POLYGYNY and the happy ever after?

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Handed in on 29.01.2016

Aalborg University
Culture, Communication, and Globalization
Pages: 79,97

Abstract

Polygyny and the happy ever after? is a cultural anthropological thesis about polygynous practices in the Northern Region of Ghana, which is the poorest and least developed region in the country. The purpose of this master thesis is to provide a thorough analysis of polygyny on an everyday basis in an urban setting in order to understand the reasoning behind the practice. 42% of women in the Northern Region are married into polygynous unions, compared to 8% in the richer south, near the capital. Although statistics from across sub-Saharan Africa have shown a constant decline in polygynous marriages over the past five decades, polygyny still occurs in high numbers in northern Ghana.

This thesis is an explorative study that aims to investigate the culture around polygyny in a narrow context. By applying an inductive model of reasoning, theories were derived based on the findings of the interviews. The experiences, which the interviewees have, are not isolated incidents, nor can they provide the full picture of how polygyny is practiced even in this narrow context. However, by investigating them through relativism, we can generalize them and offer a more varied picture of the practice.

The empirical data has been collected during a two months field study in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region. Prior to the actual interviews, two explorative interviews were conducted with two people, who had experienced polygyny first hand. Then interviews were conducted with four different families (11 family members in total), each representing different age groups, educational levels, and number of wives. All interviews were conducted using semi-structured interviews and carried out using the method of *sustained judgment*.

Most work carried out on this subject is large-scale quantitative studies from across the sub-Saharan Africa, and only a few focusing solely on Ghana. An extended amount of this work has been discussed in the thesis, so as to gain a preunderstanding of the subject. However, the previous studies have not been able to encompass what was found to be relevant aspects to polygyny when investigating the practice on an everyday basis. This new contribution to previous studies on polygyny encompasses an investigation on the impacts of gender roles, gender relations, power and

male-domination, and various forms of capital, as well as the influence religion and tradition have on the practice.

The theoretical framework reflects the complex character of polygyny and the system of mutually interrelated conditions related to it. Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss' theory has been utilized to conceptualize the different roles of men and women in the household, and to examine the relations among gender that keeps women in a subordinate position to men. Michel Foucault's theory of power and power relations to investigate what power is put into action in a polygynous unions. Lastly, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of capital is used to investigate what influence economic, cultural, and particularly social capital have on polygyny. The aspect of capital is further elaborated using James Coleman, who focuses on the functioning of human and social capital.

The first part of the analysis provides a thorough conceptualization of gender roles and how these are socially constructed in this particular context in northern Ghana based on the narratives of the interviewees. It was found that men are breadwinners, while female values are to perform domestic work, be a good and respectful wife towards her husband, motherhood, and an additional gender role, that takes the woman out of the kitchen and into the labor market. The second part investigates gender relations in polygynous unions, and the power and dominance relationships that are in evidence. Lastly, the analysis offers an investigation of the various types of capital that the interviewees perceive as being important for their reasoning behind engaging in polygyny.

The thesis found that gender roles are indoctrinated from early childhood and are highly valued and adhered to in northern Ghana. It is concluded that a recent development of the respectively gender roles of men and women, specifically that women are now also expected to be financial contributors, maintains the high level of polygynous unions in this specific context. Gender relations and male-dominance are found to be causing the more problematic aspects to polygyny, meaning *how* polygyny is practiced but not the practice itself. This is because males tend to find the practice pleasurable, and use religion and tradition as arguments for personal gain. Lastly, it was found that women's reason for being polygynous is directly influenced by economic capital, as they put emphasis on the man's ability to provide for the household when entering a marriage. Men, on the other hand, found cultural and social capital as preferred reasons.

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Chapter I: Introductory Sections

Introduction

I first came across the practice of polygyny when I did an internship in Tamale in the Northern Region of Ghana in 2014. Polygyny is a marital system where one man marries multiple wives, as opposed to monogamy or other systems that allow a number of partners to marry any number of spouses, of either gender – generally termed polygamous systems. A Ghanaian colleague of mine had three wives and considered taking a fourth. His argument was that there were too few men compared to the number of women in Ghana. Therefore, he argued that he was in fact doing his wives a favor, since an unmarried woman is – according to him - a burden and disgrace to her family. However, as I started looking into the subject, I found that the practice is deeply embedded within a complex network of mutually interrelated conditions, spanning from ancient traditions and religion, to poverty, agriculture, and male-dominated societal structures.

The number of people engaging in polygyny in Ghana is fluctuating, and differs greatly whether you look at the richer southern or poorer northern part of the country. 42% of women in the Northern region are married into polygynous marriages, and 27% of the men. In comparison, only 8% of women in Accra in the south are in polygynous marriages, and 3% men **(Ghana Statistical Service 2015, 50-52)**. Although Ghana on a national level is prevailingly Christian, the predominant religion in this particular region is Islam, with traditional religions as the second largest group. Consequently, those who enter these marital arrangements, predominantly belong to one of these religions. Islam allows the husband to take up to four wives whereas the traditional religions do not have an actual limitation for the accepted number of wives. Christian men who have opted for monogamous unions, however, tend to pursue more informal forms of polygyny outside their formal marriages, in an institutionalized system of girlfriend relationships **(Dinan 1977, 164; Hayase & Liaw 1997, 293)**. In this sense, the Ghanaian spirit of polygyny is high, regardless of religious orientation. However, we need not to turn our eyes all the way to Africa, to get a sense of the polygynous spirit. An article in the Danish newspaper Randers Amtsavis, looked into Danish men's

allegedly higher need for sex and satisfaction with multiple women. In this context, it has nothing to do with religion or tradition - only men's supposedly pure biological higher need for sex:

> *It is a man's nature and primitive instinct to get sex from women. As a man, I have an urge and a need to get sex from different women. It's the same as if you had to eat the same food every day for 30 years. You'd rather want a varied diet.*
> **(Øvlisen 2015, translated by author)**

Initially, being a foreigner, I had a hard time understanding the reasoning behind the practice, particularly as the practice in this area, only allow men to marry more women and not the reverse. Undeniably, I also equated polygyny with social inequality between genders and suppression of women. However, I am also aware that outsiders are often better at judging beliefs and behaviors of others than attempting to understand them in their context. What if my colleague was right – maybe he actually did do his wives a favor. Or perhaps the explanation for this marital constellation in Ghana must be found deeper into the culture and early childhood.

Studies investigating male and female relations in Ghana, have shown that "girls receive profound affection from their mothers, and are taught how to serve and be submissive to their fathers, brothers and any other older person" **(Boateng & Ampofo 2016)**. Throughout childhood, boys and girls are introduced to and involved in work that relates to his or her new social status and role. Furthermore, a girl is conceptually viewed as a 'minor', which persists until her maturity has been proven through marriage or independent productive housework. Additionally, the study found that most of young adolescents were socialized to define appropriate opposite and polarized gender roles, and that boys expressed a sense of entitlement for a dominant role in male-female relationships. The study concludes that gender roles are created in the home and in childhood **(Ibid.)**.

An extensive amount of work has been done to investigate polygyny across sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. The majority of these, investigate the various reasons why

polygynous practices have decreased over the past 50 years, by looking at and analyzing the effects of economic booms, rain shocks, wars, etc. However, not much work has been done exploring men and women's individual share in the continued practice of and reasons for engaging in polygyny. Is it the man who proposes to marry a second, third, or fourth wife? Or is it the woman who accepts a proposal from a married man?

This thesis offers another and so far uncharted angle to polygyny, as it investigates the practice from the inside out, through narratives of people living in polygynous marriages. The narratives will be investigated by applying theories on gender and gender relations, power and dominance, and aspects of various forms of capital's influence on the practice. The narrow geographical context of the study is a selective choice, as the practice varies greatly depending on factors as religion, tradition, wealth, and general educational levels. The aim of the thesis is to investigate men and women's reasoning for practicing polygyny, and look at the cultural, religious, and traditional aspects that are in evidence within this specific context in Tamale.

Problem Formulation

How is polygyny practiced and embedded in the North Ghanaian culture?

To answer the problem formulation, the following research questions will be the focal point of the thesis:

1. How are gender roles socially constructed and lived by?
2. How do gender relations impact polygynous practices?
3. How do religious and traditional practices influence the cultural practices and understanding of polygyny?
4. What are the men and women's reasoning for engaging in polygyny?

Introducing Tamale, Ghana

Tamale is the capital of the Northern Region and also serves as the commercial capital of the three northern regions (Upper East, Upper West, and Northern Region), and is with its 350.000 inhabitants one of the largest cities in Ghana. Due to its size and location, most foreign NGOs working in either of the three northern regions, are usually based in Tamale.
Ghana is a very religious country, and despite being prevalently Christian, Islam is the predominant religion in Tamale and the Northern Region in general. Therefore, the religious atmosphere is very influenced by Islam as well as by traditional religions from Upper East and Upper West, as a result of people from rural areas moving closer to the city. This results in religions and traditional practices often blending and merging, e.g. when it comes to cultural practices, moral codex, and polygyny. The people of Tamale, and Ghana in general, hold great respect for the traditional chief systems and religious ways of living, which is why local chiefs and religious leaders have great political power and influence in the communities **(Ghanaweb.com).**

Delimitations

As will become evident, polygyny in Ghana is a common and frequently practiced institution of marriage. Therefore, taking all aspects into consideration when writing this report not be possible or particularly advantageous. This section offers the delimitations of the framework for this study.

The empirical data for this study has been collected during a two-month field study in Tamale. Within these two months, the contact with the interviewed families and the explorative interviews were initiated through my personal network. Due to the limited time spend in Tamale and with the families, it is not possible to give a more thorough examination of how everyday life is in a polygynous family through observations, had I e.g. spent a week with each family. The results of this research can only be grounded in the interviewees' answers.

The purpose of this specific study is to shed light on and investigate polygynous marriages in a certain cultural context. Furthermore, it aims to gain knowledge on both genders' experiences and attitudes towards this kind of marital constellation. Therefore, the empirical data will be the main source and foundation for the analysis and general fulfillment of the purpose of this study. The theoretical framework will be used to add relevant aspects of views on genders and polygyny in general.

Previous studies on the subject have been based on large quantitative compilations of data from across sub-Saharan Africa with only a few focusing solely on Ghana. As will become evident throughout this report, the practice of polygyny differs greatly even within the same country. Comparing the richer southern Ghana with the poorer north, Tamale and more rural areas, or even a comparison between tribes, could have generated very different results. The core of this study is the narrative of my interviewees that all live in the same city and share a local and cultural context. Therefore, I will only shortly touch upon the results of the previous studies. However, as all my interviewees come from different tribes and religious backgrounds (although all interviewees have been Muslims or converted to Islam when marrying), they have very different practices around marriage, which is why I will not go further into how their individual religious background impact on polygynous practices. This study only looks into four different families, and will as a result not be able to offer any general conclusions on polygyny nor a thorough analysis of the traditional practices within each tribe, even in this very narrow context. Indeed, nor is this the general purpose of this study.

Lastly, this report will not include an ethical discussion weighing the arguments for and against the practice, as the purpose of the study is not to judge or change the practice, or the mindset driving it. As a researcher, it would be naive to believe that I am able to stay completely objective while conducting this study or writing this report, even though my only aim is to investigate polygyny from the people practicing it to account for their experiences. However, it is my aim to be as objective as my presumptions allow me to, and the study will not be a comparison between the Danish idea of monogamous unions and North Ghanaian

polygynous ones. Rather, the study will focus on the interviewees' narratives in order to achieve a deeper and more varied understanding to the practice, than I believe previous quantitative studies have been able to offer.

Terminologies

Bride price: Also know as 'bride token' or 'marriage payment'. It is an amount of money, property, cattle, or other form of wealth paid by the groom or his kin to the woman's kin in order to ratify the marriage. In case of divorce, the bride price must be returned to the husband's kin. The payment of bride price is often a matter of social and symbolic exchange between the two intermarrying families, and consolidates friendly relations among them. It is further seen as a material pledge that the woman and her children will be treated well, symbolizes her worth to the community, and provides a level of compensation to her family for the loss of her labor and company **(Britannica.com)**.

Cedis: The local currency in Ghana.

Dagbani: The local language in the Northern Region.

Dowry: An amount of money, goods, or property that a woman brings to her husband or his family when the marriage is entered. This practice is particularly common in cultures that expect the woman to reside with or near the husband's family. If the couple is very young, the dowry is used to establish their new household. Otherwise, it serves as a gesture from the bride's kin to the groom's kin. The exchange of dowry is not purely for economic reasons but also serves to ratify the marriage and consolidate friendship between the two families. **(Britannica.com)**

Polygamy: The umbrella term of unions with three partners or more.

Polyamory: The expression for group marriage where the family unit consists of multiple persons of the same or mixed genders. Often this is practiced as one man with two women, the reverse, or with multiple partners of both genders. What distinguishes polyamory from polyandry and polygyny, is that the people in this

type of union are not set on a specific amount of partners, or their gender. This would be the most common practice if looking at a Danish context and polyamory is also the only polygamous union that allows non-heterosexual individuals.

Polyandry: The family unit consists of one woman and multiple husbands. This system still exists in a minor extent in rural areas of Bhutan, Mongolia, and Tibet.

Polygyny: The family unit consists of one man and multiple wives, which is by far the most common union and is also the only system that is legal and practiced in Ghana and most other countries legally practicing polygamy.

