

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF  
DIVORCED MUSLIM WOMEN IN KIBERA: *Its*  
*Implications for the Redeemed Christian Church of God Mission*

BY  
ESTHER OBASIKE

*A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of the Master of  
Art in Missions Studies*

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Approved

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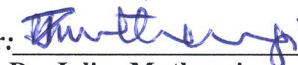
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Student's Declaration

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF DIVORCED MUSLIM  
WOMEN IN KIBERA: ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REDEEMED  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD MISSION.

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to  
any other College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate  
School of Theology or of the examiners

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_

  
Esther N. Obasike

June, 2004.

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of divorced Muslim women in Kibera and its implications for the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) mission to the Muslim women in Kibera.

A qualitative research design employing phenomenology tradition was used for the study. Data was collected using face-to-face open-ended interviews that were recorded and transcribed. I used moderate participant observation to build rapport with the informants.

The findings revealed that Islam as an ideology differs hugely from its practice. Seven themes emerged to explain divorce experiences for the mothers and their children. There is a lot of interwovenness between Islam and culture. More so, the status accorded to Muslim women is an underlying factor behind their unpalatable experiences in divorce.

Based on findings, divorced Muslim women are in dire need of true and meaningful relationship. This provides an excellent platform for their evangelization. The RCCG Kibera must engage in a holistic ministry in meeting their felt needs.

To

All Christian women and ministries whose hearts are yearning  
and bleeding to reach Muslim women with the  
gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural missionaries face various challenges in presenting the gospel to different religious groups. One of such religious groups is Muslims. Evangelizing Muslims especially Muslim women has posed one of the greatest challenges in fulfilling the great commission. As a missionary with a deep passion and vision to reach out to women of all religions, I see Muslim women in God's plan for salvation. In my eight years of mission work in Kenya, only two Muslim women have received Christ through our ministry. This in no doubt has left a lot of questions unanswered in my heart. This issue can no longer be ignored as acknowledged by Nehls. "We cannot ignore it any longer: Reaching Muslims for Christ is the greatest challenge the Church in Africa is facing today" (Nehls 1992, iii).

One area I have observed that is so central in Islam is the family. Marriage is considered as one of the most important institutions both in Islam and Christianity. However, most of the research done in this area has taken the advocacy approach that tends to free the Muslim woman from the inhumane laws of Islamic marriage. For example, it is said that women in most Muslim societies are restricted to functions related to their biology. In contrast, men enjoy completely the choice of movement, employment, and social-political and economic participation based on individual differences (Getui and Ayanga 2002, 42-43). However, women are not just biology (Wadud 1999, 64). What remain unattended are the perspectives of the Muslim women in marriage and in divorce situations as these relate to their acceptance or resistance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Islamic ideologies are not sufficient for unveiling the realities of Muslims. A more realistic and practical approach is to have an insider's understanding of the people (women in particular), which in no doubt will facilitate their evangelisation. According to Kim, "The more classical approaches to Islam do not address the crucial issues that deal with the human level where all the Islamic ideologies are to be implemented" (Kim 2001, 1). To fully understand the dynamic of marriage and divorce, Nkangi believes that one should go "Beyond the face value of such simplistic misconceptions

whether they originate with certain disoriented Muslims or mistaken outsiders. The problem must be examined in the full context of the family structure, the religious precepts, the human situation and the historical circumstances” (n.d, 36). In an attempt to address the issues on Islamic divorce neglected by literatures, I carried out a qualitative research.

Many Christian Churches and institutions are taking the evangelization of Muslims, especially Muslim women very seriously. However, very minute positive results are seen. This must be attributed to the approaches, strategies and methods employed by Churches in Muslim evangelism and their perceptions of Muslims. One such Church denomination is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The set goal of the RCCG is to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world, the Muslim world inclusive. The RCCG Kenya is a result of mission efforts of the same Church in Nigeria. RCCG is a mission-oriented Church with Church planting as one of her most effective means of doing mission. There are key visions, which drive the RCCG in her mission. The Church stresses that individual members of the Church should make heaven as their primary goal. Then through their life style many people will also make it to heaven. To achieve the above mentioned, there is emphasis on living a holy life. Evangelism is in no doubt central in her vision; hence every effort is to be made in taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. One of the ways of reaching out to the people is by planting Churches within five minutes walking distance in all nations, cities, towns and villages on earth (Bankole 1999, 29).

In the past eight years of the RCCG existence in Kenya, twenty four Churches have been planted. One of the areas where this Church exists is in Kibera (See description of Kibera on page ten), which has a highly Islamic influence. There is a monthly women’s meeting organized by the RCCG as a forum to evangelize women from all spheres of life and religion. However, it is noted that no Muslim woman has ever attended this meeting. In addition, RCCG Kibera in her evangelistic meetings has not been able to win any Muslim to Christ. To this effect, it becomes very crucial that a study on Muslim women in Kibera be carried out for effective evangelism and Church planting.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem to be addressed in this study is to describe the phenomenon of divorce among Muslim women in Kibera and to understand the extent to which this phenomenon affects their response to the gospel of Christ shared by the RCCG mission.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this phenomenological study is in two-fold. First, it describes the phenomenon of divorce among Muslim women in Kibera in Nairobi. Second, it investigates missiological implications of this phenomenon in Muslim evangelism by the RCCG mission. Generally, divorce in this research is defined as the permanent dissolution of marriage contracted under Islamic *Shariah* law.

### **Significance of the Study**

The RCCG whose existence in Kenya for the last eight years without any significant impact on the Muslims only suggests the level of ignorance the Church is facing in terms of Muslim Evangelism. Hence, the findings of this study will facilitate the RCCG evangelistic approach to Muslim women in Kenya and other parts of East Africa. I started an interdenominational Bible college in Kenya, which offers Diploma in Theology since 1999. This college is an arm of the RCCG that trains ministers of God from all Christian denominations. Nonetheless, there are no Islamic courses offered in this college due to ignorance concerning the Muslim world. However, the findings of this research will lead to the inclusion of Islamic studies in the school curriculum, which will expose Christian leaders to the Islamic world for effective evangelism.

In 1997, there was religious fracas between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria, which resulted in the loss of many lives, properties and Church buildings. The RCCG mission was not spared during this fracas. RCCG as a mission oriented Church with mission fields in over eighty countries of the world will in no doubt use the result of this study in evangelizing Muslim women worldwide, especially in Nigeria where Islam has a great influence. RCCG has her headquarter in Nigeria with over one million adherents. Some of the RCCG Churches among the Hausas of Nigeria to date are facing severe

persecutions from Muslims. Therefore, without any shadow of doubt, this research will be an asset for my Church in Nigeria.

One of the great challenges to the Church in today's world is Islam. Unfortunately, most Christians have little or no idea of the ideologies and practicalities of Islam. This religion is spreading like wild fire all over the world to the extent that may become the most populated world religion. This calls for an urgent response from the Church of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the findings of this study will of a necessity facilitate the world evangelization of Muslim women

I have made many efforts in search of library resources on this topic, particularly relating to the Kibera Muslims. However, there are very few materials on this topic. Most of the findings in this work will come as a result of my fieldwork, which suggests the originality behind this research. Hence, I hope that the findings of this study will go a long way in helping other students interested in such a research.

### **Goals**

This study aims at describing the current phenomena of divorce among Muslim women with special reference to those in Kibera. In carrying out this study by phenomenological description, I rely primarily on the Muslim insider's view. Understanding Muslim women from their perspective will facilitate Christian approaches to them in evangelism. Further, this study will help Christians to determine to what extent divorce poses a challenge to Muslim women evangelism.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Muslim women in Kibera experience divorce?
2. How does this divorce affect their children?
3. What are the implications of Islamic divorce for the RCCG mission in Kibera?

### **Delimitation**

This study is not concerned with doctrinal, theological and socio-cultural issues surrounding Islamic divorce. Also, the psychological matters are not the focus of my research. I am not interested in the position of men with regard to Islamic divorce; rather, my focus is in that of Muslim women. Also, the

meaning of Islamic divorce may differ from society to society even among Muslims; but this study is concerned solely with Muslim women in Kibera. Further, this study will not cover the aspect of post divorce. My aim is to understand the lifestyle of the divorced Muslim women in Kibera and to grasp its implications for evangelizing Muslim women. Moreover, Kibera having a large population is not possible to cover; hence, this research is restricted to the *Mashimoni* (a place of holes) area of Kibera.

### Limitation

In the data collection procedure, the population covered only Kibera women who were available to my fieldwork. This is because Muslim women are generally not easily accessible. Being a foreigner, I used an accredited interpreter to rightly spell and interpret some of the statements my informants expressed in Kiswahili.

