented uncertainty surrounding first-wife consent and the gap between formal legal safeguards and marital practice (Ridwan, Abdullah, and Idham 2024; Taufiqurohman and Musaffa 2023; Wirastri and van Huis 2021). Research on Muslim family pragmatism similarly shows that lived marital arrangements may be justified through considerations extending beyond formal law, without necessarily resolving questions of justice or consent (Sam’ani et al. 2023). The external accounts thus reveal an objectivated but incomplete family reality: “nobility” was treated as settled within the natal

family, while other participants continued to question consent, marital conduct, and the meaning of material prosperity.

### **3) Internalization**

Internalization began with the family's movement from resistance toward acceptance. R2 recalled that the proposed marriage initially exposed the *kiai* to *si beuki momok*, a crude Sundanese sexual insult directed at a man perceived as repeatedly pursuing women. The expression is retained as emic evidence of gendered and sexualized stigma, not as the authors' characterization. R2 then recounted the later-married wife's response:

"All right, I will not marry the *kiai*. But please find me another man whose piety and religious knowledge are equal to or greater than his." (R2, May 2026)

The wife's response shifted the evaluative frame from sexuality and marital sequence to *kafa'ah*, or marital compatibility based on piety and religious knowledge. Her statement demonstrated agency because she actively defended her preferred marriage. Yet this agency was bounded by an evaluative standard already centered on the charismatic figure: an alternative spouse would have to equal or surpass the *kiai* in precisely the qualities through which his authority was constructed.

This pattern does not eliminate feminist critiques of polygynous marriage. Studies of Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation and public discourse show how women may be positioned as objects of male marital choice and disproportionately burdened by sexualized labels (Hasan et al. 2022; Martin-Anatias 2019; Rosjayani and Idrus 2024). At the same time, qualitative research indicates that women in polygynous or unregistered marriages may develop negotiated meanings, adaptive strategies, and locally defined forms of security or satisfaction (Nisa, Jendrius, and Indraddin 2025; Sholihin and Koentjoro 2023; Sukianti and Mohd Nor 2023). Broader scholarship also shows that women's agency may be negotiated within Islamic legal, pious, and patriarchal frameworks rather than existing entirely outside them (Mir-Hosseini 2006; Smith 2014). R4's decision should therefore be understood neither as proof of unrestricted autonomy nor as evidence of complete passivity. It reflects agency exercised within religious, familial, and gendered constraints.

The family's eventual acceptance was also shaped by an asymmetrical relationship of religious authority. R3 reported that the wife's father was so deferential toward the *kiai* that the usual hand-kissing practice was reversed: the father kissed his son-in-law's hand rather than the son-in-law kissing the elder's hand (R3, May 2026). R2 connected this deference directly to the father's relationship with the prospective husband:

"In the end, everyone accepted, especially her father after she spoke that way. He also felt *sungkan* [deferential restraint] because the *kiai* was his teacher." (R2, May 2026)

In this context, *sungkan* refers to an affective restraint that can make open disagreement with a respected teacher difficult. The reversal of hand-kissing etiquette indicates that the *kiai* was not treated merely as a son-in-law. His religious status reordered conventional family hierarchy.

EX2 contested this practice:

"In fact, hand-kissing has no clear basis in the hadith. A practice such as this can be regarded as excessive – *ghuluw*." (EX2, July 2026)

*Ghuluw* means excessive religious veneration. EX2's assessment should be understood as a theological position from outside the study-circle community rather than as a definitive judgment established by this research. Its inclusion demonstrates that conduct considered appropriate within the natal family did not receive uniform religious approval. This contestation resembles broader Indonesian debates in which respect for religious authority is distinguished from the uncritical reproduction of patriarchal or charismatic power (Kloos and Ismah 2023).