Chapter II: Method And Methodology

Most research carried out on polygyny[1] has so far been large compilations of data investigating polygynous practices across sub-Saharan Africa. The main focus of these studies has been on the causes to polygyny, e.g. war, economic shocks, slavery, education, poverty, etc., aiming to find major objective cross-cultural probabilistic laws that are valid in several cultural and geographical contexts **(see e.g. Bretschneider 1995; Brooks 2009; Fenske 2011; and Hayase & Liaw 1997)**. For this reason, some of the conclusions other writers have come to are very general and I cannot recognize them all from my own research, e.g. that polygyny creates a reproductive competition among the wives, as the wives receive money and food from the husband based on their number of children. Although these studies have given me an insight to the reasoning behind and history of polygyny in an African context, there are tremendous differences that could result in the studies becoming of a too general and superficial nature. In Ghana, I have found that there are vast differences in economy, education, practice of religion and traditions, etc. between the rich south around the capital, and the poorer and less developed north. As Bretschneider **(1995, 13)** argues: "A comparison of polygyny between two different societies/cultures is impossible since the institution has completely different meanings in each society/culture."

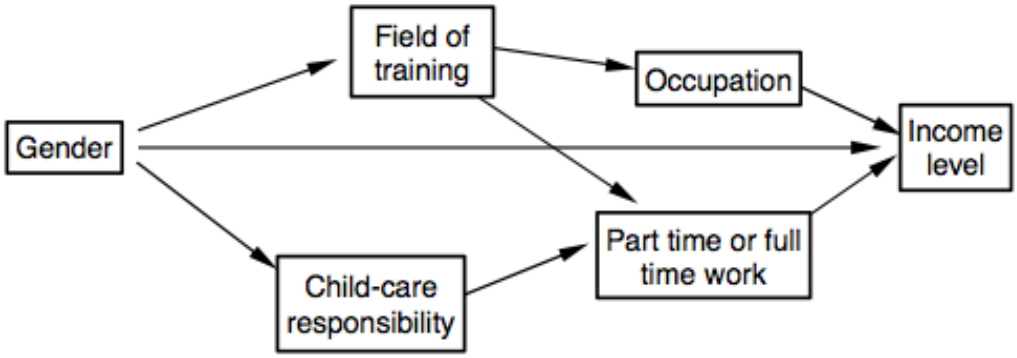
Instead of focusing on the more general level of polygyny including societal and cultural systems as main focus, this study will have the *individuals* who practice polygyny as center of focus, while cultural and societal structures and systems serve as a secondary parameter. Furthermore, these individuals all live in the same local context. By investigating their individual reasoning for engaging in polygynous practices through the narratives, this study may contribute with a more nuanced and in-depth insight to the practice, than what mere statistics are able to tell us, and give an *understanding* of the reasoning behind the practice before judging it.

[1] It should be noted that most writers of these studies use the umbrella term 'polygamy' in their research. As polygamy is solely practiced as 'polygyny' when investigating the African context, I will only use the latter term

The following sections will describe my research design, methods and methodological considerations in the collection of data. The five steps encompasses my considerations from the very beginning of this study up to and including the final analysis.

Step 1: Method Of Reasoning

This study is an explanatory research that aims to the answer the *why* questions. When I wish to examine men and women's reasoning for entering polygynous unions, I need to have hunches about why they may do so. As will become evident, there are various incompatible reasons for why polygyny occurs in sub-Saharan Africa in such a scale, and opinions of whether the practice should be abolished or not. I will have to collect information that enables me to see which hunches work the best empirically for this particular context. This process can be demonstrated by using a complex causal model of direct and indirect links:



(Source: nyu.edu)

The process of answering the *why* questions will be a process of *theory building*, in which my research begins with observation and the use of an *inductive* method of reasoning to derive my theories from these observations. As the aim with the study is to try to understand the individuals within a cultural and traditional context very different from my own, the inductive approach is more open-ended and explorative. This allows me to be led more freely in the direction my observations take me, rather than in the direction theories on polygynous elements, e.g. different causes to polygyny that may not be very suited for this particular

context, would take me in. In other words, theories will be formulated towards the end of my research as a direct result of my observations.

Based on my observations of the context, I may begin to detect more abstract generalizations and ideas, and identify preliminary relationships that can further direct me to formulate research questions to explore the practice. Finally, I end up developing some general conclusions and theories on the subject. An additional advantage to this approach is that it puts more focus on the explorative side of the research, while leaving out testing already known theories or patterns **(Nyu.edu).**

Step 2: Considerations On What Data To Collect

As I have not been able to find any studies on polygyny conducted specifically in the Northern Region of Ghana nor been working with the subject beforehand, I did not have any pre-understanding of polygynous practices in this specific context nor of the people I wished to investigate. Therefore, the data collected for this study consists of both first and second hand data.

The second hand data is a discussion of different studies and literature on polygyny, which has helped me gain a pre-understanding of the subject. It has also helped me understand how other writers have understood and problematized polygyny in their research. The second hand data is discussed in *Chapter 3: Essay Review*. However, the second hand data does not serve as my empirical data in the analysis. It has been used as a guideline prior to conducting the first hand data, and will be used on equal terms with the selected theories in the analysis.

As mentioned, I did not have much knowledge about the subject before starting this research. Therefore, I have conducted two explorative interviews with people who have experienced polygyny first hand, before interviewing the polygynous families. The first interviewee is a male, who is not polygynous himself, but grew up in a polygynous family. The second interviewee is a woman, who was the first of four wives until her husband passed away.

In order to answer my problem formulation, I have conducted interviews with four different families. The families represent different educational and economic backgrounds, different ages, number of wives and children, and depict varieties of the common family in Tamale, in

order to find something generalizable among them. The interviewed families are presented in Appendix 1-4, and the interview transcripts are found in Appendix 8-20.

Step 3: How to Conduct The Data

My first issue as a researcher when undertaking a study of a practice so unlike anything from my own world is: how can I begin to understand the beliefs and behaviors that are different from my own?

First I need to recognize that my own behavior and beliefs are socially patterned and constructed – as are those of people in the society that I am to investigate **(Robbins 2009, 2)**. The world is what human being themselves creates by giving meanings to things, events, activities, and people. As Robbins **(2009, 6)** argues:

> *Human beings are cultural animals; they ascribe meanings of their own creation to objects, persons, behaviors, emotions, and events, and then act as those meanings are real. All facets of their lives – death, births, courtship, mating, food, acquisition and consumption – are suffused with meaning.*

As human beings, we are compelled to impose meaning on our every experience. Without these meanings to help comprehend experiences and impose order in our universe, our world would seem a jungle. When people share the same meanings they give to experiences, they share and participate in the same culture **(Ibid.).** My beliefs about the institution of marriage and a 'nuclear family' derive from the Christian belief in a heterosexual and monogamous union between two people: a husband and his wife. While this idea now also covers husband and husband or wife and wife, it still only consists of two individuals. This is an example of how culture is not a fixed term but that the individuals within it are change-making agents within their own social environment, as they "create, reproduce, and change culture through daily practices" **(Risse 2004, 3)**. Differences in culture arise in part from the fact that different groups of human beings create, share, and participate in different realities, assigning different meanings to death, birth, marriage and food. Objects, persons, behaviors, emotions, and

events in a human world have meanings ascribed to them by those who share, use, or experience them **(Robbins 2009, 6)**.

The problem formulation can be approached from a social constructivist point of view, which states that the "social environment in which we find ourselves defines, or constitutes, who we are, our identities as social beings. (…) "We" are social beings, embedded in various relevant social communities" **(Risse 2004, 3)**. This means that our social environment and community constructs our reality.

The social constructivist approach allows me to challenge the authentic Ghanaian culture[2], as it enables me to explore the extent to which the different social communities and environments influence a particular individual's opinion.

Many social norms not only regulate behavior; they also constitute the identity of actors in the sense of defining who 'we' are as members of a social community. Constructivism maintains that collective norms and understandings define the basic 'rules of the game' in their interactions. This does not mean that constitutive norms cannot be changed or violated. However, the argument implies that we cannot even describe the properties of social agents without referencing to the social structure in which they are embedded **(Ibid., 5-6)**. This means that in order to fully understand the practice of polygyny, I cannot only focus on the individuals who practice it. I must also look at the environment in which the practice exists, the societal structures and how the alternative – to stay single or marrying a less able man – influences women's reasoning for marrying polygynous.

[2] From a previous study I did on homophobia in the same area in Ghana, I came across a term the Ghanaians and Ghanaian media and politicians called 'the authentic Ghanaian culture', which promotes, among more, family values, marriage, reproduction, and religion. Many religious and political leaders attempt to protect this culture from foreign (Western) infiltration and imported values that they see inconsistent with the African identity **(Sallar & Somda, 2011, 287)**.

Step 4: Conducting The Data

I have been introduced to all of my interviewees through my personal network in Tamale. Although polygyny is a practice deeply rooted in the proud Ghanaian culture and many Ghanaians I have come across in this town do not see any problem with the practice, it is hard as a foreigner, especially a salimenga[3], to seek out participants on my own. I therefore asked people I already knew, if they might know someone who would be interested in participating in my study. They initiated the contact after which I got in touch with the husband and explained the purpose of my study: to understand the practice of polygyny in its 'natural habitat'.

I visited all the families two to three times. On my first visit, I was introduced to the husband, the wives and the children living at home, and I saw their house and how the families live together. I made sure to spend time in the family house, greet all the family members, and get a tour around the compound before conducting my first interview with the husband. In order to talk to the women, it is extremely important to go through their husband first and get his approval of my study and me as a person. By interviewing the husband at my first visit and the wives at my second or third, I hoped that the women would be more familiar with me and have an idea about my intentions, since many of the interviewed women were not educated or familiar with neither an interview situation nor the purpose of it. Although, the contact with the families was initiated through the husbands, who were then told to discuss the participation and topic with his wives, I found this to rarely be the case. The women often only knew that a salimenga would stop by the house to talk to them, which is why I spent quite some time telling them about myself and the purpose of my study, before starting the actual interview.

Another element to take into consideration when working with Ghanaian people, particularly people from royal families as some of the participants were, is the importance of giving a gesture. Normally when seeing a chief or royal people, you would bring money to the house.

[3] 'Salimenga' is the Dagbani word for a white person, which automatically equals 'rich foreigner'. Because people with money or other means of power or influence are automatically placed high up in the culturally social hierarchy in Ghana, I was implicitly placed high up in that hierarchy too.

However, many of these families are struggling financially, royals or not, and I did not want them to participate because of an economic benefit. When I went to the families for the first time, I brought them a basket with some coffee, tea, chocolate, and a few packets of biscuit to show my appreciation and also to avoid any later requests for money.

The data is collected from four families, all representing different class, family size, level of education, income, and age.
All of my data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews, although the answers from a structured interview may have made the results more comparable, had I wished to investigate the influence of education, income, age, number of children, etc. However, the core of this study lies within the *narratives* of the individuals. The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that it gives me opportunity to ask supplementary, more explorative and sensitive questions. These will take form depending on the person's story and the individual's willingness to share more intimate details about his or her marriage. This helps to better understand the participants' reasoning for marrying polygynous. Separate interview guides were developed for the explorative interviews, for the interviews with the husbands, and for the wives, and can be found in Appendix 5-7.

The methodological approach in the data collection will be influenced by a term called *suspend judgment*, meaning "to hold back a judgment long enough to be able to understand what is being expressed" **(Bradford)**. This way I may more fully explore and rationally understand someone's argument and the context from where it derives, before making any judgments. This is important when exploring a rationale and a logic I most likely do not share. However, being in a state of sustained judgment is only contemporary and should be seen as a metaphor for striving for objectivity rather than actually being objective or free of bias. It would be more correct to say that my method is objective and sustained judgment is the interview technique in use **(Americanpressinstitute.org)**. This technique involves being especially aware of my body language and mimics, and in particular focus on not being subjective when I ask both the prepared and supplementing questions.

Step 5: Methodology And Data Processing

My study fails to take into account all factors that are of relevance in order to give a holistic explanation for the existence of a given phenomenon. I will try to meet this objection by taking into account a number of variables and discuss the matter from an ethnocentric and relativist point of view.

The ethnographic method for conducting this study involves the clash of at least two cultures: the culture of the people I am trying to understand and my own. In this case, however, it may be more precise to say that it is a meeting of the North Ghanaian culture in a very narrow context, and my personal background and lifeworld.

As a researcher, particularly in the interview situation, I must set aside my own views on thing and attempt to see the world in a new way **(Robbins 2009, 17)**. Often when people judge the beliefs and behaviors of others, especially before fully understanding them, they are committing the *ethnocentric fallacy*: the idea that our beliefs and behaviors are right and true, and that those of other people's are wrong and misguided. Ethnocentrism tries to show what often appears on the surface as "an odd belief or bizarre bit of behavior is functional and logical in the context of a particular culture" **(Ibid., 8)**.

If I did not recognize that polygynous practice is an ancient[4] and integrated part of the Ghanaian system and people's conceptualization of marriage, I would simply be studying the mistakes of others and my research would fail to investigate the context. Ethnocentrism holds that if all people everywhere think that they are right and the others are wrong, we would reach an intellectual and social dead end. However, it is debatable whether complete suppression of one's own values and beliefs is possible when studying those of others.