### Definition of Terms

Throughout my writing, I have italicized the Arabic words except some words, such as Islam, Allah, Qur'an and Hadith which have already been anglicized. Scripture references are from the King James Version of the Bible.

#### Arabic Terms

Gibb and Kramers (1953) define the following Arabic terms as follows:

*Shariah* This literally means the road that leads to the watering place. It generally refers to Islamic law (524).

*Hadith* This is the record of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet and his Companions (166).

*Talak* This means divorce or repudiation of a wife by the husband (564).

*Umma* This is a Qur'anic word for people or community (603).

*Khula* This is a special form of divorce initiated by the wife (568).

*Sheik* This refers to a spiritual leader in Islam (mostly among Sunnis).

### **Assumptions**

1. I hold the basic assumption as a Christian that apart from the “general revelation” God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, in a special way for our eternal salvation and this “special revelation” is recorded in the Bible (Oleka 1998, 80-82).
2. I assume that salvation through Jesus Christ is the only way to have a relationship with God the Father (Acts 4:12).
3. I assume that “women and the family are the foundation of the Islamic community, the heart of Muslim society”( Sesi 2003, 8 quoting Esposito 1998).
4. I assume that the beliefs and teachings of the Qur'an on women contribute greatly to the close-up of Muslim women to the gospel of Christ.
5. I assume that most Muslim women need a meaningful friendship.

### **Role of Literature in Phenomenology**

In qualitative research, the literature should be used in a manner consistent with the assumptions of learning from the informants, and not prescribing the questions that need to be answered from the researcher's viewpoint (Creswell 2003, 30). A qualitative study is an exploratory one. Therefore, I went out to gather information inductively from informants about the topic under study. This means that not much has been written about my research topic or the informants studied; hence, I sought to listen to informants and built an understanding based on their experiences. In a phenomenological study, literature will serve less to set the stage for the study. The literature is presented at the end as a basis for comparing and contrasting findings of the qualitative study (31). I considered this approach suitable for this work because phenomenology involves an inductive process of qualitative research. The literature did not guide and direct the study but was an aide once patterns were identified.



## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to address the issues on Islamic divorce, I carried out a qualitative research. Qualitative research attempts to understand the meaning or nature of experiences of persons with problems such as divorce and addiction, and this involves getting out into the field and finding out what people are doing and thinking (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 11). Qualitative research involves an inquiry process for understanding, which is based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. This approach uses strategies of inquiry like narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. It involves the collection of open-ended, emerging data primarily for developing themes from the data (Creswell 2003, 18). For my fieldwork, I have employed a phenomenology design.

Phenomenology in research tradition has its origin in a philosophical movement founded by Edmund Husserl. He claims that knowledge begins with the self's experience of phenomena, which are the various sensations, perceptions, and ideations that appear in consciousness when the self focuses attention on an object (Gall and Borg 1996, 601).

It studies reality as it appears (593). This type of research studies the world as it appears to individuals when they place themselves in a state of consciousness that reflects an effort to be free of everyday biases and belief (600). Creswell states, "The phenomenological approach is primarily an attempt to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied" (Creswell 1998, 275). Further, in using this method, the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomena being studied and comes to know himself within his experiencing of these phenomena (Gall and Borg 1996, 166). In a phenomenological study, a small number of subjects are studied through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell 2003, 15 with reference to Moustakas 1994). In this kind of research, the study of three to ten subjects will be appropriate

(Creswell 1998, 122 referring to Dukes 1984).

Phenomenological research has some advantages as an approach to qualitative research. First, it can be used to study a wide range of phenomena. Second, the interview process used to collect data is wide- ranged; hence, it is capable of detecting many aspects of experience that may prove to be important variables in subsequent quantitative studies. In addition, the procedures are relatively straightforward, so it seems that less training would be required to do a phenomenological study than would be required to do a study using the methods of a qualitative research tradition such as ethnography (Gall and Borg 1996, 603). However, some aspects of this research are ethnographic in nature. This was because I conducted an in-depth interview and used participant- observation method for a long period of eight months. On that note, I borrowed ethnography but with no intention of studying the cultural worldview of informants. Rather, my aim was simply to understand and to describe what divorced Muslim women went through. “Ethnography offers an excellent strategy for discovering new theory” (Spradley 1979, 11). But my research is not interested in building theories. The reason behind the usage of ethnography in some areas was due solely to the nature of my approach to the informants. In order to gain access into Muslim women, a lot of time was needed to build relationship and trust.

I considered phenomenology as an appropriate strategy for this study based on the following reasons:

- The research questions deal with a phenomenon of divorce as understood and experienced by informants. The four informants have Islamic backgrounds and have directly experienced divorce.
- Since the procedure of inquiry is relatively straightforward, it suits the research that I am dealing with as well as the time constraint in doing this work.
- Phenomenology deals with a small number of informants. In consideration of the accessibility to the informants and the sensitivity of this study, I studied a small number of Muslim women. In contrast, ethnography research requires more time and informants in order to produce an in-depth study of cultural meaning.

### Role of the Researcher

In a phenomenology study, the researcher becomes the primary measuring instrument. This indicates that she/he carries out data collection and becomes personally involved in the phenomena under study. Hence, she/he interacts closely with field informants, attends social events in the field setting, and uses empathy and other psychological processes to grasp the meaning of the phenomena as it is experienced by individuals and groups in the setting (Gall and Borg 1996, 554). Therefore, I was physically on the field to collect data using one- on- one, in-person interview within a period of eight months.

In the past eight years, I have been reaching out to Muslim women in Kenya with the gospel but the result was not very positive. I have traveled to many parts of Kenya for women evangelism but have not led any Muslim woman to Christ, apart from the one who walked into my office by herself and received Christ. I have a deep passion for women ministry, which suggests why I have been ministering to women for over twenty years now. However, nothing much, if any, has been done in understanding the actual experiences that Muslim women go through and the relationship of these experiences with Muslim women evangelism. We have planted a Church in Kibera with the mind of reaching to its dwellers with the gospel of Christ. It was observed that the fear of divorce is strong among Muslim women, which hinder them from being accessible to the gospel. Therefore, the research of divorced Muslim women provided a platform for a better understanding of how best to approach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My connection with the research site is primarily due to the Church planting I was involved in. Also, with the ministry of Life Challenge Africa to Muslim women in Kibera, I got connected with the informants. The site was chosen because there was an alarming rate of spread of Islam in Kibera. Life Challenge Africa, which has been actively involved in Muslim evangelism, claims that for every five homes in *Mashimoni*, there is one Muslim family. In addition, the rate of divorce among the Muslims at this site is high. For this study, I selected the “New Hope” project, which is a small scale tailoring, and embroidery business set up by Life Challenge Africa. It serves primarily as a center for reaching out to Muslim women with the gospel. Currently, there are over ten Muslim women on the job training.

My belief is that Muslim women should be accorded the same rights, values and position in the society just like most other women. However, for the purposes of objectivity, I ensured that every

necessary step was taken to reduce bias. This is part of my reason for engaging in an explorative study; hence, results were given as stated by my informants without any subjective interpretation.

### **Description of the Fieldwork Site (Kibera)**

According to the Muslim Consultative Council (n.d) there are about 28.7 million Kenyans as at 1999 census. It is said that one third of these are Muslims from all the races, tribes and regions of the country. The Muslims predominate, however, along the Coast and the Northern parts of the country. Also, with a high significant concentration are the Nubians who occupy Kibera. The latter is known to be the largest slum in South of Sahara. The Kibera slum is less than fifteen minutes drive from the center of Nairobi, Kenya. Morgan (2000) states that about four hundred thousand Kenyans live in Kibera amid open sewers and garbage-grazing goats that roam the community's dirt alleyways. On the other hand, Wambugu claims that roughly a million people live in Kibera (2001). Majority of the Muslim Women in Kibera are illiterate. "There is growing concern about the low literacy levels among Muslim women throughout Africa because of the stereo-type idea, the women are the wheels and captives of their husbands" (Nessibou 1996). Life Challenge Africa (2002, 1) reports, in their publication of June issue, that East African region has a population of about 50 million Muslims with Nairobi having over fifty mosques, ten Islamic schools that offer very cheap education, medical facilities, cultural centers for teaching Islam and numerous book shops. In Kenya, Muslims are struggling for political power so as to achieve their religious supremacy. Out of the fifty Mosques in Nairobi, quite a good number is scattered in Kibera.

Wambugu (2001) describes Kibera as an area with widespread unemployment, over crowdedness, with often six to eight people sharing a small room in tin-roofed mud-huts. There is scarcity of water and electricity supply. It is characterized with deadly diseases including HIV/AIDS, poor sanitation, insecurity, and house lootings. In addition, based on my various visits to Kibera, I observed that sale of water is a lucrative business in that environment amidst the very few water taps around. About five litres of water costs as much as between five to ten Kenya shillings. The lack of water contributes tremendously to the poor level of hygiene in Kibera. There is no doubt about the high rates of spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, whooping cough, food poisoning and others due to infection and congestion in this area. HIV

and AIDS have a higher tendency of thriving in this environment due to poor medical services, poor hygiene and nutrition. Prostitution and promiscuous living becomes the answer to poverty.

