

## **Juggling Stakes in the Jumble: The Magi of Marital Decision Making among Young Urban Elite Women in Ghana**

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The complex social and economic influences mainly from colonialism and globalization have affected the family institution in Ghana in diverse ways. With higher education becoming one major determinant for potential social mobility, the challenges of cultural disorder in the traditional notion of division of labour between both sexes is most obvious. Business interests seeking to maximize space in the global arena demand human capital— both sexes equally yoked competing within market imperatives awarding performance by technical competence. Historical and cultural realities for affirmative action and “equity” ignored, glaring differential accessibility to resources for higher education between both sexes is obvious. With females lagging far behind and struggling to keep pace, questions of the relationship between economic capital and women’s agency; as well as between varied paths for negotiating and inclusion of cultural identity-reinforcing reactions become crucial. Within this context this paper draws a picture of the re-emergence of polygyny in urban areas as a strategy whereby some young female elites juggle their stakes within the jumble of cultural and ideological hegemony. It investigates processes in decision making towards resolving dilemma between, on the one hand, avenues for social climbing (eg. mobilizing resources from man as lover for social mobility), how this process may lead into transforming ideals, and massaging norms that regulate the border crossings (between monogamy and polygyny) arriving at social respectability associated with the cultural “imperative” of marriage and child birth: and on the other hand, exploring how female agency through ingenuity counters dominant formulations by negotiating space in maintaining some degree of autonomy within marriage through reinvention of a new genre of polygyny we shall call “neo-polygyny”.[1] The paper illustrates the decision making process leading to the choice of neo-polygyny in principle ignoring the ideological hegemony established by the Church for monogamy. The paper is based on fieldwork in Tamale and Bolgatanga-Navrongo cities in Ghana between May and November 2010 within the framework of my doctoral project. Empirical data generated through life histories, focus group discussions, and participant observation of young adults is presented to provide insights into the interplay between social capital, economic capital and the decision making process regarding neo-polygyny among educated female elites.

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[1]The term "neo-polygyny" is coined to reflect characteristics that make the phenomenon in the urban environment quite distinct from polygyny as pertains in the rural, agrarian, predominantly illiterate environment in Ghana.