[4] No one knows the exact time of the origin of polygyny. However, the practice can be dated back to the Hindu God, Krishna, who was born around 3.200 BCE and is believed to be married to no less than 16.108 wives. The Islamic prophet Mohammed and a number of biblical figures have also practiced polygyny, although Christianity condemns the practice. Its precise time of origin in Africa has not been established, but it is assumed that polygamy has been practiced as different constellations during time. It was not until Christian missionaries arrived in Africa during Colonialism that the subject was firstly articulated in this area **(Vallely 2010)**.

The alternative to ethnocentrism, *relativism*, is equally problematic. Relativism holds that "no behavior or belief can be judged to be odd or wrong simply because it is different from our own" **(Robbins 2009, 9)**. Instead, we must try to understand a culture on its own terms and to understand behaviors and beliefs in terms of the purpose, function, or meaning they have for people in that particular society. However, relativism poses a moral dilemma. *Relativistic fallacy* is the idea that "it is impossible to make moral judgments about the beliefs and behaviors of other" **(Ibid., 10)**. Consequently, no beliefs or behavior can be condemned as wrong. If we have a situation where polygyny proves to be suppressing of women and violating their rights as human beings, and we could not say that the practice was wrong, the relativist alternative is morally unsatisfactory **(Ibid.)**.
The issue is whether I am being ethnocentric in judging the custom of polygyny in the northern Ghana by my own Danish cultural norms, or is it correct to emphasize that the practice, which I found to be structural unequal, is problematic? Does it help the pro-polygynous argument if we further understand the logic behind the practice? How do the Ghanaians conceptualize and understand the practice themselves? Although it may be argued that polygyny is just as much a traditional practice at it is religiously motivated, how can we judge people by their faith?

Human rights activists are skeptical about the idea of cultural relativity. Cultural relativism makes arguments about human rights issues meaningless by legitimizing almost any behavior. Does it even matter if the women enter a polygynous marriage voluntarily? What will happen if they object? Does it make a difference whether we are speaking of one woman or a million?

Cultural relativists are right to claim that the endorsement or rejection of some foreign customs risks imposing one's own cultural prejudice on others. However, the idea that we can make no judgment without being ethnocentric is illusory.

> *One simply cannot avoid making judgments when faced with oppression and brutality masquerading under the guise of cultural tradition. Such a nonjudgmental tolerance of*

> *brutality is actually an ultimate form of ethnocentrism, if not an outright ethical surrender.*
> **(Robbins 2009, 14)**

When I discussed the women's marital situation and they noticed that I was not wearing a ring on my finger, they often asked about my age. When I told them that I was 26 and did not plan on marrying anytime soon, they sympathized with me. As my norms are very different from the norms of my interviewees, it would be naïve to think I would be able to stay completely objective when conducting the interviews and writing this report. To be able to conduct this study, I must look at the values my interviewees hold about marriage; for what reasons do they marry, how do they experience love and jealousy, and how are polygyny practiced in an everyday context? As a researcher, it is important for me to acknowledge that everything is socially constructed. Polygyny in my interviewees' life is just as socially constructed as monogamy is in mine, and only with this realization should I conduct the interviews. In this sense, the social constructivist approach will be my greatest analytical tool when analyzing the collected data. I cannot stay fully objective or unbiased, but will use my own understanding of marriage to explore central elements to the institution that the interviewees' see as core values themselves.

When investigating polygyny, there might be an overall infringement on a rights norm in evidence. However, the only way we can understand and generalize the practice is through the complexity of relativism. This is where sustained judgment becomes a relevant tool of investigation, as we would otherwise only see the flaws of polygyny and not the opportunities the practice no doubt also generates. The experiences my interviewees have are not isolated incidents, nor can they give the full picture of how polygyny is practiced even in this narrow context. However, by investigating them through relativism can we generalize on them and offer a more varied picture of the practice. Differences in how we understand polygyny are the product of different histories, as they are expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires. When feminists, for example, speak of polygyny, they may want justice for women. We must accept, however, that there might be

different ideas about justice, the fact that women want different things, choose different futures than what feminists and myself as a researcher envision as the best **(Aby-Lughod 2002, 787-788)**. I am not in a position to make any judgment of whether or not polygyny is an actual issue, as it may as well be an infringement on the rights of three or more people to live in a polygynous marriage. What I can do, however, is to use the interviewees' stories to regard the problematic aspects to the practice from the inside out.

As mentioned, the aim of this study is not to do an intercultural comparative study of polygynous marriages in northern Ghana and monogamous ones in Denmark. When I write "people's conceptualization of marriage" it means that an awareness of historical conditions is needed in order to understand present circumstances. The conceptualization of polygyny will not be of polygyny itself, but the values that the interviewee puts into their marriage.
The conceptualization should not be founded on a theory of the object, polygyny, but by objectivizing the subject, those who practice polygyny through the narratives **(Foucault 1982, 778)**. This, however, is not to rationalize the practice as such, but to analyze the specific rationalities the interviewees mention themselves **(Ibid., 779-780)**.

Critical Reflections

In addition to my reflections on my role as a researcher in the interview situation, I must also take into consideration a fundamental difference between the interviewees and myself. This difference has undoubtedly had an influence on my research and the interviewees willingness to participate and share their life stories with me.
Being a *salimenga* already puts a severe gap between the interviewees and me. In Ghana, there is a strict social hierarchy. Rich, educated, and/or people with high-ranking professions such as doctors, ministers, and clerics, are on top of that hierarchy. Because salimengas are unconditionally related with money, I am implicitly highly ranked in the hierarchy. In that sense, my skin color indicates a power distance between the interviewees and myself. My impression was that for some of the interviewees, this was their first encounter with a salimenga. Furthermore, many of the participants were not educated or had been exposed to

an interview situation nor the purpose of it before, which may have made the power distance between us more apparent.

For all families except the Yusif Abdablah family, where the contact was initiated through the first wife, the husband arranged the interviews. Although it was explained to the husbands that they should discuss the participations with the wives to make sure that everybody involved was doing it willingly, I found it not to be the case when I arrived at the house. Often the women knew that a salimenga would stop by the house, but not the purpose of my visit. On my first visit, except with the Yusif family, I met the family and interviewed the husbands to give the women an idea of what was going to happen and explained the purpose of the interviews. However, being a salimenga and the fact the husbands were the ones who initially wanted to participate may have put pressure on the women to participate without full consent. Even though all the women participated, not all felt comfortable in the interview situation, which has quite possibly affected the sincerity and openness in some of their answers.

Some of the interviews were conducted by the use of a translator. All interviews conducted with the use of a translator have been marked in the transcriptions. When using a translator, I got a thorough resume of the interviewee's answer and the points of them, however it is inevitable that some things could have been lost in translation. Often the women also had a hard time understanding and answering the questions, meaning my translator used additional questions or situations to explain or reformulate the questions to get an answer. The questions may as a result have been more leading and closed than what I myself would have wanted. Most of the women had no education and, consequently, were not very good at expressing themselves and their feelings, nor reflect on the questions making leading questions sometimes hard to avoid.
For one of the families, it was not possible for me to find a female translator and a male carried out the translations. Although the translator had been introduced to the wives on our first visit, it could have had an effect on the women's answers. However, I did not experience that the interviews conducted with a male translator had any effect on the women's willingness to participate.

Finally, I will touch upon the amount of data collected. As this study only consists of two explorative interviews and eleven interviews with four different family members, it is not possible to say anything general about polygyny in northern Ghana. It will therefore not be possible for me to fully confirm or dismiss the hypotheses and conclusions made by other writers. I can only say if they do or do not correlate with what I found in my research. However, my aim is not to say anything general about polygyny in northern Ghana but merely to give a more nuanced, and individualized insight to the practice in a local context. This I feel I have been unable to find in existing research.

Chapter III: Essay Review

This section serves as an introduction to the academic work carried out on polygyny in Ghana and throughout sub-Saharan Africa.
Not much work has been done on polygyny in this area since the 1980s and only a few studies focus solely on Ghana – even though Ghana has one of the highest prevalence's of polygynous unions in the African continent. The far majority of research carried out on polygyny, are large quantitative studies exploring the causes to and history of polygyny. They test various hypotheses on prevalence and decline over the past half century. I will only briefly go through some of the main results of these studies, since quantitative data does not serve as an actual source to this study. However, the results have served as a guiding tool for me in the compilation of my own empirical data in northern Ghana. What I have found is that the causes to and opinions about polygyny are both varied and conflicting, and so is the culture around the practice. This applies not only when looking at the Western versus African point of view but also when looking at it in a very restricted area.

In this section, I have captured five overall themes based on the literature that covers many of the conflicts, difficulties and arguments for and against the practice of polygyny. The themes are *History of Polygyny, Culture and Value Systems, Religion and Laws, Marriage and Reproduction, and Women's position in Society and Family*, and are discussed individually.

History Of Polygyny

This section is an introduction to polygynous practices in Ghana throughout history. Although most of the material covers polygyny in rural settings and my study investigates the practice in an urban setting, it is important in order to understand the mindset behind the practice and how it has become an integrated part of the North Ghanaian culture.
Although today mostly practiced in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, Hindus, Mormons, Muslims, and other cultural and religious groups throughout history have practiced polygyny. The Bible also notes several polygynous marriages with central biblical figures

(Brooks 2009, 2; Archampong 2010, 325). Because Islamic law gives men the right to take up to four wives, many mistake polygyny to be an Islamic import to the African continent. Fenske's **(2011, 8)** study on the prevalence and decline in polygyny for the African continent showed that Muslims and followers of traditional African religions have similar levels of polygyny. He therefore argues that polygamy, as a general practice, is neither exclusively Western nor non-Western; nor does it originate from one particular religion or culture. Rather, it is to great extent cross-cultural and varies in practice depending on geography and demography.

Today, polygamy almost exclusively takes the form of *polygyny*: one husband with multiple wives, although *polyandry,* where one woman is married to multiple husbands, still exist in very small numbers in rural areas of Bhutan, Mongolia, and Tibet **(Brooks 2009, 1)**. Polyandry is not legal in Ghana, neither is it in any other country that legally practices polygamy except the above-mentioned, why many blame it to be a women suppressing practice. Although polygyny has been a well-developed, coherent and acceptable way of life in sub-Saharan Africa since pre-colonial times, the British and Christian missionaries labeled it as 'backward' or 'bush behavior' and attempted to replace polygyny with monogamy through regulations and preferential treatments towards monogamous men **(Hayase & Liaw 1997, 294, 297)**. One arguments used by the British was that polygyny was the root for the "fundamental inequality between the sexes in African social systems" **(Archampong 2010, 327)**.

What the British did not understand was how and to what degree the system of polygyny was integrated in the culture, traditions, society, family, and in particular agriculture, which is why the practice could not be abolished by 'just' passing a bill.

Polygyny comes from an ancient culture based on an economy of high land and agriculture. Due to the high mortality – in particular mortality among infants and women during pregnancy or labor – caused by unfavorable climate, deadly diseases, and lack of medical health and nourishment, the core of the polygynous culture is to promote reproduction as a means to biologically increase the population in otherwise dying communities **(Dinan 1977, 326)**. In the agricultural system, women do most of the farm work concurrent with the household and raising the children. Men are motivated to have more wives and many children

so they can help with the farm work. Additionally, polygyny is a way to expand a man's ownership of farmland, since a woman has limited rights to inherit her late husband. When she remarries – which is often to a polygynous man, the woman will then bring the land into the new marriage.

This particular law is another factor to promote reproduction. Women have restricted access to inherit and own property, and girls and women are traditionally married away to their husbands to live with him and his family. Both men and women will strive to produce enough boys to be sure that property will stay in the hands of the family and that they have someone to provide for them in their old age **(Archampong 2010, 326)**. Due to the heavy workload, a woman may even encourage her husband to take an additional wife **(Hayase & Liaw 1997, 296)**. The first wife is usually the one with the authority to assign and distribute domestic work to the other wife or wives. That way, the addition of more wives, helps the first wife to enhance her status in the marriage and pride.

Besides the practical reasons for polygyny and reproduction, having a large family is a signal of wealth and high social status. Islam allows a man to take four wives but customary law, which is rooted in traditional religions and customs, have no actual limit.

Despite the British's advocacy to abolish the practice for decades, the independence of sub-Saharan countries around 1960 was to some extent accompanied by the reassertion of the values of the native culture, as local African churches removed themselves from Christianity and Western judgments on marriages **(Ibid., 298)**. Today, Ghanaian law recognizes three forms of marriage: the Marriage Ordinance (Cap 127), the Marriage of Mohammedan Ordinance (Cap 129), and customary marriage. The two last-mentioned are polygynous or potentially polygynous. Archampong's **(2010, 325-326)** study found that the number of well-educated women who prefer monogamous marriages under the Cap 127 is increasing. However, most educated women live in urban areas where polygamous marriages strongly correlates with farming households, and inhabits over 70% of Ghana's population.