AIDS infection among Nairobi prostitutes rose from 65% in 1985 to 85% in 1987 and has reached 95% proportions in 1997 in one ward known for its 'ladies of the night'. It has also been reported that 25% of Nairobi women attending antenatal clinics in 1994 were HIV positive as compared to 10% countrywide. At Kenyatta National hospital, Nairobi's largest health centre, 13% of all children admitted are HIV positive. (Niemeyer 1999, 136).

However, many are industrious. There are petty trading and grass root projects mushrooming everywhere (Wambugu 2001). Nevertheless, I noted that despite the petty trading going on, many women and children just sit around either chatting, doing domestic work or relaxing outside the houses as early as 11:00am. This is evidence of joblessness. There is sudden eruption of tribal clashes among the dwellers. Sometimes, the tribal clashes have religious sentiments undertone. In 1995, there was a fierce fight between the Luos who were predominantly Christians and the Nubians, predominantly Muslims (Kauali and Odhiambo 2001, 1). "Much of the populations in Kibera is made up of people from Kenya's Luo and Luyia tribes. The landlords, however, are Muslim Nubians, a predominantly Muslim group of Sudanese origin" (Staff Reporter 2001).

In Nairobi, these slum dwellers only occupy 1% of Nairobi's living space with about three thousand people living in a space of a soccer pitch. If all of Nairobi residents were crowded like the poor, the city would contain two hundred million residents instead of its four million people. In Kibera, a large slum of one hundred and seventy thousand people has as many as three thousand people share one toilet and one thousand may share a single water feulet (Niemeyer 1999, 193).

I observed that a single toilet could serve an entire surrounding of about over two thousand people. One of such toilets had a notice board asking for payment of ten shillings from customers per usage. For most who cannot afford the price, polythene papers become a better and cheaper option. Hence, marching on any polythene paper on the streets of Kibera can be very devastating.

Most importantly are the numbers of Churches in that vicinity. For about every five-minute walk, one sees a Church in a very small room, with a big signboard and captivating names. For example, there is one Church in a one-room house called Holy Ghost New Pentecostal Holiness Church. Most of these Churches appear to be African Independent Churches. The Roman Catholic and African Inland Churches have fairly good buildings with the former having an institution where girls learn tailoring and crafts.

There were sensitive ethical issues that are associated with this study because of the nature of the research. In an attempt to protect the human rights of informants, the following necessary steps were taken:

- From my second visit, my role as a researcher as well as the research objective was made known to them. Therefore, my informants permitted me to proceed with the research.
- The informants were asked whether their names should be used in reporting the data. Three of them opted for pseudo names, whereas one permitted me to use her real name. However, for security reasons, I used pseudo names for the four informants.
- The interviews were conducted separately and none of the interviews was done in public; rather, all was conducted behind the doors for security purposes.
- All my data collection devices such as the written notes and audiotapes were made available to them.
- My informants saw all my transcriptions, interpretations and reports.
- Before I started reporting the data, my informants' rights, interests and wishes were considered.

### **Entry**

I gained entry into the research site through verbal discussion with the leadership of Life Challenge Africa. Based on the existing relationship, I only needed to explain my aim of research and much assistance and support were given to me.

### **Informants**

Research informants were four women selected by criterion sampling, which means I found individuals who have experienced divorce directly with ages ranging from 25 to 33. One woman with four children has been divorced for seven years; another is a victim of divorced parents since she was thirteen years. Currently, she is over twenty-five years old, married with two children. Both informants hail from Moyale and still experience the realities of divorce. These two women are converts to Christianity. The third, a Muslim from Meru has been divorced for two years and she has two children, ages of eleven and nine. The fourth woman from Nyeri has been divorced for six years now with two children and she is a convert to Christianity. The number of informants chosen was a manageable one considering the time,

resources and accessibility to data. The informants are located at a single site, Mashimoni in Kibera area of Nairobi.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Considering the nature of the informants under study, the data was collected in multiple phases. The reason for the latter was to establish rapport so that informants would provide necessary data. Ten observations were made during the fieldwork. Each observation took forty-five minutes and it was made bi-weekly from September 18, 2003 to January 22, 2004. During my first visit, I concealed my role as a researcher while I played the role of a complete observer. This was very useful in my exploring the best approach to use in asking questions. Through my observations, I realized that they freely discussed their children rather than their husbands. The weakness of this type was that as I greeted some of them to gain rapport, there were withdrawals since they were not sure of my intentions. Subsequently, my role as a researcher was known as observations continued. This created a relaxed atmosphere for me to interact with them. Further, I was engaged in teaching them the Bible and sometimes took special interests in their tailoring and embroidery. Consequently, an interactive relationship was established between the researcher and the informants. The building up of relationship was necessary considering the nature of the informants.

Having established some common grounds, one-on-one in-person, long open-ended interviews were conducted for all the informants using an audiotape. The length of interviews varied from one hour to two hours. I took control of the interview to ensure that informants did not deviate from the focus. In doing a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews (Creswell 1998, 122). Interviews were conducted twice for each of those women who hail from Moyale. This gave me the opportunity of hearing their stories twice to ensure consistency. For the other two informants, interviews were conducted once and privately. As I interviewed them, I also noted reactions and emotional expressions. Of special significance were the informants' feelings regarding the experiences and what meaning they appeared to have for them.

The audiotape was useful because it enabled me to go back to the interview as many times as possible for better understanding of phenomena and accuracy in analyzing data. The tapes were replayed for the informants for verification of data. This helped informants to provide historical information and

allowed me to have control over the line of questioning. On the other hand, it showed some weaknesses as information was filtered through the views of the informants. Further, data was collected in a designated place rather than a natural setting. My presence may have introduced biased responses. Moreover, some of the informants were not intelligent in handling questions and self-expressions. The data collected through tape recording was cumbersome, time consuming and challenging to transcribe.

### **Treatment of Data**

The raw data as recorded were transcribed verbatim and subjected for analysis for each informant. The latter's descriptions were read so as to acquire a feeling from them. Significant statements, which relate directly to the phenomenon under study, were extracted. Statements, which contained the same or nearly the same meaning, were cancelled. I formulated meanings by understanding the meaning of each statement without changing the original meaning as narrated by the informants. From the formulated meanings, seven themes emerged. Each theme was common to all of the informants' descriptions. The statements, which were not relevant to the study, were discarded.

At this point, for the purposes of verification, each theme was referred to the original descriptions. This revealed extra information in the original that was not accounted for in the cluster of themes. Similarly, I dictated any information in the themes that was not in the original. This called for my re-examination of data and theme clusters. It was discovered that some themes were not related to other ones, as well as a few other themes contrasted the rest. My conviction was that some experiences, which were logically incapable of being explained nor accounted, are authentically in existence. The results yielded a detailed description of divorce, and they provided an indisputable statement about divorce phenomenon. The descriptions of the divorced women and the effects on children were analyzed in the same way. To achieve a final verification step, I returned to the informants to ask if the description formulated validated the original experience. The informants confirmed the validity.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Taped interviews of the four informants were transcribed, and the significant statements pulled from these transcriptions became raw data for analysis. As the significant statements were being extracted



from the original transcriptions, it became apparent that it would be of value to make separate lists for the three women who are divorced and the woman who was a victim of divorced parents. These significant statements were put under various themes. This is because the statements differed in their emphasis. After extraction of all significant statements from all four transcriptions, duplicate and irrelevant statements were eliminated. From the significant statements, I formulated meanings. I arrived at these meanings by reading, rereading, and reflecting upon the significant statements in the original transcriptions to get the meaning of the informants' statement in the original context.

I organized the formulated meanings into clusters of seven themes. The latter emerged and are common to all of the informants. The themes were causes of divorce, approaches to divorce, social, economic, emotional/psychological, spiritual experiences and effects on children. I referred the themes to the original descriptions in order to validate them. Each description was examined to ascertain that each theme is a true representation of the original data. An exhaustive description of the divorced phenomenon was produced by the integration of the results of the analysis as shown in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

As earlier mentioned in chapter two, seven themes emerged from my analysis. They were: causes of divorce, approaches to divorce, social, economical, emotional/psychological and spiritual experiences, and effects on children. A descriptive approach was employed in reporting my findings. Phenomenology uses a general description of the experience to present the findings of the research (Creswell 1998, 55). Therefore, this chapter describes how divorce was experienced under the following themes:

#### Causes of Divorce

Apart from being a tolerated practice in Islam, divorce has multifaceted causes of misfortune and has eventually metamorphosed women's life into disaster. From the most trivial reasons to the very despicable ones, marriages are terminated at such alarming rates. It is unfathomable. Bureaucratic ease of process and execution of these divorces has not worthily helped the volume of divorces in Islam. Findings reveal the following factors amidst others:

#### Religious Factors

My findings showed that the most hostile and somewhat irreconcilable difference that resulted in divorce was a "defection" from Islam to Christianity. This is worse than betrayal and viewed as a spiritual felony not just by the husband of the woman but by the entire family and indeed the Islamic community to which they belong.