EX2 drew a similar distinction regarding *tabarruk* and used *ustadz*, an Indonesian term for a Muslim religious teacher:

"Seeking blessing by giving to a *kiai*'s or an *ustadz*'s child may be permissible.... But if someone believes that this particular person has supernatural power and that giving to him will make one's business more successful, whereas giving to someone else will not, then it becomes problematic." (EX2, July 2026)

EX2 described the problematic extension of such beliefs as *wali-isasi*, an Indonesian coinage referring to the treatment of a person as a saintly or supernaturally empowered figure. The distinction indicates that giving and respect could be religiously accepted while claims of automatic supernatural benefit remained contested. It also prevents the family's language of blessing from being represented as an uncontested theological position.

Internalization was further visible in R4's account of the contrast between private and public interaction:

"When we are alone, the *kiai* is like an ordinary person and likes to laugh. But when other people are present, including family members, everyone is carried into a sacred atmosphere, and I simply adjust." (R4, March 2026)

This contrast suggests that the sacred atmosphere surrounding the *kiai* was reproduced through interaction. R4's adjustment did not mean that she experienced her husband as continuously extraordinary in private. Instead, she adapted her behavior when family members or followers were present, thereby participating in the public performance of charismatic authority.

Language and spatial conduct reinforced the same hierarchy. Members of the extended family addressed him as “*Kiai*” rather than using an ordinary kinship term. During field visits, the researcher observed family members making space when he entered and withdrawing from the principal room. Such responses placed his religious authority within bodily routines and domestic space. They also show why internalization cannot be reduced to an abstract belief: it was expressed through forms of address, movement, and deference.

The family linked these practices with material security, access to household assistance, and recognition by people around them. These experiences helped consolidate the belief that the marriage had brought honor rather than disgrace. However, the available evidence does not show that the interpretation was shared by the other wives, all followers, or the wider public. Internalization did not eliminate stigma. It provided the wife and her natal family with a coherent counter-narrative through which stigma could be resisted.

In this case, “nobility” and *tabarruk* operated as emic categories through which family members recast a stigmatized marital identity as socially legitimate. Berger and Luckmann’s framework explains how this interpretation was expressed, stabilized, and incorporated into family consciousness, while the external accounts show that it remained contested. These categories are therefore treated as objects of sociological explanation rather than as claims about the marriage’s theological validity or ethical acceptability.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The construction of “nobility” around the later-married wife emerged through three interrelated moments in the wife’s natal family. Externalization occurred when religious meanings were expressed through material provision, redistribution, giving, and domestic hierarchy. Objectivation developed as accounts of the *kiai*’s religious knowledge, household provision, and social influence were repeatedly narrated and increasingly treated within the family as an established reality. Internalization occurred when this interpretation shaped marital reasoning, family acceptance, forms of address, bodily conduct, and deference to the *kiai*. These processes enabled the wife and her natal family to develop a counter-narrative to gendered and sexualized stigma. They did not, however, eliminate disagreement or establish “nobility” as a belief shared by the entire study-circle community or the wider public.

The family’s reception of Qur’an 4:3 was mediated primarily through narratives about the *kiai*’s biography, religious knowledge, and perceived ability to provide for a large household. Because the study did not directly observe a Qur’anic exegesis session specifically addressing polygyny, it does not claim to reconstruct the *kiai*’s formal interpretation of the verse. Instead, the case shows how scriptural reception can develop through lived practices, material

arrangements, and relationships of religious authority. The critical accounts provided by external participants further show that recognition of the *kiai's* religious knowledge could coexist with moral disagreement about his marital conduct and theological uncertainty about claims of blessing.

By centering the natal family, this study extends research on polygynous marriage beyond the experiences of husbands and wives to the relational processes through which close relatives reinterpret a contested marital identity. Conceptually, the natal family emerges as an active participant in the production of marital legitimacy rather than as a passive observer of the marriage. The findings remain limited to a single financially secure household and seven participants: the later-married wife, three members of her natal family, and three external informants. The other wives, the *kiai*, formal religious authorities, and openly critical members of the study-circle community were not interviewed. EX3's economic ties to the community also limit the independence of that participant's account. The findings should therefore be read as a contextual case of family meaning-making rather than as a general pattern of Indonesian polygyny. Future research could compare natal families across different economic and religious settings and include first wives, other household members, critical followers, and formal religious authorities to examine more fully how consent, authority, material security, and stigma interact in polygynous marriages.

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