Although polygyny is an ancient tradition and part of the African culture, the prevalence of polygyny across sub-Saharan Africa has been declining over the last half century **(Fenske 2011, 1)**. One common hypothesis links the decrease in polygyny with girls longer education. Studies have shown that girls who stay longer in school generally marry and have their first baby at a later age, and are more likely to use modern contraception methods **(Tatum 2015)**. Archampong's **(2010, 325)** study supports this idea, as she stated that more women with a longer education in urban areas preferred being monogamously married. This correlates with statistics from Ghana, which showed that 31% of women with no education are in polygynous marriages, while the number for women with secondary or higher education is 5% **(Ghana Statistical Service 2015, 50)**. It should be noted, though, that these numbers are from all of Ghana, and not the Northern Region. In Northern Region, 4.4% of women have completed secondary school and only 1.7% have more than secondary school, which is respectively the second lowest and lowest numbers in the country **(Ghana Statistical Service 2015, 34)**. However, Fenske's survey from 2011 of nearly half a million women across sub-Saharan Africa dismisses this idea. His study showed that there was a strong negative correlation between polygyny and a woman's length of education. In fact, his results suggest that the education of women only appears to reduce polygyny rates over a very long period of time and only in conjunction with other interventions **(Fenske 2011, 16)**. What may instead be causing the effect that Archampong found is where the women live. Therefore, is it interesting to investigate men and women's reasoning for marrying polygynous in an urban setting.

Culture And Value Systems

Polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa is not only a type of marriage, but also a value system. Hayase & Liaw **(2010, 295)** identifies some of the main features of this culture: firstly, women's very early age at their first marriage (18.7 years) **(Ghana Statistical Service 2015, 54)**, which ensures their exposure to early and numerous pregnancies. Secondly, the men's very late age at first marriage (26.4 years) **(Ibid.)** which is determined by his or his family's ability to pay for the marriage and/or support the household. Thirdly, the quick remarriage of separated, divorced, or widowed women.

Agriculture is undeniably a much needed and valued motivation for the polygynous culture. As I have already touched upon the agriculture element, I will now concentrate on female productivity.

Throughout history, women have been an important and most needed force in agriculture. It is a familiar hypothesis that polygyny may be a consequence of female productivity in agriculture. However, Fenske's results have found this not to be true. In fact, Fenske found that the historical importance of women in agriculture is negatively correlated with polygyny and that polygyny is mostly prevalent in those parts of Africa where female labor in agriculture have historically been least important **(Fenske 2011, 9-10)**. Therefore, I believe it is more relevant to look at the women's role in the household and urban women's growing participation in supplementing the household income.

None of the articles I found pay much attention to household work. This may be contradictory since the argument for many, is that men should take a co-wife when the workload gets too heavy for one wife to handle alone. I will argue that women – particularly when looking at those in urban areas – are now also expected to contribute financially to the household. Many women participate in petty trading, selling fruits and vegetables, smoked fish and more either from a stand at a market or along the roadside. The women spend most of their days earning a salary but are still expected to take care of the children and perform all other duties in the household. Although women are making steps towards equality on the labor market, the same cannot be said when speaking of the workload in the house. This may even call for the necessity of polygyny.

This leads me to another factor that other writers have not touched upon: gender roles. Ghana is a very patriarchal society. Being a product of social inequality between sexes high prevalence of polygyny in an area, acts to reinforce and preserve the inequality through cultural norms that govern gender roles **(Agadjanian & Ezeh 2000, 428)**. At my first stay in Ghana, I found that gender roles are strictly lived by and highly valued by both men and women. It is a man's job to provide financially for his family and bring food to the house, while the woman's role is to raise and educate the children, cook, clean the house, wash clothes, and provide for visitors. At the same time, you see women at the market, in her shop,

cleaning, or being engaged in other kinds of moneymaking. We must, therefore, look at the relationship between gender roles and polygyny.

Throughout history, the value system embedded in polygyny has been highly resistant to the British imported ideology of monogamy. As a reflection of the persistency of the polygynous value system, the decline in polygynous unions in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular in the urban areas, has been accompanied by a clear-cut pattern whereby men, in particular Christian men, has opted for monogamous unions. Instead, monogamous men tend to pursue more informal forms of polygyny outside the marriage, which involve rather irregular 'girlfriends' and somewhat regular 'outside wives'. Many sub-Saharan men in urban areas consider the possession of outside wives as a symbol of high status and achievement – not unlike men in the formal polygynous unions, who are respected due to their ability to lead a large family. Outside girlfriends have become an institutionalized system, and the women even find it unrealistic to hope for a faithful husband. They anticipate that their husbands will have mistresses outside the marriage **(Dinan 1977, 164; Hayase & Liaw 1997, 293+298)**. This is also the case when looking at the North Ghanaian context, and is why the spirit of polygyny remains strong throughout society.
It will be interesting to look at both men and women's attitudes towards outside girlfriends and men's promiscuous behavior, and whether this makes people more tolerant towards the practice.

In Africa today, some view the call for the abolition of polygyny a rejection of a part of the authentic African culture, in favor of ideas that are foreign and Western **(Archampong 2010, 327)**. However, as advocates for polygyny argue, we in the Western world may be better at hiding it, but can we really say that we are better than African men are? Adultery happens everywhere, whether a slip at a work Christmas party or long or short-term affairs. Proponents argue that such persons form relationships that involve "emotional commitments" that are "not easily terminated" – not unlike polygyny **(Brooks 2009, 2)**. Therefore, in essence, a married person and his or hers lover are engaged in a polygynous relationship, and this does not seem to generate much hostility in the Western world.

Even though this is a fair argument, defending polygynous marriages by comparing it to affairs and adultery is reducing the institution of marriage to only being about having a sexual relationship or a break from everyday life. Both the man and the woman may enter affairs, whereas polygynous rights in Ghana and everywhere else it is practiced, are only entitled to men. One suggestion can be found in a 2003 UN report on men's role in the fight against HIV/AIDS:

> *Boys and men are socialized to believe that sex is their right and that they are entitled to it whenever they want it. Girls are socialized to be submissive, service oriented and self-sacrificial. They grow up believing it is their duty to serve and satisfy men. Some women believe the lie that it is natural for men to have many partners or to exercise power over them. (...) [Polygyny] is an accepted norm by both women and men in many societies; and multiple partners are justified as a form of informal [polygyny].*
> **(Wainaina 2003, 5)**

An additional point is that, mostly, polygyny is a direct result of the agricultural system, where the family relies on a large and free (in the sense they would not have to be paid a salary) workforce of women and children to help with the farm work. However, my study takes place in an urban area. Still, polygyny is a very common practice in this setting too. Then what is the purpose of polygyny in an urban setting, and what role does having large families play in this particular context? This will be explored in the analysis.

Religion And Tradition

As previously stated, polygyny is not an Islamic import in Ghana despite being the only religion that outright gives the man the right to take up to four wives. Particular in the Northern Region, which has the highest density of Muslims, men often justify polygyny with references to Islam **(Agadjanian & Ezeh 2000, 433)**. Although this study found that polygyny levels and dynamics are shaped under a strong influence of dominant religious beliefs, it did not apply solely to Muslims **(Ibid., 429)**. Traditionalists have always practiced

polygyny, and it is an integrated part in the Ghanaian chief system that is still practiced throughout Ghana, particularly in the northern part where Islam and Islamic laws fitted right into the original culture. A survey of 2,676 polygynous Ghanaian women made by Hayase & Liaw from 1997 showed that around half of the Muslim women in Ghana were in polygynous marriages. Similar numbers are seen when looking at followers of traditional religions, but more surprising is it that 27% of the Christian women were in polygynous unions **(Hayase & Liaw 1997, 308)**. These studies strongly indicate that polygyny is not solely correlated with the presence of Islam.

Ghana is a very traditional and a strong believing country, and the moral centers around religion directly influencing the country's legal system, meaning that the law reflects the Ghanaian culture. This indicates that polygyny is not only a product of religion but also deeply embedded in Ghanaian culture and way of life. None of the articles I have found, articulate the effects the presence of chief systems has on people's reason for engaging in polygyny. The question is whether the Ghanaians themselves perceive polygyny as a religious, traditional, or political practice, and how this influence both men and women's reasoning for engaging in polygyny.

As mentioned, Ghanaian law recognizes three types of marriages of which two are polygynous or potentially polygynous, on the premise that the husband is able to provide for his wives equally. What is understood as 'equal treatment' and how it works in practice is something to be looked into in the analysis.

When conducting this study, I came across one particular moral justification for polygynous practices that leaves all historical aspects such as agriculture, religion, chief systems, tradition, wealth, dowry, bride price, etc. out: there is a surplus of women, not only when looking at Ghana, but throughout the world. It may be argued that the situation is caused by the greater loss of men during conflict and war as well as the nature of their work and more harsh lifestyles with smoking and drinking **(Asangalisah 2012)**. This was also the main argument my previous Ghanaian colleague made. He took the argument further by stating that due to this situation, only men could marry multiple wives. He would not answer my question

when I asked him if the same law had been in force if the situation had been the inverse. I, therefore, wanted to look at the demographics of Ghana.

Statistics from The World Factbook **(Central Intelligence Agency 2016)** show that the median age for a woman's first marriage in 2015 is 19,8 years while the age is 25,9 for men. When looking at the age group 15-24 years, the difference is not striking:

> ***15-24 years:*** *18.69% (male 2,449,026/female 2,472,756) = 23.730 more females. Sex ratio: 0,99 males.*

If we look at the numbers or the age group 25-54 years, the numbers have shifted:

> ***25-54 years:*** *33.95% (male 4,338,197/female 4,598,796) = 260.599 more females. Sex ratio: 0,94 males.*

The total population is 26,327,649 people and the sex ratio is 0,97 males. The statistics show that there is a slight surplus of women, also in the age groups not included here. However, the gap between male and female age 15-24 is relatively small out of a population of 26 million. It is, therefore, hard to solely use the argument of the surplus of women to defend polygynous practices if the woman enters this type of union at her first marriage. However, the gap between males and females is significantly larger when looking at the 25-54 years age group. This supports the argument that there are not enough men for all the women to marry monogamously as well as widowed women are to a greater extent able to remarry. However, the gap is not large enough to legitimize that one third to half of the North Ghanaian women are living in polygynous marriages. We must, therefore, look at other reasons for the practice, and whether the women themselves belief that the alternative to polygyny is better.

In order to investigate the above, we may have to look deeper into the marital process and the meaning of marriage. In many cultures, a marriage is not only a union between two people, but also two families. This is also the case for Ghana, particularly in the north where traditional practices and polygyny are more widespread than in the richer south: "In the higher-polygyny setting, marriage is thought of as a contract between two families in which

the woman's individual preferences are rarely heeded" **(Agadjanian & Ezeh 2000, 434)**. In the three northern regions, where many of my interviewees originate from, the systems of dowry or bride price are common practices when marriages are arranged. In this sense, a woman becomes an asset to be traded for livestock, money, values, or a respected family name, and when she marries, she becomes her husband's property. She can also be given to a cleric, a chief or a chief's son as a gift, which brings other types of return and benefits back to her father's house. Ghana has laws and police departments to prevent women from being married away to someone she does not wish to marry, often due to great age differences, however the laws fail to protect the women from the direct or indirect pressure they may feel from their family. It is also important to note that marriage is a way to survive in northern Ghana. Not only is marriage highly valued, due to the gender roles already discussed, it is the husband who provides for the woman and her children. By marrying someone with higher social status, which would be a wealthy man or high-ranking man, her willingness to enter a marriage may be on other terms than what e.g. my Western culture would value. Therefore, it is important to look more into each woman's reasoning for marrying polygynous.

However one perceives polygyny, it has brought some liberating opportunities for women. Polygyny gives women – in particular older women who can only give birth to a few or no children – the possibility to marry at a late age (thirties) or remarry if her husband has past away; as such, it works as a social security system. Moreover, surveys from across the African continent shows that divorce rates are high since women know that remarrying is easy. Given the argument that there are slightly more women than men in most Ghanaian communities, polygyny allows women, who would otherwise not have been able to find an available and suitable husband, to marry **(Archampong 2010, 327)**. Therefore, we must investigate the women's view on the importance of marriage in terms of their rights, as well as their perception of divorce and ability to do so.

Marriage And Reproduction

Marriage and reproduction are core values and customs in the Ghanaian culture whether polygynous or not, and birthing children is highly expected and valued, not only from a societal stand but also amongst the women themselves **(Dinan 1977, 161)**. Girls are often married at a young age to ensure their early exposure to pregnancy, and men are often married older so they are more able to pay for the marriage and support the household **(Hayase & Liaw, 1997, 295)**.

> *In this culture, the number of children is maximized by 1) the system of [polygyny] which is designed to ensure no shortage of potential husbands and to maximize women's chances of pregnancy, and 2) the custom of long female postpartum sexual abstinence that is believed to reduce infant mortality.*
> **(Hayase & Liaw 1997, 295)**

In African cultures in general, infertility is not only undesirable but also thought of as evil. If a woman does not become pregnant, her husband's family will encourage him to take another wife. If monogamously married, the husband will most likely divorce her, which will put her in a very difficult and undesirable position, while women in polygynous marriages are expected to help each other, especially with childcare **(Agadjanian & Ezeh 2000, 434)**. Unity is a key component in Ghanaian polygynous families, which means that a wife does not only take care of the children she has given birth to, but all children are treated alike by all the wives. In this sense, the culture of polygyny helps maintain a generally high fertility level and ensures that women can stay married despite their inability to give birth.