My husband did quarrel with me whenever I returned from Bible Studies, he will say that the *mzungu* (white lady) has bought me over to Christianity with money. One time he collected my Swahili Bible from me. He really mistreated me because I became a Christian. One day he walked out of the house as though he was on safari (journey) and *na huo ndio mwisho nilimuona* (that is the last I saw him) [Muhammad 2004].

Islam empowers the male people so much so they are to be regarded as absolute lords whose words are not to be questioned. Husbands are meant to be strict with their spouses and often the relationship is classified as that between a subject and a lord. All the women made such statements as “my husband was very strict”, “he neglected me”, “when he returns home he is not to be asked about anything including his whereabouts”.

I really thank God for that. I really have freedom now. Am happy am divorced. Now that I am divorced, I am like a bird on the tree. I can look for my food and all that I want. Now I have to work for money to take care of my children and pay my rent. I will sweat and get money. But when I was with my husband it was very hard. Muslim ladies are not free. The husbands don't allow the wives to go and work. When I got my divorce, I saw that all my ways are now good (Muhammad 2004).

Directly opposite to the above chauvinism are the passiveness of women and an absolute denial of all that could be termed marital rights in Islam. Women were not to be heard. Whatever feelings they had were to be bottled within. These naturally gravitated to rebellions and outbursts that shred the marriage. “That man did not allow me to think for myself or live my life the way I wanted it. He was always dictating to me what to do and what not to do. It was a problem socializing with people” (Hasan 2004).

Men can marry as many as four wives and can divorce any of the existing ones at will in order to marry another one. Beating is highly recommended in Islam to be dished out by a man to his wife. It is actually claimed to be a way of showing love and affection to the woman. “They always say that when a husband loves his wife, he will always beat her. That is a sign of love. But it is not true. Beatings do not show love. It is enemy” (Muhammad 2004). What a contradiction between ideology and practical reality!. Men perceive love in beatings whereas the women receive it as cruelty.

#### Social and Emotional Factors

Due to the polygamous nature of Islamic marriage, there are always scrambles and tussles for the love and attention of the man. The women interviewed complained of rejection, lack of attention, lack of love, dislike, and so on. A particular lady was “pushed” out of her marriage by the influence and manipulations of the first wife.

In a bid to out-do other wives, most of the wives engage in competitive scheming mostly by discrediting or putting other wives in disrepute before the husband. They used lies and unfriendly gestures

as significant part of the armory. Sometimes, the co-wives consulted the witch doctors for spiritual powers to eject a wife from the marriage.

She is the one who made me separate with my husband. In my marriage, my life was very difficult. We lived in different houses and we became big enemies. She feels jealous about me and says that I have taken away her husband so she always says, 'I will kill her'. I don't know what love is (Muhammad 2004).

This is aggravated by the consistent beatings of the wife. "Islam regards this as husbandly affection. He was always beating me with wire," said Muhammad (2004). The women were forbidden to socialize without the permission of the husband. Hence, the husbands determined their friends and where they should go.

### Sexual Factors

Most sexual relationships in marriage were at the initiation of the men. It is a function of the men whenever they wanted it irrespective of what the women felt like. "Yes, if you don't satisfy him on the bed, he can divorce you and get another wife because it is very easy to get two or three women when they need" (Muhammad 2004). On the other side of the coin, the women's sexual needs were irrelevant. All they could do was to wait and hoped that the men would beckon on them in the midst of their rivals. It appears that the women were not fulfilled sexually due to the absence of the man. In stiff competitions between the wives, to be "summoned" by the husband is seen as a privilege. This, among other factors, can entice some of Muslim women to engage in adulterous acts. Surprisingly, men freely engage in extra-marital affairs but it must not be that women commit adultery.

He was a drunkard and he neglected us. Most of the time, he will go out with other women. Those were the things I got tired of. He is not around for one week, when he comes back he doesn't want to be asked, lying to me. Those were the things I got fed up with at a certain point (Salim 2004).

Although Salim like other informants got fed up with her husband's attitude, she neither attempted to initiate divorce nor retaliate by living an immoral life.

### Approaches to Divorce

Either party in the marriage can initiate divorce based on the various causes already discussed but only the man can grant the divorce. The women claimed that contrary to Islamic belief, their husbands divorced them without issuing to them letters of divorce. They termed this act, “a malicious” one because without an official letter of divorce they cannot re-marry. The informants had to insist that letters of divorce be given to them. Through the help of the *Sheik* and relatives in Nairobi, their letters of divorce were given to them.

He refused to divorce me. I wrote him a letter telling him that he was not taking care of his children and me. So it is better he divorced me but he said that a woman couldn't ask for divorce letter. He is the one to say whether he will divorce her or not. So I had to get to the *Sheik* and with his help I was given my divorce letter (Muhammad 2004).

In the course of divorce any party can make apologies. This may or may not be accepted. However, my informants were never given that opportunity to apologize neither did their husbands attempt to ask for reconciliation.

In all approaches to the divorce, the man determines who keeps custody of the children. There are basically three approaches to divorce but common to all of them is the fact that: (a) the dowry paid on the woman at marriage must be returned, and in case the dowry was not fully paid, it must of necessity be paid before divorce could take place. Unfortunately, as of the time of writing this paper, the husbands of these women have neither returned the dowry nor completed the payment. (b) Procedure involves the filling of forms in modern times; (c) after divorce a woman cannot remarry her former husband without having married another man first. The reason being that, the man will want his wife to try out another husband, to compare and contrast her experiences with both husbands. My informants said they were not prepared to marry another husband because the story would be the same.

The informants went through the three types of divorce. In the first type, warnings were issued to the women to refrain from whatever their husbands claimed they were doing wrongly. Subsequently, after the second warning, the third was followed with the final *talaka* (divorce). “I was thrown out of my home on the third warning”, says Hasan (2004). The man can remarry the following day after divorce but it takes the woman a minimum of three months to remarry. “I have been divorced for two years now, but I am not planning to re-marry. But this man has re-married”(Hasan 2004). However, if the woman is pregnant, the

divorce has to be delayed until she is delivered of the baby. There is a possibility of the divorce being withdrawn or totally dismissed after the delivery.

A woman can initiate divorce if in her opinion she has been grossly mistreated in the relationship. However, she would need witnesses to back up her claim. Muhammad with a long laughter said that it was not according to the Qur'an for a woman to initiate divorce; she heard from fellow Muslim women that it was possible for a woman to initiate divorce (2004). A *Sheik* was to be approached with the complaints so that he could write to call for the husband as well as the witnesses to validate the claim. If the woman's claims are proved, the *Sheik* then issues a letter of divorce. Nevertheless, my informants despite all the mistreatments from their husbands did not initiate divorce.

It is quite common to see the husband walk out of the marriage. Most times, the husband does this to punish his wife with such an embarrassment and to make her unable to go into another relationship. In this circumstance the woman is at the mercy of the man requesting him for a divorce. However, the woman can appeal for the intervention of the *Sheik*.

He refused to divorce me. I wrote him a letter telling him he was not taking care of his children and me. "We are getting a lot of difficulties, so it is better for you to write me a letter of divorce". He said, "A woman can't ask for a divorce letter, I am the one to say whether I will divorce you or not, so you don't ask for it". So he mistreated me. It was 2000 he told me the last time he was going to give me the divorce letter. So I went to a *Sheik* here in Nairobi and narrated all my difficulties and problems. I was given a form that I filled and it was sent to him. In the letter, they wrote him, "If she is your wife, you can come and explain". He refused to come, so the *Sheik* gave me a divorce letter (Muhammad 2004).

In all instances the husband is meant to compensate the woman financially based on his overall status. The amount due to the woman is calculated by the *Sheik* based on the following variables:

- The financial capability of the man as declared by himself.
- The number of children within the marriage, if the man concedes their custody to the woman.
- Two-third of the total assets of the man should usually be awarded to the woman.

Though this is the ideal as propagated by Islam, the reality is far from it. All the informants claimed they were yet to receive the financial compensation for them and their kids as charged by the *Sheik*.