As already argued, polygyny is a structurally unequal practice in Ghana as the practice only allows men to marry multiple wives while women do not have the same right. An argument supporting this can be linked to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): that polygyny is "unambiguously linked to customs of male domination" and that it "represents an asymmetry of power between men and women, which appears similarly linked to male domination of

women" **(Brooks 2009, 8)**. This correlates with what Agadjanian & Ezeh **(2000, 433)** found in their focus group survey:

> *[Men] (...) see it as a convenient way to alternate wives as they give birth to children and breastfeed. Most men see polygyny as a useful and enjoyable arrangement. They do recognize that women tend to dislike it and that polygyny may therefore constitute a source of friction and conflict in the family. However, men do not question the institution itself, only an improper functioning of this institution.*

At the same time Archampong **(2010, 331)** found that

> *[Polygyny] does not promote women's rights in marriage and in the broader society; bluntly put, [polygyny] is subordination of women by men and it would take abolition of the practice to completely eliminate its gender discriminatory effect.*

This statement is supported by Agadjanian & Ezeh **(2000, 428)**, who found that polygyny does not only affect women in polygynous marriages, but all women in areas with high prevalence of polygyny, as the practice acts to reinforce and preserve social inequality between genders through cultural norms and prescriptions that govern gender relations. In these areas, a woman's position and role in the household is seen as easily replaceable, which undermines their relative bargaining position when it comes to major household decisions - for example if the husband should add a wife or private matters such as childbearing. A man who intends to marry an additional wife under customary law would inform his existing wife or wives before he goes ahead with the marriage. The existing wife or wives' consent, however, is not a precondition for him to bring another wife into the marriage.
A central aspect in continuation of this needed to be investigated is to what extent the interviewed women are able to have a say in the husband's decision on adding a wife and, furthermore, if the first and later wives reasoning for being polygynous differs.

I found it rather contradictory that the husbands to a much greater extent expect their wives to perform a full-time job and contribute financially to the household while her workload in the household and raising the children remains unchanged – and so does the role of the husband. It would be interesting to know if the growing expectations of and workload for the women lead to more polygynous marriages, as the husband may suggest taking a co-wife to assist his wife in her duties. Unless men willingly take on more responsibility in the household, which calls for greater readjustments of the Ghanaian culture, it seems that polygyny is hard to avoid.

Still, Ghanaian feminists have called for the abolition of polygyny, as it places women in an unequal position to their male counterparts. Dinan **(1977, 332)** proposes two arguments for why the abolishment of polygyny is challenging. Firstly, parties in polygynous marriages voluntarily choose to enter such a marriage, and it is therefore difficult to find widespread support for the feminist's proposition Secondly, Ghanaian spouses who do not wish to practice polygyny can choose to opt for civil marriage (Cap 127).

However, I question the degree of voluntariness of the women entering polygynous marriages, as Dinan proposes. With the pressure on young girls to marry and have children, she may fear that she will not receive a proposal from another man, or feel pressured by her family to accept the proposal. One reason for this is that polygynous men are found to be wealthier and more respected than monogamous men, as they have already proven to be able to take care of his wife/wives and her/their children. In a society with much poverty, the woman may, therefore, feel pressure from her family to accept the offer for financial reasons. I question whether the 'free choice' as Dinan describes is actually an indirect discourse of force. Furthermore, I doubt that women have much to say when their husband decides to take an additional wife. Should she protest, the husband may divorce her, which will leave her in a worse position. I believe it is necessary to discuss the line between force and consent, and furthermore how the interviewees experience this when wives are added.

An additional problem with polygyny and the culture of reproduction is how means and attention from the husband are distributed within the family. Feeding, clothing, and paying school fees for all the children are expensive; particularly when looking at an urban setting. It

is argued that polygyny creates a 'reproduction competition' between the wives, as the more children she has, the more money she will receive from her husband **(Asangalisah 2012)**. We must, therefore, look into whether or not this influences women's reasoning for having children, maybe more than they initially wished, in this particular context.

Women's Position In Society And Family

Whether married monogamous or polygynous, a Ghanaian woman is married away to her husband's family, while the man stays with or near his family and support his parents and the elder. This practice already states an inequality between the sexes, although the Ghanaian society as such does not encourage inequality, and there are no customary religious or legal barriers against e.g. female employment. Men even find the additional income beneficial, although they still expect the wife or wives to manage the home **(Greenstreet 1972, 353)**. Compared to many other African countries, Ghana is even in the lead when it comes to e.g. equal access to education for boys and girls.

Women have limited status in society until they are married, have their own household to manage, and their own children to raise. Dinan has conducted a study among self-imposed single women in urban Accra, the capital of Ghana, which concluded that the status for single women has not yet become an acceptable position in Ghanaian society. Society still puts great emphasis on marriage and reproduction as the approved roles of women, and women "don't consider any other life pattern as possible in Ghana at the moment" **(Dinan 1977, 166)**.
As men pay for their wife, either in the form dowry or bride price, she becomes property of the husband and gets a place and a function in his family. Particularly in the northern part of Ghana, the husband is considered to have authority over his wives and children, and the children are considered assets **(Greenstreet 1972, 352)**. This also means that in case of divorce, the children belong to the man.
Brooks has conducted a study investigating the effects of polygyny. He found that polygyny is "more likely to present harmful effects, especially towards women and children, then monogamy" **(2009, 5-6)** and that "these effects impact upon all members of the [polygynous]

family, although women are at the greatest risk" **(Ibid.)**. The findings are many and I will not be able to process all of them, but part of the conclusion is that women enjoy less marital satisfaction, have higher risk of low self-esteem and depression, and that these women are often unable to exercise control over the addition of new wives.

I wonder, when looking at an urban setting, if the inequality between men and women is different from what we have seen it to be in the above sections. The environment in an urban setting drastically distinct itself from the original idea and purpose of polygyny, where families were dependent on agriculture. I will look into whether or not women entering the labor market and have better opportunities to generate their own income may help challenging the gender relations and, therefore, also the institution of polygyny.

From the above discussions of different scientific contributions on polygyny, it should be clear that what is objectionable about the practice in Ghana is that it is only available to males. It is typically connected with legal, religious, and traditional regimes, under which women have unequal property rights and rights of mobility, association, and self-determination. However, I also believe it is the case that many people's reasons for opposing polygyny, is often connected with ignorance about people whose practices are different than their own. From what I have been able to find, the closest any writer has gotten to talk to polygynous people, is via a focus group interview with mixed polygynous and monogamous participants who all lived in rural settings.

Although the articles have provided an insight to the practice, I found a gap in literature between the quantitative studies and what I found to be relevant for the people practicing polygyny when collecting the data for this study. Subjects such as gender roles, extended family systems, and societal structures as the chief systems were not addressed, even though they all influence people's reasoning for engaging in polygyny. Neither was polygyny in a more modern and urban setting. The next chapter will, therefore, constitute the theoretical framework for how polygyny is practiced on an everyday basis in an urban setting in northern Ghana.

Chapter IV: Theoretical Framework

My selected theories reflect the complex character of polygyny and the system of mutually interrelated conditions to it, in order to get a more detailed investigation of polygyny in this particular community in Northern Ghana. The crux of this study and the new contribution to the scientific research on polygynous practices, are the interviewees narratives that offer a more in-depth analysis of the practices. They take into account different factors and variables that other studies have not been able to provide.

I found that gender roles and relations are factors that withhold women in a secondary position to their male counterparts and I will use Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss to conceptualize women's role in the household. Furthermore, I will look at how these roles and relations influence both men and women's reasoning for engaging in polygyny. In continuation of gender roles, I will use Michel Foucault's theory of power and power relations to examine the dominance relationship between men and women, as I found that polygyny is initiated by men, and for men.

When conducting my interviews, I further found that many of the interviewees – particularly the women -– mentioned various forms of wealth when asked about how they met their husband or why they married someone already married. However, it was not wealth in the way we might understand the word – money, property, other assets, etc. Wealth comes in various forms such as respect, social status, and a good family name. These can be conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'social capital', which has been further elaborated on by author James Coleman.

Social capital is a broad term that encompasses norms and networks facilitating collective action for a mutual benefit and may, in principle, be applied to every feature of life as a form of social capital **(Woolcock 1998, 155)**. Therefore, I will limit the use social capital to investigate the interviewees' understanding of 'wealth', and how it impact upon their family life and motivation for practicing polygyny.

Conceptualizing Gender Relations

By its very nature, polygyny is an unequal practice in terms of gender, as only men are allowed to take multiple spouses, and moreover – when looking at this particular context – only men have the right to choose whether or not to be in a polygynous union. The latter shows male domination and an asymmetry in power between the interviewed men and women. Before theorizing power relations in polygynous unions, we must conceptualize how gender may be perceived and understood in Ghana.

Gerson and Peiss **(1985, 318)** propose a new way of thinking gender,[5] with a more sensitive and complex analytical tool looking at *boundaries*, *processes of negotiation and domination,* and *consciousness*. Because gender is a social category and socially constructed, i.e. it has different meanings if we were looking at genders in Denmark and Ghana, gender cannot be subsumed under an analytical category as class and caste. We must first look at gender as a system of social relations: "Gender is not a rigid or reified analytical category imposed on human experience, but a fluid one whose meaning emerges in specific social contexts as it is created and recreated through human actions" **(Ibid., 317)**. This formulation asserts that gender is defined by socially constructed relationships between men and women, among women, and among men in social groups. Furthermore, the writers argue that a central factor to the analysis of social relations is male domination over women, which explains the forms and processes of physical intimidation, economic exploitation, and ideological control to which women are subjected **(Ibid., 318)**, which for example comes to terms when the interviewees defends polygyny by saying that Ghana is a patriarchal society and men, therefore, are entitled to make decisions on whether or not to be in a polygynous union.

[5] It should be noted that the writers use 'gender' and 'sexes' similar, which, when looking at the Ghanaian context, is not accurate. Sex is the anatomy of a person's reproductive system, which includes hormones, chromosomes, and genitals, and differentiates from gender that refers to an average group, which encompasses social roles and expectations – gender roles – people are ascribed based on that person's sex. If we were looking at a Danish context, the difference between sex, which is also correlated with sexuality, and gender is more erased as genders are more equal. However, in the Ghanaian context, sex and sexuality are very fixed terms, e.g. is homosexuality criminalized and a vast taboo, why sex and sexuality are rarely spoken about. Gender expectations are, however, of great importance and behaving or doing anything outside these expectations is a vast taboo. Therefore, I will only be using the term gender.

First of all, Gerson and Peiss offer a conceptualization of *boundaries* that will challenge the idea proposed by social science literature of separate spheres – domestic and public work – as this division stresses the assignment of women to domestic realm and men to the public one. Previous research on gender has been influenced profoundly by this basic structural division between genders. However, a structural division of labor by gender is still the case when looking at the North Ghanaian context. Women still perform all domestic work while men, in theory, work and provide everything needed in the household. When conducting the interviews, reality proved to be different as all the interviewed women had entered the labor market in more or less public work. However, women as a group seemed to still not be an acknowledged part of the work force. This calls for a more thorough investigation of gender roles in this particular context that does not simplify or reduce social life to two discrete environments, but captures the complexity of social and cultural divisions.

The conceptualization of boundaries will allow us to express a basic commonality in the division between genders and also to encompass definitions of changing patterns of social relations. Boundary is a more generic term, which simultaneously allows us to see specific commonalities and discern actual differences in historic and current patterns of gender-based experiences. Boundaries are also an important place to observe gender relations. These intersections reveal the normal, acceptable behaviors and attitudes as well as deviant, inappropriate ones, and how they are shaped by social interactions **(Gerson & Peiss 1985, 319)**.

When women start making their own income, the boundaries between genders shift in small but important ways, which indicates a change in gender relations and the ways individual women and men may experience them. I argue that that this change challenges women's dependence on men, and moves in the direction of breaking the interdependence between the two. The question is, then, how or if the decreasing interdependence challenges gender roles and male domination, and thereby the practice of polygyny.

The second parameter introduced by the writers, is the *Process of Negotiation and Domination*. The analysis of domination has been a major contribution in explaining the subordinate position of women. Regardless of the theoretical orientation, the assumption is made that women are the

passive victims of a system of power domination **(Gerson & Peiss 1985, 321)**. While women are not responsible for their own oppression and exploitation, at the same time it is argued that they are not completely without responsibility. To examine gender roles in northern Ghana, we need to explore women's participation in setting up, maintaining, and altering the system of gender relations. This is a study of two processes: 1) domination explains the ways women are oppressed and either accommodate or resist, while 2) negotiation describes the ways women and men bargain for privileges and resources. The two are interdependent and exist concurrently **(Ibid., 322)**. Strictly put, men may be argued to possess the financial resources, while women's resources are found in the labor involved in sustaining and nurturing ties and affiliations among family kin. As a result, women have more control over a set of kin-based resources and permit men access to those resources only if and when the women so desires **(Ibid.)**. When women lack structural power, it limits the resources with which to negotiate and opportunities to do so. Therefore, we must look into the situations where the women use kin work to derive advantages from their negotiations.

Lastly, the writers bring up *Consciousness*, which encompasses the mindset of both women and men, and the expectations they have to their role as married, parents, etc. The gender-based division of labor situates women in the position as housewives, and men as the provider and wage earner. Consequently, both women and men behave in accordance with the normative expectations and act to further support those expectations **(Ibid., 325)**. A generalized sense of inferiority leads women to believe that they are incomplete and inadequate without a husband or other male leaders, e.g. their father. When women act to protest or disrupt the existing social order because they cannot satisfactory fulfill their obligations, they challenge existing powers. Knowing this, we can look further into how the interviewed women challenge their husbands in those situations where they no longer feel the same need for their husband as male role model, and the situations that changed this **(Ibid., 326)**.