### Aftermath of Divorce

Like most vices on the surface of the earth, the divorce experiences leave footprints and marks behind. Some of these marks are proved indelible as each interviewed woman has only tales of woes whenever the question of divorce surfaces. The tales expectedly differed to an extent from woman to another basically due to the differences in the circumstances that led to the divorce, the events during the divorce and life after the divorce.

Table 1 below shows a summary of the comparison of Islamic ideals with data.

**TABLE 1**  
**A COMPARISON OF ISLAMIC IDEALS WITH DATA**

	<b>Islamic Ideology</b>	<b>Reality</b>
<b>View on marriage</b>	A solemn act	Purely a terminable contract
<b>Grounds for divorce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adultery</li> <li>• Rejection of Islam</li> <li>• Obvious and embarrassing misconducts by the wife over a period of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejection of Islam</li> <li>• Wife rivalry</li> <li>• Desire for a new wife for a man with four already</li> <li>• Sexual dissatisfaction of the man</li> <li>• Sometime no reason given</li> </ul>
<b>Divorce proceedings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three warnings to wife from husband over a minimum period of three months. "I divorce you" has to be said three times to the wife</li> <li>• Both men and women can initiate divorce</li> <li>• Husband should meet <i>Sheik</i> and issue wife with letter of <i>talaka</i> (divorce)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man can issue warning three times in succession or at will</li> <li>• Only men initiate divorce</li> <li>• Husbands walk away from marriage without issuing <i>talaka</i></li> </ul>
<b>Alimony</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divorced wife and her children are entitled to a periodic sum from the husband as calculated by the <i>Sheik</i> based on the man's declared income</li> <li>• The divorced wife is entitled to two thirds of the man's property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None of the women admitted receipt of any financial assistance</li> <li>• No divorced woman received any property or material support from the previous husband</li> </ul>
<b>Child custody</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on mutual consent and agreement between the two parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers and fathers can forcefully take the children depending on situations or circumstances on ground</li> </ul>

### Social Experiences

The family is considered as the strong tie binding together the entire Muslim society. The structure is centrally controlled in such a manner that a breakage in the system has a lot of social implications especially for the women and children. Damaging social consequences have followed divorces of the women I spoke to.

Most of the informants voiced out the issue of social degradation. "People look down on us", one said. This could follow from the societal and religious value that confers a level of respect on married women. People are not to talk to or treat another man's wife anyhow; it is an utter disrespect to her husband. Therefore the divorce leaves them out of the league of responsible and respectable women in the society.

Because it is my husband who walked out on me, it was very very hard because everybody was saying that there was a problem with me and that I was responsible for his going away. People felt I should have done something to prevent this. Whenever I talked to people I felt many of them were condemning me. A time came when I said, "I am not going to talk about it, I will not socialize with people and I will stay alone". I felt like running away from Nairobi where I live to a place where nobody knows me (Salim 2004).

Most of them also feel sexually vulnerable and open to intimidation and harassment by men basically due to their emotional state of loneliness and dependability. "If a man comes to my house and says 'I love you', and I don't accept him, he can team up with another man that I had refused earlier to hurt me" (Muhammad 2004). Such is the precarious predicament of these women. However, one of the women claimed she was not being harassed. This she attributed to her faith and consistent prayers to Allah (Hasan 2004).

It is seen as a curse for a Muslim woman to be converted to another religion especially Christianity. According to the Muslim converts, they suffer from family and societal rejections. There are many pressures from people for them to denounce their newly found faith. "When I became a Christian, I felt my father also divorced me because I used to be dad's favorite child. He doesn't want to see me anymore, he cannot hug me, he cannot greet me, and he doesn't want to see me in his house. I felt like he divorced me" (Salim 2004). On the other hand, one of the informants said that her family accepted her back without any stress. This is because she is still faithful to her Islamic faith, which is the family religion. Coupled with this is also the loss of friends. The rejection is almost absolute. Almost all of them



wished they could relocate from where they are, to a new environment where they could be given equal chance along with others. For those that converted to Christianity the rejection was uttermost. Their daily life they said, was characterized with blame, condemnation and loneliness. It has taken them another level of resolution to hold on to their profession in Christ.

The women in the society regard the divorced women as potential husband snatchers and treat them as such. They related some episode where wives would snap at them embarrassingly when they felt they were spending a lot of time with their husbands. "We are suspects among married women", narrated Salim (2004). They said it became convenient to gossip about them to the extent that the women began to believe there was something wrong with them. These treatments meted out to them with no one to trust, yet they are answerable to everyone. However, the story was very different with Hasan who is still devoted to Islam. She has tremendous support from all and sundry and her plight is being sympathized with and therefore besieged with a lot of help and care, according to her.

The bitterest reality these divorced women said they contend with is their children. The children definitely share in the bitter pill of rejection administered to their mothers. The children are seen as a taboo along with their mothers and therefore they do miss their fathers whose absence they now believe is the reason for their rejection by the society. They narrated of how the children became very angry, helpless and eventually became rebellious as a way of fighting the rejection they felt inside. The children sometimes stared at other children with jealousy for having the fatherly care they lacked, explained a mother.

#### Economic Experiences

Islam advocates total economic dependence of the woman on her husband. The women were forbidden to work and earn an income of their own. This is seen to be an avenue for the woman to become entirely dependent on her husband. As narrated earlier, the divorcees were awarded financial ransoms by the *Sheiks* to the tune of two-thirds of the man's fortune, though none of the women acknowledged the receipt of their alimony. "I was left with twenty Kenyan Shillings", says Salim (2004). This picture becomes more depressing when we remember those converted divorcees; their family and friends do not associate with them any more. It is seen as a crime in Islam to extend any type of help to these women.

“He is not helping us at all and this is the seventh year. When a *Sheik* called him, he did not respond because he knew he was going to pay per day hundred shillings for seven years. Because he is a *Sheik*, he only goes around with his Qur’an as he claims he has no money, yet he is taking care of the other wife and her children” (Muhammad 2004). They are expected to seek jobs in the same society they are seen as taboos, how frustrating! All my informants lamented greatly about the challenge of not having any job. Muhammad and Hasan are working as house helps few days a week and earning so little. At a point during my separate interviews with them, they begged me to help them get any type of job because things were so difficult for them. Although Hasan said that her relatives helped her, she declared that she owed her landlord three months of rent and her two children had been at home for one year for the lack of school fees. Contrarily, things were different with Salim, who said she had no single job at all that she was doing (2004).

Responses to the question of their economic experiences revealed hardships and pains with no obvious solution in sight. For the same reasons stated above, most of these women said they lost everything, they were uncertain whether they would make it through or survive. Due to the difficulty of finding jobs, economic empowerment to take care of basic necessities such as feeding, paying hospital bills, house rent and the likes becomes quite a challenge. For these women, it is hard catching up with life let alone enjoying it.

So I was very much affected because even for that year, my son left school, stayed at home. It was very hard to catch up with life because I didn’t have a job and had two kids to feed, house rent to pay and many other things. My daughter also was sickly and most of the time I used to take her to hospital. Many times she got sick at night and I didn’t have a single cent. So I will just cry, I feel so helpless, but I thank God. It brought me close to God because I knew that at that time He was the only refuge (Salim 2004).

However, they acknowledged receiving help from some of their friends. “I live on friends charity”, said Muhammad (2004). Hasan who remained a Muslim after her divorce said help sometimes comes from her relatives as she asks Allah to provide for her needs.

### Emotional and Psychological Experiences

The pains they went through left all the women with wounds they were finding difficult to allow to heal. Emotional and psychological consequences that followed their ordeals cannot be overemphasized.

During my observations, I noticed that each time the women recounted their experiences, there were emotional expressions of anger, sighing, tendencies to cry, a brief silence with a deep breathing and then their stories continued. This to a large extent showed the state of minds of these women.

They all have a general resentment for male folks. This negativism towards men is an offshoot of the treatments they received from the men. It is interesting to note that while Muhammad and Salim are seeking refuge in their newfound love in Jesus to help in taking away the bitterness they feel, they are still tasting the bitterness towards their ex-husbands. The case is more serious for Hasan. She vows never to forgive her ex-husband or talk to him.

In my opinion, such a self-vow as made by Hasan is a way to get out from their personal pain. Psychologically, the wounded women tend to give a self-vow, such as, "I will never forgive him", "I will never remarry", "I will never accept him again", "Staying alone protects me from him", and so forth. "Sometimes I can't hug my son because he is a man". Though the resentments are common, they seem to differ as to whether they miss the men. One actually acknowledged missing him for the sake of the children. Divorce is something one cannot forget. It is alive in the thought and dream of the woman for each minute. It is described as being devastating, leaving the woman useless and having no reason to live if not for the children (Salim 2004).