Power And Power Relations

From the above section, we saw that polygyny is an unequal practice in terms of the choice of whether or not to be in a polygynous union, as the husband has the sole power to decide if he should

take more wives – even if the women themselves wishes to be in a polygynous union, the man could chose not to. The social order and gender relations, as Gerson and Peiss describe, may be transferred into what Michel Foucault defines as power and power relations. The power relations are theorized as the following:

> *The main objective of the struggle is to attack not so much an institution of power, group, elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power. This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life, which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him, which he must recognize and which others have to recognize on him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge.*
> **(Foucault 1982, 781)**

When investigating the power relations between husband and wives when in a polygynous marriage, we must look at two essential questions raised by Foucault **(Ibid., 786)**: By what means is power exercised? And what happens when individuals exert power over others?
In order to understand what power relations is about, e.g. the opposition to the power men have over women, is to investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations. To say that it is an anti-authority struggle is not sufficient.
When analyzing power relations – assuming that the husbands exercise power over their wives in terms of their individual reason for being in a polygynous marriage and choice to be so – we must characterize the power that brings into play the *relations* between individuals, as power designates the relationships between partners **(Foucault 1982, 786)**. However, it is not simply a relationship between partners or individuals; it is a way in which certain actions modify others, as power only exists when it is put into action **(Ibid., 788)**. Consequently, its opposite pole can only be passivity. According to Foucault, power can only be exercised over free subjects, which means "individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized" **(Ibid., 790)**. When examining how men are exercising power over their wives in terms of the decision of taking an additional wife, inflicting

both of their lives, the women's reaction, or lack of same, is relevant. If looking strictly at Foucault's notion of power relations, it seems it would reduce women to passive individuals being dominated by their male superiors.

According to Hartsock **(1990, 168-171)**, Foucault writes that power must not be seen as either a single individual dominating others, or as one group or class dominating others, which makes it difficult to locate the actual domination, including domination in gender and social relations. Foucault fails to take into account the important power of differentials within the family. Understanding how power works in oppressive societies is important. We must look into other ways of exercising power within the family, and whether the women hold some kind of power over the later wives in terms of a social hierarchical structure within the family.

Pierre Bourdieu On Social Capital

According to Bourdieu's theory, capital is represented in three fundamental shapes: as *economic capital*, which is immediately convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights. As *cultural capital*, which is convertible into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications. Finally as *social capital* made up of social obligations or connections, here used in the shape of the family. Under certain conditions this can be converted into economic capital through creating a larger workforce that can generate income to the household. It may further be institutionalized in the form of 'goodness', a good family name, which generates respect in the community and every action from a member of the family goes directly back to the family name. Hence why the extended family system becomes a central feature in Bourdieu's theory on social capital **(Bourdieu 1986, 84)**. Although economic and cultural capital will be shortly touched upon in the analysis, I will mainly focus on social capital.

Social capital should be seen as a network of connections not naturally or socially given, but constituted once and for all by an initial act of an institution, represented in this case as the immediate family group and kinship relations in the extended family. These are necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits.

In this sense, social capital is a product of investment strategies, both individual and collective. They are consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing social relationships directly useable within the family and among relatives in the extended family **(Bourdieu 1986, 89)**. Looking at marriage in a North Ghanaian context it will be evident that the union is not arranged the way I, as a foreigner, would go into or arrange a marriage. This union is not merely between a man and a woman but more essential a union between two families, making marriage a sort of an investment. The husband pays bride price to the woman's family with the purpose of having more helping hands in the house, have children to extend the family and the number of people; all in order to eventually bring prosperity in terms of money, respect, etc. back to the family. In this sense, Bourdieu's theory can be used to investigate how one form of capital is transformed into another in the polygynous marriage; particularly in terms of how the interviewees' interprets 'wealth'. The wealth aspect will be looked into using Bourdieu's definition of *social capital*.

Social capital is defined as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to (…) membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity owned capital" **(Ibid., 88)**. In his theory, the emphasis is on social networks that provide access to a group's resources. Therefore, the preparation and conclusion of marriages should be the business of the whole group and not only of the two agents directly concerned. When a new family member, in this case an additional wife, enters, the whole definition of the family group, e.g. its boundaries and identity, is put at stake, exposed to redefinition and alteration **(Ibid., 89)**. The head of the family, the husband or in some cases the elder, is recognized as the only person entitled to speak on behalf of the family group. That person has to defend the collective honor if the weakest member is threatened, which means "the concentration of social capital have the effect of limiting the consequences of individual lapses by explicitly delimiting responsibilities and authorizing the recognized spokesmen to shield the group as a whole from discredit by expelling or excommunicating the embarrassing individuals" **(Ibid., 90)**. In this case it would mean that he alone holds the power to divorce or rebuke an individual of the family group if this person is wrecking or in any way disgracing the family name. By the same token, it reaffirms the limits of group membership, namely the limits beyond which the constitutive exchange, here marriage, cannot take place **(Ibid., 89)**.

The outcome of Bourdieu's notion of social capital is ultimately economic reward gained through ongoing participation in the network as benefits increase for all group members. In the North Ghanaian context, this may be related to the polygynous or extended family. In these, all members contribute financially to the family, e.g. by supporting a member through education, resulting in this person later being capable of contributing not only to the person funding his or hers education, but to the entire family. This can be in terms of financial benefits or derived from association with a rare prestigious group, should a member get a high positioned job or in other ways be associated with people of high status.

In summary, Bourdieu's definition of social capital is: resources that provide access to group goods to ensure economic capital for individuals in class competition **(Winther 2000, 5)**.

James Coleman On Social Capital

As my interviewees expressed that wealth was more than just economic capital, Bourdieu's notion of social capital will be supplemented with Coleman's theory of social capital.

Coleman's theory fundamentally constructs the same theoretical concept as Bourdieu, however he uses different terms to define social capital resulting in a different purpose or outcome. Coleman defines social capital by its *function*. Social capital is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures – a family group – and they facilitate certain actions of actors – family members – within the structure **(Coleman 1988, 98)**. In continuation of this, Coleman differs between capital in three categories: Physical, human, and social capital.

Physical capital is wholly tangible being embodied in observable material form (as embodied in tools, machines, and other productive equipment that can be extended to include human capital, as the human capital facilitates the production by the use of tools and machines). *Human capital*, which is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual **(Ibid., 100-101)**. The creation of human capital is dependent on the physical presence of others, in this context the husband. If the man is absent, e.g. when the woman is not on duty and, therefore, is not allowed to be in physical contact with the husband, is described as *structural deficiency* in the *family capital*. This may also be the case if there are not strong relations between the husband and a

wife, which will be shown is a consequence of polygyny. It means that whatever *human capital* exists in the family, the wife does not profit from it because the *social capital* is missing **(Coleman 1988, 112)**. Finally, *social capital* that is less tangible yet, for it exists in the *relations* among persons **(Ibid., 100-101)**. A family may consist of well-educated parents with high human and financial capital, but can be weak in the relationships that go to make up a family. Deficiencies in familial social capital, meaning the relations among family members and here only the relationship between the husband and his wives, and his wives amongst themselves, can be related to the *unity* among family members and potentially have a negative influence on the family's collected social capital **(Coleman 1987, 380)**. In this sense, we must look at the *function* of the family when generating human and social capital.

As I am looking at polygyny in an urban context, where the use of physical capital plays a very small or no role in the households in comparison to a rural context, I will only use Coleman's concept of human and social capital. Human capital will be applied to the extended family system, while social capital will be used to investigate the relations and unity among family members.

Central to Coleman's aspects of social structure are obligations and expectations, norms and sanctions that constrain and/or encourage certain kinds of behavior that exist in the relations among individuals in the relation, which they can use to achieve their interests. "If A does something for B and trusts B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and obligations on the part of B" **(Coleman 1988, 102)**. When applying this to polygyny in Ghana, it is particularly practiced in the extended family system, which is a central element to the practice. If A financially supports B in his or her education, starting a business, or help getting B a job, A will expect B to later bring wealth in form of money, favors, or respect back to the family name if B will e.g. rise academically or get a high positioned job. This form of social capital calls for a high degree of trustworthiness among the members of the family, or this institution could not exist, particular in this setting, as there are no other sources of aid, e.g. from a welfare system **(Ibid., 103).** The central function of an extended family relation or a multiplex relation (e.g. neighbors, other people from the community, sub-chiefs, etc.) is that it allows the resources of one relationship to be appropriated for use in others. Often, it is resources in the form of other persons who have obligations in one context that can be called to aid when one has problems in another context **(Coleman 1988, 109)**.

Coleman's application of the concept social capital is concerned with understanding the role of norms and sanctions within family and community networks that facilitate the attainment of human capital, which is very like Bourdieu. Both see social capital as a mean to increase an individual's resources. However, where Bourdieu sees social capital as a resource convertible to *economic capital* for individuals, Coleman's focus is on how social capital in the family and community networks is a resource to *human capital* for individuals **(Winther 2000, 5)**.
The problem with Coleman is that social capital to him is inherently functional, and social capital is whatever allows people or institutions to act. Social capital is therefore not a mechanism, thing, or outcome, but simultaneously any or all of them **(DeFillippis 2001, 784)**. The lack of clarity in Coleman's definition confuses the level of social networks with their ability to generate capital **(Ibid. 798)**. The critical element about defining social capital fundamentally as its function leaves out what it *is*, and focuses solely about what it *does*. Therefore Coleman cannot be used alone.

Bourdieu and Coleman will mainly be used to investigate the 'wealth aspect' in my analysis on the basis of my empirical data, and how the various use and interpretations of wealth influences both men and women's reason for engaging in polygyny in Tamale in northern Ghana.

Chapter V: Analysis

Polygyny is embedded in a complex network of mutually interrelated conditions deeply rooted in tradition, religion, and the very male-dominated Ghanaian culture. Polygyny is particularly practiced in the rural areas where religion and traditional living is central to people's lives. Furthermore, these areas are very hard to reach with sources of information like foreign TV, Internet and mass media, which can introduce other ways of living. However, despite it being a more urban setting, polygyny is a very common practice in Tamale. To understand the practice in this more modern setting, we need to investigate the reasons the interviewees themselves believe to be driving the practice.

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part offers a thorough conceptualization of gender roles in this particular context. The second part looks into gender relations in polygynous unions, and the power and dominance relationships that are in evidence. Lastly, the analysis offers an investigation of the various types of capital that the interviewees perceive as being important for their reasoning to engaging in polygyny.

Part 1: Conceptualizing Gender Roles

When I first arrived in Tamale in 2014, walked around town and started talking to the locals about gender roles, it quickly became clear that these were indoctrinated from early childhood. Often, I would see young boys running around the streets and playing soccer, while I would see girls of the same age carrying and tending to younger siblings, fetching water, helping their mother at her small shop along the roadside, or making money by carrying women's groceries from the market on their heads. In town, you would rarely find a group of women sitting and enjoying beverages during the day or night, as was a common sight when speaking of the men. In general, the differences are apparent immediately; women and their daughters have responsibilities, and a household to take care of.

The gender roles are very culturally embedded and structured: "We do not live like robots where you program them, but we just know that it is our roles" **(App. 8, l. 523-524)**. The young women I

met and spoke to, most of them 18 or in their early 20's, were already in the search for a suitable husband, ready to take on the responsibility of managing a household on their own.

If her family has the means to pay for it, women in urban areas are now expected to get an education before marrying. However, marriage and motherhood is still highly valued among men and the women themselves. Age is another factor to take into consideration for women: "If I had to choose between marrying two beautiful women, one was 30 and one was 25, I would definitely go for the younger one" **(App. 8, l. 367-368)**.

The next sections offers a thorough analysis of a woman's role in the house, how to be a good wife, reproductively, and the new role that takes her out of the kitchen and into the labor market.

"The Kitchen Belongs To The Women"

Before going further into the analysis, it is necessary to introduce how polygyny functions in practice and on an everyday basis in this particular context.

One of the original ideas behind the practice of polygyny, both in Ghana and across sub-Saharan Africa, derives from agricultural traditions in rural areas. Farmers needed many helping hands at the farm and would therefore marry several women and have a number of children with each of them. This is still one of the main drivers of the practice in the rural areas. However, in the urban areas, I found agriculture to play a very limited or no role. Polygynous families in Tamale 'only' have a household to take care of, why I believe it is important to look at how the role of both genders has changed from how polygyny was originally practiced. When examining how polygyny works in practice, I found gender roles to be one of the central aspects.

Although Ghana is a very developed and modern country compared to many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, its culture is very conservative when it comes to men and women's different roles and place in society. The gender roles can be divided rather strictly: the husband is still expected to be the breadwinner, as well as he was expected produce food from the farm in rural areas. The wife's role is to prepare the food, and make sure all family members are fed, take care of, raise and educate the children, take care of visitors, and clean the house. However, I also found that the wife's role is slowly changing.