There is also the issue of fear and insecurity. Anxiety and worry prevail in their lives. Apprehension and uncertainty have made them lose their sense of self-worth. Their ability to trust fellow human beings, especially men, has been badly eroded. Their self-confidence has been shattered leaving them in the valley of rejection and quagmire of pain. They did wish to close this chapter of their lives and loose memory of what happened. "This is one chapter I wish to close in my life but there are fruits from it" (Salim 2004).

Due to the rejection they suffer, some of them said they were forced to feel self-pity for themselves. There is also the feeling of betrayal and sometimes guilt. Some are yet to come around from the shock of what happened to them; they wallow in confusion and anger, which naturally they do take out on other areas of life and on people around them.

I am very very angry, I am bitter. I can never forgive him. I do not even want to see him or hear about him. Because he beat me and hurt me on the left side of my waist and am

still in pains today. I will never forgive that man. I had a shock for one year (Hasan 2004).

They are struggling with depression and life is worth living just because of their children. They seem not to be able to come to terms with what they feel within, which is compounded by what they have to cope with externally. When confronted on the grounds of their bitterness, they seem to justify the way they feel.

Yes, I have to be bitter because I am stranded, struggling with my children. If I go to my relatives, they don't want to see me, because they say I always have problems. They say, "who told you to go and marry Muslim *Sheik*?" I am separated from my relatives and friends because of one person, and he doesn't take me as a woman. He treats me like a slave. Even if he comes with elders today to beg me, and say "my wife, I am sorry, forgive me", I don't think I will forgive him. It is better to die, so that I can separate from him, *kabisa* (completely) [Muhammad 2004].

The above statement brings this question to mind. Is Muhammed really happy and free, as she claimed earlier on? This shows that there are many bottlenecks that these women have with the issue of marriage.

### Spiritual Experiences

The women gave different versions of what they considered as their spiritual experiences. While Muhammad and Hasan grew stronger in their faith in God and Allah respectively, Salim lost faith and felt God forsook her at the time she needed Him most. Worst affected of all are those women that converted to Christianity. They were made to feel that their divorce was a punishment from Allah for renouncing Islam for the God of Christians.

There was thus the temptation to reconvert to Islam, as that would assure them of help from their family and friends and of a full acceptance by their society.

I didn't trust God at all. That is why I felt like a Muslim. Whether I pray or not, God will just do whatever He wants. So there is no need of prayers. Even reading the Bible was very hard for me because somehow I felt I could not trust God, and again there was a time I remember I felt I should not entertain Christians in my place because they were telling me what I did not want to hear (Salim 2004).

On the contrary, although affected, Muhammad professed that she was enjoying her Christian faith rather than Islam. According to her, she never saw any chapter in the Qur'an that talked about the second coming of Muhammad, whereas the Bible stated that Jesus would come back again. Therefore, she is happy because even if she dies now she knows that she is surely going to heaven (Muhammad 2004). For

Hasan (2004), her Allah has not failed her. She faithfully goes to the Mosque for prayers and keeps the beliefs and teachings of Islam.

All the informants shared their experiences of sadness. Even when they claimed to be happier after divorce none of them expressed joy. Whenever I asked each one of them about the possibility of reconciliation, they reacted angrily and became even sadder.

### **Effects of Divorce on the Children**

Divorce affects children destructively too, as expressed by the divorced mothers. Sahid is a victim of divorced parents. In this section, I will describe the effects of divorce on the children as accounted by the four informants but heavily drawn from Sahid's story.

Sahid described what she believed caused the separation of her parents; there was quarreling all the time. Her mother was denied a lot of freedom. On many occasions as a child, together with her siblings, she watched the parents fight and her mother being thoroughly beaten. She could not stand or forget such a sight in her life. The memories are so fresh to her. "I came from a bad home because my father and mother were quarreling even when we were kids. That night, I remember, they fought at night, it was around midnight"(Sahid 2004). She said that from what she observed about her parents, the easiest thing in Islam would be for a man to divorce his wife.

"So they were just fighting and he chased her from the house. In the morning, he wrote a letter and sent it through his brother, saying the woman was no longer his wife and he has given her three *talakas*, so she couldn't come back. Just like that"(Sahid 2004). Her mother was chased away without being given anything, so she lost everything even her children. After the father took the children, he banned both mother and children from any form of communication. "I remembered my brother was three years, and my mother wanted to take him but my dad didn't accept"(Sahid 2004).

In my data analysis, similar themes as observed among the divorced women emerged in the children's experiences, and I describe them as follows:

### Social Experiences

The value, which the society places on the children, is high such that there is a lot of empathy for children from divorced homes. Neighbors and friends are willing to help in the up-bringing of the children. According to Sahid, a Nubian lady sometimes was good to them. After cooking, she called them to eat. When they were going to school, they could leave their small brother with her.

Although the neighbors and friends are helpful, the children are still in defect of sociality. They always feel bad in the midst of their peers whose parents are not divorced. "I feel like crying when we attend any function and see my children gazing at other children with their fathers. I can't stand how my children are lost in thought"(Salim 2004). While other children of divorced parents were missing their fathers, Sahid was missing her mother. This shows that children are deeply affected when even one parent is absent. The children of divorced parents often feel intimidated and have a sense of pity and sorry through people. "When I don't go to school, break time my friend Patricia comes and asks me, 'why have you not come'? When I tell her the reason, she just feels sorry for me and goes away"(Sahid 2004).

### Economic Experiences

The direct impact of divorce on the children created the worst pains in the hearts of my informants. These mothers had big dreams of what the future might become for their children, but now dreams seem unrealistic. Often the children were thrown out of school for failure to pay fees. "Yes, divorce affected me so much, such that sometimes I would not go to school because my dad would make me sit down and look after my small sisters. Sometimes, it even took a month for me going back to school"(Sahid 2004). For Hasan, her two children have been sitting at home for the past one year because she could not afford the school fees.

As economic pressure kept mounting on the informants in the area of school fees, feeding, clothing and shelter became sour points which have caused tears to flow from both mothers and children. All my informants testified of how many times they had watched their children sleep with empty stomachs. Divorce is one area that facilitates denial of human rights. All the children were denied their basic rights and this is enough to destroy a child's destiny. Sahid narrated how sometimes her stepmother would deny

them food and made them work so hard in the house. At a point, with the influence of the stepmother, Sahid dropped out of school, which revealed why till date she did not have a good educational background.

#### Emotional/Psychological Experiences

Sahid was only thirteen years old when her mother was divorced and she was the oldest in a family of five. She said that at that time it was so difficult for her to accept what had happened. Some of the grown-up children are said to be bitter with their parents. This bitterness is exhibited sometimes through the kind of questions they asked their mothers about their fathers. As for Sahid, she had her bitterness more against both her father and stepmother.

The children could see their mothers struggling alone to bring them up in all areas. Once in a while, they blamed their mothers for allowing their fathers to walk out of the marriage. The mothers sometimes tried to explain to them what the realities were, but the children did not seem to understand. Hasan's children were indifferent as to whether they would see their father again, because they were happy that at last their father stopped beating their mother. Meanwhile, Muhammad's last child has lost her memory of who her father was because the father left them when she was only two years old. This created a huge vacuum between father and child, which might never be filled.

Sahid indicated that she did not learn many things as she was growing up. Some of the biological changes that came as a result of puberty were taught in school. Single-handedly, she managed her life with only her few Muslim friends to advise her. All my informants' children lacked parental care. They were left only for the mothers to provide the guide for their lives. It will be difficult to explain to these children what the love of a father can be. "I find it so difficult to relate to God as a father"(Sahid 2004). With reference to Sahid's statement, God as a father suggests a cruel and insensitive God. The grown-up daughters are becoming resentful to the opposite sex, whereas the boys are posing as challenges for the mothers to discipline.

Based on the emotional problems, Sahid sought for love elsewhere, unfortunately in a wrong man. She recalled how she met one man on the railway and went with that man to his home. This is what she said:

After class eight, I just got hard time because it was three years after school and I was just like a maid in the house. So I decided to get married because my father refused to get me to a secondary school. He told me 'sit here, our tribe are not many learned, how can you go to school?' So I decided to get married. It was not my choice, but I said, if I get married, it would be better for me because if I run away from home my father will kill me. But if I get married, he will not touch me. So that is how I got married to a man I didn't know. We just met on the road, then after three months we decided to get married. He was jobless and even staying in his father's house. So it was hard for me but I said that it was the only luck that I could have (Sahid 2004).

She lives in deep regret and fear of divorce as she lamented over the choice of husband she made.

The trends of events in her marriage are not very different from what she knows her mother experienced.