To avoid quarrels and rivalry among the wives, everyday life in a polygynous household is scheduled. The system is that one wife does all the housework, prepares food, cleans and sweeps, and does the washing, in a period of 2-4 days – what I will refer to as 'duty days' – while the other wives have their days off. It should be noted, though, that the other wives do not actually have these days off as they assist the wife on duty. Basically it just means that one wife is in charge of the household duties and that the husband 'belongs' to her on those particular days. On those days, this wife will sleep in the husband's bed and she is the only one to get any attention from the husband. Should the wife or husband not respect this schedule it is very likely to cause jealousy or quarrels among the women, and even worse if crossing of the days should result in a pregnancy: "If she gets pregnant after sleeping with the husband outside of her days, that child will be a bastard. (…) It should not have been there. This is how Islam interprets bastards. It is a child given to the wrong woman" **(App. 20, l. 372-375)**.

Some of the participating men expressed that they would support their wives in their roles, e.g. if she was sick or busy with work, but the gender roles are still strictly divided between men and women:

> *It may not be a strict taboo, but it would be a break with the cultural norm. If a man goes to the kitchen and someone from the community sees him in the kitchen, they will tease you to death! It means that you are a weak man. (...) The kitchen belongs to the women.*
> **(App. 10, l. 105-114)**

Tambro, one of the explorative interviewees, offers a more fluid division of gender roles in his house. Although he is monogamously married, gender roles are determined by the culture and not by marital cap. He and his wife do support each other in their roles but are also very much aware of what they perceive as the 'natural' distribution of labor:

> *She cannot ask me to cook, like saying "I cooked today so you should cook tomorrow", she cannot do that, because cooking is her responsibility. I cannot tell my wife, I paid for our*

son's school fees this month, so you have to pay next month, I cannot do that, because that is my responsibility.
(App. 8, l. 323-327)

Although the interviewed women do not have farm work to participate in, they are still perceived as a labour force. Housework is expected to be the women's responsibility, and managing a household on their own, is what the women expressed they were raised to do. They had high expectations to their role when they entered their marriage, not only because it is their role as a woman, but because managing one's own household induces respect from the society. However, managing a household is not easy, why I argue that gender roles may in fact promote polygyny in urban settings, as many women here are now also expected to hold a full time job. All interviewed women except one, who did not hold a steady job at that moment, were working and making an income on their own.

[T]he roles will not change. (...) But if one day her responsibilities have overwhelmed her, there are two to do them. She can either hire a maid, a servant, to help her with her responsibilities, or the man will basically marry a new wife to help the first wife in her responsibilities.
(App. 8, l. 391-396)

In this respect, helping the first wife in her duties becomes an argument for the man to take an additional wife. This is especially the case when it comes to royal or chief families. When I asked Yusif, who is a chief, if he was expected to marry polygynous, he clarified, "Because I am a royal, definitely yes" **(App. 19, l. 28)**, although he also acknowledged that he could have chosen to marry only one wife. However, the workload in a chief's house is too much for only one woman to handle, making marrying polygynous a necessity:

There are more responsibilities as a chief and we have so many visitors coming, so I need more wives to be able to take care of all the guests. When we have visitors, my wives cook and take care of them.
(App. 19, l. 51-52)

It is important to note here that being a royal does not mean that the man will eventually become chief. However, people from royal families often use the same argument to justify polygyny, even though their actual chances of becoming chiefs are very slim – or even non-existent – due to e.g. several older brothers.

Although Hayase & Liaw **(cf. p. 25)** found that a wife may even encourage her husband to take an additional wife, the women that I interviewed do not share this stand, nor appreciate the alleged concern and 'gesture' the man shows by taking another wife: "With polygyny, it is the man who initiates it. Even though a woman has a lot of work on her shoulders, she would not ever tell her husband to marry another woman because her workload is too big" **(App. 9, l. 371-373)**.

However, all the interviewed husbands express that marrying another woman was a mutual agreement among him and his current wife/wives. When I asked Kazim about how his first wife Hemunatu reacted to his second marriage, he expressed that she was happy. His second marriage was a result of him starting a new community in the bush at the outskirts of Tamale, why he could not bring Hemunatu and their small children.

> *[My] first wife was urging me to get a younger wife, who was strong enough to help me when I was here in the bush. So it was really a joy to my first wife when I married again, because she knew that when she came to join the second wife, there would be someone strong enough to help me in the bush.*
> **(App. 10, 56-59)**

Hemunatu, on the contrary, does not share her husband's more positive experience with the introduction of the second wife: "When I first got married, my expectations were fully met. Until the other wives came along. When they came, I had to share everything. Affection, food, attention, you know" **(App. 11, l. 60-62)**. She further expressed that she could not have stopped the marriage, and that their 'collective' decision of bringing a second wife into the marriage had rather proceeded as him informing her that he wanted to take an additional wife, which she could not challenge him on **(App. 11, l. 46-51)**.

In some ways, I could not help but wonder, whether the idea of more helping hands and shared workload is in some ways counterproductive. With each wife added to the family, it should be expected that a number of children will follow. That means more mouths to be fed, housework to do, and school fees to be paid; living costs and expenses that the common man does not have the funds to pay for. Furthermore, this kind of division of the housework makes the practice seem somewhat similar to a monogamous marriage on a wife's duty days, when looking at it from the women's perspective: "You know, you want your husband, but you cannot have him. It is not your day" **(App. 9, l. 421-422)**. Although this system is to prevent quarrels and jealousy among the wives, and as an efficient way to maintain peace and unity in the family, this 'modern' version of polygyny seems to have somewhere abandoned the original idea about helping each other with the workload and share responsibility. Additionally, it has become a new tendency that the women are unwilling to live in the same house, because of jealousy and rivalry: "The wives will not stay together because of jealousy. In that respect, it defeats the purpose of sharing the responsibilities" **(App. 8, l. 402-403).**

To me, this indicates a very male dominated practice, seemingly prioritizing other factors than the mere well being of the entire family. Both Islam and the North Ghanaian culture only allows polygyny, if the man is completely able to provide equally for all of his wives and their children. However, I found that this is not always the case:

> *Assuming [your husband] has been giving you 20 Ghana Cedis for food, which is not even enough, and then he takes a second wife. The man cannot give 20 Cedis to both of [us], so instead he starts giving [us] 10 each, but he is supposed to give 20-20. You see, you will never be happy with a new woman coming in, and you will never be happy with the reduced money you are going to get from your husband.*
>
> **(App. 20, l. 80-85)**

The quote illustrates how a man's duty to provide equally for all of his wives, which is the Islamic condition for the man to be allowed to practice polygyny, is rarely fulfilled. Haija furthermore expresses that the issue with polygyny is not necessarily the practice itself or the other

woman/women coming into the marriage, but the man's inability to fulfill his role as a man, a husband, and provider **(App. 20, l. 86-88)**.

The Good Wife

Another interesting argument I found to recur when interviewing the husbands, is related to women's role of being a good wife to her husband. Being a good wife means respecting her husband, taking good care of him, and being available to him. Many men, Ibrahim included, did not plan to take more than one wife when he first married. However he, as many others, use polygyny to keep his woman in place. If a woman is disrespectful towards her husband or not treating him the way he requires, he will threat to or even go that extra mile and marry a second wife.

Ibrahim's first wife Samata, was working until 9pm and was therefore not home in time to prepare dinner or do all the housework. Without success, Ibrahim tried to find her another job with better hours. During that time, Ibrahim was helping out a veteran who had retired years ago and was living on a very tight budget. He provided the veteran and his family with food, clothes, and money to cover their basic needs. As a way to pay Ibrahim back, the veteran gave him a daughter as a gift for him and his wife. The girl, Fatima, came to Ibrahim's house at an early age to help out with the household. She stayed for about a year until Samata suddenly threw her out as Fatima got old enough to marry – probably because she suspected a marriage on its way. Ibrahim had two choices: either he could give Fatima away to another man to marry or he could send her to his own aunt's house to work. He chose the latter, only to pick her up and marry her some time after, because Samata was causing him problems. Samata did not know about the marriage until it was entered into, and chose to pack her things and return to her father's house in a small and very traditional village in Upper West. She left her two children in the care of Ibrahim and Fatima. Ibrahim is still formally married to his first wife even though she left years ago, and they will remain married until she remarries, which is not likely to happen due to her age. However, because of tradition, he is still her formal husband and will be the one to bury her the day she passes away **(App. 14, l. 21-23)**. Still, as Ibrahim puts it, she should have waited for him to come for her. Samata chose to sleep with other men instead of waiting for the elders to bring her and Ibrahim together again and solve their issues or "small misunderstandings", as Ibrahim describes it **(App. 14, l. 46)**. To get back together,

they would have to go through a line of traditional rituals. He would have go to her village and make an animal sacrifice to the Gods. She would have to be bathed naked in a shower of herbs by the village's medicine men. After being cleansed of her misdeeds, she would have to walk through the village to Ibrahim, so that everybody would know about her cheating, and see her apologize. "They do that as a way to tell the village that the reason she cannot go back to her husband's house, is that she slept with another man" **(App. 14, l. 90-91)**. If these rituals of public humiliation and being naked in front of other men were not followed, she may die because of her sins if she would ever have sex with Ibrahim again. Ibrahim, on the other hand, has not committed a sin by bringing a second wife into the marriage, since Islam gives the man the right to marry up to four wives, but does not, however, give the women the right to object.

Ibrahim had marital issues with his first wife. When they first got married, he had no intentions of taking a second wife. However, as the years went by, Samata changed her attitude towards him. A woman's love is demonstrated by her ability to take good care of her husband, listen to him, and respect him. "[If] she was not misbehaving in any way, there would be no reason for me to take another wife" **(App. 14, l. 102-103)**.

In this sense, polygyny is used to keep a woman in place, as it is claimed that the woman "pushes the man to go and get another wife" **(App. 14, l. 123)**. If the man threatens to or actually goes and gets another wife, it should put the wife in her place:

> *If the second wife is nice to you and your love is strong, everything is moving on well and she listen to you and does not misbehave, the first wife will look at her and the way she is taking care of the husband and help him. The first wife will get jealous and she would want to change so the husband is going to like her again. She will start to imitate the second wife, so the first wife will change automatically. So if she is not the stubborn type and she changes, she becomes the good type and even become friends with the second wife, so that they will help each other and treat each other as sisters.*
>
> **(App. 14, l. 109-115)**

Although facing problems when marrying a second wife, Ibrahim does not dismiss the idea of eventually taking a third wife. However he is still of the opinion that it all depends on his wife:

> *If my new wife is good for me – right now we have no problems and our love is strong – so at the moment I do not have any intentions to marry another woman. Not every Muslims wants to have more than one wife, so sometimes it depends on the woman.*
> **(App. 14, l. 117-120)**

Sulley also expects his women to treat him with respect, although without specifying what he has done to earn such respect: "(…) after you have been married for a long time, the attitude of the wife changes towards you in terms of respect and the household, work, and that kind of things" **(App. 16, l. 48-49)**. A possible explanation is that he provides for his wives; they live in a large compound, he has a successful business, and is able to provide for his wives and send his children to school; he is fulfilling his role as a man. Another explanation could be that he is a man and according to this cultural context, naturally deserves to be respected by his wives.

Reproduction And Child Care

Reproduction is another important factor in terms of gender roles; not only in relation to polygyny, but for sub-Saharan African women in general. It is not only emphasized by men but also the women themselves. Hayase and Liaw found that "the system of [polygyny] (…) is designed to ensure no shortage of potential husbands to maximize women's chances of pregnancy" to maintain a very high level of fertility and childbirth in the family **(cf. p. 33)**. If a woman is not able to conceive, it does promote polygyny:

> *Sometimes if you are not blessed with children after 2-3 years, the family would ask the man to marry again. But if you are educated, maybe it would take 5-6 years, but [his family] would force him to marry again*.
> **(App. 20, l. 67-69)**

Haija expresses that it is not the husbands themselves but the husband's family, often his mother, who pushes for a new marriage and, which correlates with what Agadjanian and Ezeh state (**cf. p. 32)**. Although polygyny, in this sense, encourages or even force people into polygyny, it also

ensures that women are able to stay married despite her inability to conceive. A favorable opportunity for women, who would otherwise have been divorced and sent back to her family to be a burden for them.

However, giving birth is not enough. A woman must also prove her skills as a good mother, or she will not be seen as a 'serious woman'. Kazim's first wife gave birth to a baby girl but after the daughter died, he terminated the marriage:

> *I am actually married to four women. (...) She gave birth to [a] child, but she did not take care of it so the child died and the whole family was furious and became against the marriage. When your family is against it, there is nothing you can do. All of my extended family advised me to send the woman away. She was not a serious woman, so she went; I divorced her.*
> **(App. 10, l. 153-158)**

This is an example of how the responsibility of the children lies entirely with the women and the high importance this culture puts on motherhood. Although no culture would agree on a woman losing a child due to her incapacity of taking care of it, the man is left with no responsibility for the death and the woman is labeled as an 'unserious woman' facing severe difficulties of ever marrying again.

However, when looking into an urban context, I found the high fertility level to play a much smaller role than the studies that looked into polygyny in general, as most of these findings make conclusions based on more rural settings. Here, men would take more wives in order to limit the spacing between every new child, as he would not have to wait for one wife to be bodily ready for another pregnancy. I found that most of the participants discussed the number of children with their spouses, and agreed on a number far lower that the birth rate in more rural areas, and even a lower number than most of the participating women had wanted themselves. Haija is the only exception to this. She had a few marriage proposals on her hands before agreeing to marry Yusif. She chose him because he was educated and she did not want a large family with many children. She expected to have her husband to herself and that the two of them would be able to pay for education for their

three children, so they were sure they would taken good care of when they reached old age **(App. 20, l. 270-271)**.