### Spiritual Experiences

The truth remains that the spiritual lives of parents directly or indirectly affect their children. The parents are the spiritual compass of their children; hence, when a child has nobody to properly direct him/her spiritually, such a child can end up in wrong hands. Some of my informants' children have not yet understood fully what is expected of them in terms of spiritual matters. However, they love to attend Church or Mosque and worship with other children. Hasan said she taught her children how to pray to Allah and do good things so that Allah could protect and provide for them. The greatest joy of Muhammad was that if she and her children die today, they would be with Jesus. Although the divorce was painful for her, she thanked God that her children have found the truth about Jesus. The same experience went for Salim regarding her children. "Nobody is disturbing me at all over my children's faith. I have the right to choose where my children will go for worship"(Salim 2004).

While the other three informants were giving their children spiritual guidance, Sahid was left on her own to find the way. She was totally confused on which way to find joy, love, peace and self-esteem. She got actively involved in reading the Qur'an and practicing Islamic teachings. She went as many times as possible to Mosque to pray, searching for the way. But she realized that Islam was so difficult for her to understand. In 1994, she joined the New Hope Project where she was told the Bible story for four years. In 1998, she heard that Jesus could take away burdens. Since she was carrying a lot of burdens, she surrendered her life to Christ. In doing so, for the first time she could relate with God as Father.

Table 2 below shows the consequences and effects of divorce on the women and their children.



**TABLE 2**  
**CONSEQUENCES AND EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON THE AFFECTED**

<b>Experiences</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Children</b>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society sees them as deviants</li> <li>• They loose society acceptance and respect</li> <li>• Sexual vulnerability</li> <li>• Intimidation from men</li> <li>• Rejection from family and friends</li> <li>• Other married women treat them with suspicion</li> <li>• Points of gossip</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive sympathy by some members of the society</li> <li>• Not very sociable due to absence of their fathers</li> <li>• Socially intimidated by the sense of pity and empathy of people</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financially incapacitated</li> <li>• Inability to pay children's school fees</li> <li>• Lives on the gifts from friends</li> <li>• Forced to seek jobs with meager income in a hostile environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Totally an offshoot of what their mother experience economically</li> <li>• Some have dropped out of school due to inability to pay school fees</li> <li>• Children labour to help with the situation at home</li> </ul>
Emotional/psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General resentment for male folks</li> <li>• Bitterness, pain, anger and un-forgiveness</li> <li>• Distrust and emotional withdrawal from all and sundry</li> <li>• Loneliness and self-pity</li> <li>• Low self worth and esteem</li> <li>• Fear and insecurity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bitterness</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Distorted perception of life</li> <li>• Distrust and resentment</li> <li>• Void of fatherly or motherly care as the case may be</li> <li>• They seek love and acceptance in other people or things</li> </ul>
Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some grew stronger in the faith (Christian or Islamic) towards God, others lost faith</li> <li>• Spiritual condemnation</li> <li>• For those that became Christians, there is the temptation to go back to Islam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Difficult to relate to God as father</li> <li>• Generally they tend towards the inclination of their guiding parent</li> </ul>

### **Interpretation**

As I explored the world of divorced Muslim women in Kibera, I realized that divorce mentality begins right from the start of marriage. Muslim women enter into marriage with great fear of divorce based on other women's experiences and what they know about Islamic position on women. This mental state suggests why in their narration of life experiences, they rewind their memories as far back as the causes they experienced before finally the divorce came through. With their rewind memories, themes of causes

assigned to men was described by these women as manipulation and unnecessary control over their wives. This was evident when they said that their husbands came back home after weeks of absence, only to beat their wives when asked of their whereabouts. In other words, there are abuses and over usage of power by the men. My findings have revealed that many Muslim women in Kibera are treated by their husbands as fixed assets that can be easily acquired and disposed at will. Some of the emotional traumas experienced by these women might need a lifetime to heal.

While there is a slight difference between the experiences these divorced women went through and what their children faced, the fact still remains that there are huge interlinks between their experiences and effects of divorce on their children. The two are inseparable in all ramifications. The impact of divorce on mothers pass on to their children, especially their daughters as they think of marriage.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned in my first chapter, little has been written on the topic of divorced Muslim women in Kibera. Therefore, there was no database for the study. This again explains why the literature review is coming up at this time. The aim of literature in this study was to serve as basis for comparing and contrasting findings. Some literature has been provided in a general sense about divorce in Islam and this formed the basis of my review.

The Muslims claim that the Qur'an is a unique book having an unquestionable authenticity in its contents and order, a quality, which no other book of any kind has ever enjoyed. In the Muslim view, these claims leave no doubt as to the Qur'an's purity, originality and totality of its text (Abdalati 1975, 192). Ignorance of the knowledge of the Qur'an is believed to have contributed immensely to the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Islamic divorce. "Many people have either misinterpreted or misunderstood the facts that govern the issue of divorce in Islam and have consequently presented a distorted picture of the matter. The system of divorce in Islam is the most ideal system of divorce ordained by any religion" (Right of Divorce in Islam n.d). Further, Islam permits divorce because it ordains laws that take human nature into consideration and they claim that divorce is sometimes the only solution to serious marital problems (Right of Divorce n.d). However, the claims and position of Islamic scholars on the system of divorce is questionable in comparison with my findings.

Muslims believe that divorce was revealed at Al-Madinah (Medina) and was expected to deal with the social life of the community. This was a reaction against the custom of pagan Arabs. Prior to the advent of Islam, in some societies and religious doctrines, only the death of a spouse or adultery could lead to divorce. Once divorce occurred due to adultery, neither of the parties could re-marry. This was considered as an over-restriction. On the other hand, some other societies permitted an easy breaking of marriage and

frequent divorces, and this was considered as an over-liberalization. Therefore, Muslims claim that Islam offered a moderate view on divorce (Hasan 1999, 1).

All my informants however attributed divorce to the easiness of it. The easiness of divorce only shows a low level of commitment and value to the family (Zwemer 1926, 48). The moderate view of divorce in Islam appears to be no more than over liberalization for Muslim men especially when the view is evaluated in light of my findings. Divorce can take place for any trivial or serious issues. Polygamy, which is promoted by Islam, is an excellent platform for divorce to occur. Parshal says, "The real cause of Islamic family life is not polygamy, but easiness of divorce" (1995, 24). It is claimed that Islam stopped the common practice of female infanticide, reduced the multiplicity of legal wives to four and stipulated that each wife must be treated equally (Weeks 1978, xxxi). It is impossible to treat four wives equally, however.

Islam encourages men to beat their wives, which is believed by men to be a way of showing their love for wives. A woman's misconduct can lead her to being sold, killed or rejected by her husband (Goodwin 1994, 246). Women can be admonished when disloyal and ill-conducted, or they can be refused sex or beaten lightly (Surah 4: 34). Nkangi in an attempt to explain the need for a husband to beat his wife as a way of disciplining her appears to be contradicting issues. According to Nkangi, divorce is strongly undesirable or nearly forbidden where there is no good reason for it because Muslims are forbidden by their religion to initiate harm or inflict injury upon one another (n.d, 35). The problem with Nkangi's explanation is that he failed to differentiate between beating and inflicting of injury. Muhammad, one of my informants went through a lot of emotional stresses as a result of the beatings with wire that she received often from her husband. Similarly, Hasan is deeply bitter against her husband for injuring her waist during one of his beatings on her. She claims that till date it gives her medical problems. I consider that if Islam sees women as God's creature, there should be a better way of correcting a wife other than beating.

In comparing and contrasting Surah 2:228 with Surah 4:34, however, it will be observed that although Islam claims to solicit for equality, there is a difference between man and woman in all aspects of divorce as experienced by my informants. The Muslim Women's League notes, "It is clear that the Qur'an states that there is a 'degree' of difference with regards to the rights of men and women in divorce, but it is not

clear ‘how much’ and ‘what’ privileges a man is entitled to” (1999). The experiences of the divorced women under study showed a wide range of difference with regard to the right of men and women in divorce. Men were not answerable to any authority as per how they treated their wives. The informants’ statements affirm that there are three types of divorce. “In Muslim countries which apply the law according to the Qur’an, Muslim family law says that divorce is allowed. The man can give *talaka* (divorce) by saying ‘I divorce thee’ three times to his wife, or over a minimum period of three months. A woman, however, is not permitted to give her husband *talaka*” (Sutcliffe 1997, 95). In contrast, another irrevocable form of divorce initiated by the wife rather than the husband is called *Khula* (Nkangi n.d, 44). However, the tension comes in on who is qualified to initiate divorce. In principle, Muslim women can initiate divorce, but in practice it is observed that men initiate it.

Some of the experiences of my informants went beyond Islamic practices to cultural expectations and values. This clearly brought out the inter-relationship between Islam and culture in terms of family system.

It is practically impossible to disentangle the culturally derived reasons for divorce from Qur’anic teachings. A wife must remain obedient, fulfill her domestic duties, gratify her husband’s sexual desires, safeguard her honour and be respectful. She must be faithful to her husband both in herself and with regard to his property. Any breach of these requirements calls for divorce (EL-Solh and Mabro 1995, 42).

Based on the findings, it appears that marriage in Islam is a contract rather than a solemn act. Any breaching of contract by women automatically leads to divorce. Although my informants did not go into details of what their own offences could have been, but the fact remains that based on the terms of contract the husbands terminated the marriage contracts. However, as the marriage was terminated based on Islamic demands or authority, the procedures and approaches were defaulted against the women. For example, Islam advocates that a divorced woman should be given a letter of divorce to set her free. But my informants had to fight on their own with the assistance of a local *Sheik* and relatives in obtaining the letters.

Islamic inheritance law allots two thirds of the property to the male child and only one-third to the female (Weeks 1978, 386). My informants have male and female children but unfortunately were not given anything financially or materially on divorce. One of my informants stated that after divorce, her brother-in-law gave her a portion of the husband’s land in Ethiopia, but sadly through the influence of the

first wife, her husband reclaimed the land back leaving her and the children with nothing (Muhammad 2004).

An area of interest is on how Islam practices its acclaimed beliefs. In case of divorce, the husband is financially responsible for the wife although there is no formula for the amount of support he should be giving the wife. The amount is negotiable based on the man's income (Surah 2: 236-237, 241; 33: 49; 65: 4-7). The result of this study clearly shows the level of economic stress my informants are going through because the Islamic law on the woman's economic right was not actualized for the divorced women. The *Shariah* rule of the man taking care of the divorced wife's maintenance is disregarded; hence, making this woman to wear out quickly (Trimingham 1949, 9). An Islamic scholar assumes that basically the position of women in Islam is inferior to that of the male, although it is far superior to their position among the animists prior to the coming of Islam (Weeks 1978, 105). Although Muslims claim that Islamic law in principle has made so many heavy demands on divorce, those demands do not seem to be the best way to discourage people from the act of divorce. Rather, "The Qur'an allows easy divorce. It does not impose certain conditions or limits on this painful action which causes a great deal of suffering among women, treating them as if they were a piece of furniture" (Inzoberi 2002, 23). It may be necessary for Islam to find a way of enforcing or settling issues of injustice towards women in the area of divorce.

Muslims believe that sexual relationship affects individual lives, children, purity and well being of the society. In Islam, sex is a very serious issue especially to the man as it is considered a solemn act (Surah 2:223). "As for those women from whom you fear disloyalty, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them" (Surah 4:34). One of my informants was divorced for assumingly not satisfying her husband sexually amidst other accusations. But there is no provision in Islam for the woman to express her own lack of satisfaction by her husband. It is only the husband who can walk out of the house for his satisfaction and return after weeks without any explanation to his wife.

Getui and Ayanga presume that the Qur'an and Hadith accord a high status to Muslim women. According to them, the society that ignores the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith oppresses women (2002,41). We can now detect a tension among Muslim scholars' claims, the actual practices, and Qur'anic teachings of the status of women in Islam. "While the most eminent Islamic scholars agree on the

importance given within the Islamic teachings to marriage and the family and to women's education and rights, the position of women, in many Islamic societies, is marked by inequality" (Das 1991, 2).

The Qur'an advises the husband and wife to mutually agree on the custodian of the children after divorce (Surah 2: 232-233). Children of up to the age of about seven is given to the mother. It is expected that a child later chooses between his mother and father for custody purposes. This should be settled in a manner that balances the interest of both parents and well-being of the child (Badawi n.d). However, in Egypt, the divorced woman loses both the children and housing (Goodwin 1994, 113). The situation in Egypt is not too different from that in Kenya as narrated by my informants.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has achieved its purpose in that it has exhaustively described the phenomenon of divorce among Muslim women in Kibera. It is hoped that the findings have added credence to the limited data on divorce experiences among Muslim women. It is ascertained that Islam as an ideology differs from actual practices being carried out by its people (Muslims). The actual process of divorce along with its causes, approaches and consequences is contrary to what Islam propagates. Divorce mentality starts far before people get married. The greatest fear of Muslim women can be said to be the fear of divorce due to its disastrous consequences for them and their children.

The position of women in Islam is a marginalized one, which leaves them in an entirely passive state. There is no provision made by Islam as an avenue for Muslim women to channel their complaints or fight for their rights. It appears that Islam is a male domineering religion. "Some feminine sociologists believe that Islam is just one of the devices used by ruling elites to manipulate any issue including reproduction and women" (Das 1991, 2).

These findings offer some implications for the RCCG mission in Kibera and for the rest of the world Christians who are interested in putting a smile on the face of a Muslim woman. The rate of divorce is high among Muslims in Kibera. Divorced Muslim women are the souls made ready for conversion. Due to the incredible experiences they go through, there is a large vacuum in their lives waiting to be filled by anything better than Islam. This fact actually offers the RCCG an excellent opportunity to fill up the gaps with the Love of Jesus Christ.

Muslim women are in dire need of true relationship that they lack and they need confidants to share their deep concerns with. Consequently, the Church should set up counseling and medical centers for meeting their felt needs both physically and spiritually. The counselors must be trained ones who understand Islamic divorce very well and have a great sympathy with those affected by it.



Many of the divorced Muslim women live with bitterness and unforgiving spirit; hence, power evangelism will play a key role in evangelizing them. Deliverance ministry with emphasis on inner healing will be an effective way to minister to them. I was engaged twice in teaching my informants on forgiveness. Listening to those who have vowed neither to forgive their former husbands nor to re-marry, I have seen a great need for discipleship after their conversion.

The Church can engage in opening schools where education can be offered to children either for free or with heavy subsidy. Simultaneously, adult education can be offered to their mothers. Considering the site under study, the Church can assist these divorced women in starting petty trading to bridge their economic challenges. They could be trained on tailoring and crafts.

The Church of Jesus Christ must understand this: "Islam resides at the very core of a Muslim woman's self. It is this self that is in contention. Will she remain trapped in Islam, or will she break away into freedom and awareness of Christ?" (Love and Eckheart 2000, 65). As we try to understand Muslim women in relation to Islamic divorce, it will be important to understand our roles in evangelizing Muslim women. There is no dispute over the fact that many Christians are bitter with Muslims because of attacks and challenges against Christianity. Some Christians even fear to witness to Muslims. Others are simply ignorant of how to win Muslim women to Christ. Nevertheless, whatever excuse we may have for not engaging in Muslim women evangelism, it will be unacceptable to God.

As I earlier stated, one of the advantages of a phenomenological study is that many important aspects of human experiences can be detected rather easily as compared with other types of study. However, in order to grasp a deeper level of spiritual needs felt by divorced Muslim women and also to establish more effective evangelistic strategies for them, I would recommend a further study that explores not only the marital status of Muslim women but also their spiritual journey during marriage. This kind of study will probably require an in-depth, ethnographical research.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE I**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of divorce \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been divorced now?
2. Do you have any children?
3. How did you feel when your husband divorced you?
4. What have been your experiences since your husband divorced you?
5. If your husband comes back to apologize to you, will you forgive him?
6. What do you think about marriage in Islam?
7. Are your children affected in any area?
8. If yes, can you describe such areas?

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE II**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

1. For how long have your parents been divorced?
2. How old were you when your parents divorced?
3. Do you have brothers and sisters?
4. If yes, where are they?
5. How did you feel when your mother was divorced?
6. Who took custody of you from the time of divorce till now?
7. Can you tell me all your experiences from the time your father chased away your mother?
8. In which ways were you affected by the divorce?

## VITA

### PERSONAL DATA

Name: Esther Nkemdilim Obasike  
Date of Birth: July 23, 1966  
Marital Status: Married  
Gender: Female  
Nationality: Nigerian

### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

2004 Master of Arts (Mission), NEGST  
1995 Diploma in Theology, The Redeemed Christian Bible College (RCBC), Nigeria  
1992 Diploma in Management and Administration, University of Lagos, Nigeria  
1989 Higher National Diploma, Institute of Management & Technology, Nigeria  
1983 West African School Certificate, Ado Girls Secondary School, Onitsha, Nigeria

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2003 to date Faculty Member, Haggai Institute, Kenya  
2000-2003 Parish Pastor Redemption Sanctuary, RCCG, Nairobi, Kenya  
1999 to date Principal/Facilitator, The RCBC Kenya  
1996 to date President RCCG Women Fellowship, East Africa  
1996 to date Ordained Pastor/Missionary, RCCG Eastern Africa  
1992-1993 Assistant Manager Treasury, De-beacon Finance Company, Lagos  
1991-1992 Marketing Executive, Malcon Consultancy & Marketing Company, Lagos