Apart from Haija's story, I found that it was the men who set the wished number of children. Several of the interviewed women expressed that they wished to have one or two more children, but their husband had said no. This may be correlated with the higher living costs in the urban setting and a new mindset, which emphasizes the importance of education.

Furthermore, previous studies concluded that reproduction generates competition among the wives, as the more children they had, the more money they would receive from the husband **(cf. p. 19)**. I found this not to be the case in Tamale. Regardless of the number of children, the wives are to receive the same amount of money or material things from their husband. The wives may then themselves choose to help each other out, by sharing one's money with another wife. This could for example be if one wife's children had grown up and were no longer depending on their mother, and another wife has small children to take care of. Interference from the husband on this account will cause jealousy and rivalry among the wives, who are supposed to treat each other as sisters:

> *You come to my house and then we are rivals. You may be okay because you just came in, but I will not be okay, because I have spent most of my life with this man. I feel jealous inside, because I have suffered with this man for so long, and then you come in and I would know that he has been giving you money, but I have not received any money. I will never like you; I will be jealous of you.*
> **(App. 20, l. 340-344)**

In addition to creating competition between the wives, I found that polygyny in Tamale generates competition between the children. Humu, Sulley's second wife, grew up in a polygynous home herself and describes her upbringing as a "serious battle" **(App. 18, l. 20)**. As the father most often do not have the means to take care of all children and support them through higher educational levels, it is up to the mother to make sure that her own children gets the opportunity to rise academically. Still, both Humu and her husband describe the competition between the children to do well, as one of the positive aspects of polygyny:

> *If for example my sister's daughter were in school to become a doctor, my daughter too would work hard to be a doctor. If one of the kids were an accountant, another kid would think, 'oh, my brother is an accountant, I want to be that too'. So there is this positive competition among them that makes them try harder, because they all want to be somebody.* **(App. 18, l. 287-91)**

But as all the women expressed, the men do not have the means to support all of their children through university or even high school, why the women must make an income themselves in order to support their own children through education. The next section will, therefore, look into a new tendency within polygynous marriages that upgrade women's position from housewives to financial contributors.

New Gender Role: Women as Financial Contributors

What I found to particularly distinguish polygyny in urban areas compared to rural, is that women are now also expected to hold a full time job in addition to her household work, as Greenstreet also found **(cf. p. 36)**. All women apart from one, who did not hold a steady job at the current moment, were working and were expected to contribute financially to the household. The money the women make, however, does not go to what is considered the man's responsibility, e.g. pay for the school fees, food, or bills. They are spent on providing for the women's own children. Haija has paid for her three children's education and is also supporting two of her husband's other wives, by contributing to their children's' school fees. Yusif now has four wives and is no longer working due to his chief office, which means that he does not generate much of an income and, consequently, does not have the funds to provide for all of his children. Humu, Sulley's second wife, confirms such a scenario as she expresses how polygyny influences the children's opportunities to succeed, when her husband is unable to provide for all of them:

> *If you are not working and you are in a polygynous marriage, you and your kids will always be lacking behind, because the man cannot provide even the basic things for all of you. As I*

told you, I am supporting my own kids, so all the money I make goes to taking care of all of them.

(App. 18, l. 283-286)

Before marrying, Humu worked hard and earned her certificate as a teacher in order to be able to take care of herself and her children since she started working at age 22. If a woman is not married over a certain age, people will start questioning that woman's ability to be a good wife: "Why is this beautiful woman not married, is it because she is demanding too much, is she looking for a superman" **(App. 8, l. 354-355)**, which explains the direct societal pressure for women to marry young. This is especially the case of an educated woman, as the men may feel threatened by her. At age 24, Humu was dating a man who did not hold a steady job and was not ready to get married and take on the responsibility of providing for a family. Although she was not ready to marry herself, she describes the reasons for her marriage to her husband, Sulley, as circumstantial: "(…) when you are up to the stage where you are making your own money as a woman and a Muslim, the men will fear you. So people said I had to get married" **(App. 18, l. 49-50)**.

Sulley was a friend of the family and the only responsible man in the community. Therefore, she felt that she had to accept his proposal. Humu was aware that he was already married and her mother did not agree on the marriage at first. Her own mother was her husband's fourth wife, and knew the consequences of being in this kind of union, particularly as the last coming wife. Marriage in northern Ghana is a survival strategy, and the only way to be acknowledged as a real woman in society. In northern Ghana, a woman is considered a minor until she is married and has proven that she can run her own household **(cf. p. 4) —** while educational background has not yet achieved the same status nor importance. However, Humu's educational background gave her a much-needed confidence:

I knew I would be able to take care of and manage myself. So even if the man could not take care of me himself, I knew that I would be able to take care of myself. That is why I struggled to get my certificate.

(App. 18, l. 58-61)

Women as a group are still not fully acknowledged as being a part of the labor market. They have not yet obtained status as financial contributors in the family strong enough to challenge the man's role as the provider. However, this thorough analysis of the gender roles in the North Ghanaian context has shown that one cannot longer simplify or reduce social life to two discrete environments — housework and paid work — but has shown the complexity of social and cultural divisions as Gerson and Peiss demanded **(cf. p. 41)**. What can be concluded from Haija and Humu's stories, is that education does not necessarily prevent women from marrying polygynous. It does, however, make her more empowered in her marriage and confident in her own ability to take care of herself and her children. As such, working has been added to the pile of duties a woman has to fulfill, although not altered the husbands' attitudes towards helping out in the household. This may be due to the fact that the income women make, is not put into the household as such. Instead, it is used to take care of her own children, and in some cases provide for herself so as to not depend on her husband. Consequently, this added gender role has not been solid enough to challenge the social structure and division between the genders. Housework and childcare is still only a woman's job, which occasionally leads to a situation, where women gaining footage into the labor market, may actually promote polygyny as her job takes time away from the housework. However, quantitative studies have shown a stabile decline in polygynous marriages across sub-Saharan Africa over the past five decades. Therefore, we must investigate how this new gender role impacts gender relations in polygynous marriages in this particular context.

Part 2: Gender And Gender Relations In Polygynous Marriages

As shown above, gender roles in northern Ghana are conservative and strictly divided between men and women. However, we also saw that gender roles are no fixed objects but dynamic, ever changing, and socially constructed. This section will look into the relationship between gender roles and polygyny, by analyzing the relations among the genders; both between a husband and his wives, and the wives amongst each other.

As Gerson and Peiss argue, a central factor to the analysis of gender relations is male-domination over women, which explains an ideological control to which women are subjected **(cf. p. 41)**. A

fundamental and general aspect in the apparent inequality between men and women in northern Ghana may be explained as: "We think that a man should marry a wife, and not that a woman marries a man. But you should realize that this is because the society is patriarchal. That is the feeling of male wanting to be dominant" **(App. 8, l. 235-237)**. What I found to be relevant factors when discussing gender relations is sex and power relations.

Sexual related subjects are a vast taboo and something that should be kept in the private, although it is well-known that men are having sex outside the marriage: "To the question of men being superior in terms of sex, then yes, I think that in some ways men feel they are entitled to have sex anytime they want it" **(App. 8, l. 454-455)**. However, this is not sex in terms of reproduction and with the purpose of limiting the spacing between pregnancies, as Hayase and Liaw found **(cf. p. 33)** but in terms of the woman being available to the man at all times. Here, it is the idea that men have a higher need for sex, and I found that it is generally seen as undesirable for women to express a high sex drive. As stated, Ghana is a very religious country, and none of the dominant religions accept adultery, why the men's assumed higher sex drive, is argued to be promoting polygyny:

> *[The] culture recognizes the fact that men naturally have the tendency of going out of the marriage to have more sex. I think it is not only recognized by culture, but biologically. Naturally, you will find that men will have that tendency more than women. That is why it gives room for the man to be able to marry more than one wife.*
> **(App. 8, l. 461-464)**

However, I found the seemingly unlimited access to sex (it should be noted that the women presumably are allowed to say no) is not the actual motivation for men to marry more than one wife, as was my impression when researching the subject and discussing with locals. Because of the system with duty days, the husband can only have sex with the one wife on duty. The husband in theory belongs to the wife on duty in a polygynous marriage but that does not necessarily generate intimacy between the husband and his wives, or mean that he will call her to his room at night. Women are expected to show affection on her duty days, but not as I would probably show affection to a man. Women demonstrate affection for their husband in terms of cooking a meal she

knows he will enjoy, fetching water for him to wash himself before prayer, and take good care of the household and children. Neither the husband nor the wives are allowed to display affection in public, as this may cause jealousy quarrels among the wives. Therefore, affection is only shown when a husband is alone with his wife in bed. Humu describes how she has not felt affection since 2-3 years into her now 9 years long marriage, and that being on duty does not mean that her husband will call for her at night: "When he feels like having you there, he will call you. If he does not feel like it, he does not call you" **(App. 18, l. 113-114).** It is the husband who will initiate intimate moments with his wives. At the same token, if the wife he calls for does not show affection back, it increases the risk of him taking another wife: "If you as a woman do not show affection, he will bring in someone that will" **(App. 18, l. 105-106)**. In this sense, there seems to be inconsistency between men's access to sex at all times and his longing for his wives. It basically means that when the husband is no longer sexually satisfied with his first wife/wives, he will bring in a new one, who is often younger and more beautiful. For example, when Sulley was about to introduce me to his wives at my first visit, he straight out said 'you will see that my wives are a lot fatter than me'.

According to Humu, Sulley is having intercourse with the woman he is dating outside the marriage and whom he plans to marry. Adultery for both men and women is not acceptable according to religion and is culturally frowned upon, but if the husband has intentions of marrying the woman he is seeing outside his marriage, it is not considered adultery. In this sense, polygyny is also impelled by the man's socially accepted and recognized need for sex with multiple partners. Sulley, for instance, says that being polygynous "keeps [him] away from fornication" **(App. 16, 114-115)**. This – to me – indicates that polygyny is not only practiced due to religious right or obligations nor its traditional importance; it is undeniably also pleasurable for men, if they are no longer sexually satisfied with their current wives.

As stated by Agadjanian and Ezeh **(cf. p. 34)**, polygyny acts to reinforce and preserve social inequality between genders through cultural norms and prescriptions that govern gender relations. A woman's position in the household is seen as easily replaceable, which undermines her relative bargaining position when it comes to major household decisions. Although Humu is capable of taking care of herself and her children, she is still easily replaceable, why her opportunity to

negotiate any decisions concerning the household is very little or nonexistent. When Humu first got to know that her husband was dating someone outside the marriage, a person she in fact knew, she called the woman and told her to stay away, as Sulley would not be capable of taking care of three wives. When Sulley heard about Humu's call, they got into a fight, which she was in no position to win, and she can now expect that the woman will be introduced to her as the third wife at any time without being able to bargain. Another disadvantage, is that a man and/or his family pays dowry or bride price for the woman, or if the man is a chief the woman may be given to him as a gift. In both cases, she and her children automatically become the man's property, which gives him power: "Sharing is better than running away. You have to cope with it. (…) Where should I go? I have my children and I cannot leave them behind. It is better to stay" **(App. 18, l. 98-99)**. If a woman chooses to divorce, her children automatically belongs to the husband. This may be a reason why divorce only occurs in very limited numbers in northern Ghana[6], despite Archampong found that divorce rates are high in areas where polygyny is practiced **(cf. p. 32)**.

Both Dinan, and Hayase and Liaw found that men who have opted for monogamous unions, tend to pursue more informal forms of polygyny outside their marriage. Women know it is unrealistic to hope for a faithful husband, and they even anticipate that that their husbands will have mistresses outside the marriage **(cf. p. 28)**. The women I spoke to, acknowledged and accepted their husband's promiscuous behavior, which is supposed to be socially frowned upon and a sin according to Islam. A new woman coming into the marriage, however, although allowed according to the same religion, causes more offense with the women. I found that there was inconsistency between the men and women's attitude towards outside affairs. As we saw with Sulley, he used polygyny as a way to avoid fornication. However, the women were more lenient and acknowledgeable about their husband having a girlfriend on the side, as long as he did not marry her.
Haija was also fully aware that her husband Yusif was dating someone outside the marriage and accepted this, until she found out that he had married her:

[6] Not all marriages, particularly customary marriages, are officially registered and neither are all divorces. There are therefore no accurate statistics over the divorce rate in northern Ghana. However, some 40 to 50 years back, divorce was almost unheard of, and marriage was still "very much intact and respected as a sacred institution" **(Mustapha 2013)**.

> *My husband and I were together, and after I had our three children – like I knew he was dating outside our marriage – but later I found out that he had a baby with someone else and that he had married her! (…) When it happens like that, it is torture to the first wife.* **(App. 20, l. 169-173)**

Haija was aware that marrying a Muslim man would potentially mean that more wives would be added later on, but hoped that his educational background would make him prefer a monogamous marriage. As expressed in the above quote, she did not know about the other woman who turned out to become a second wife, nor her baby, until Yusif had already married her. The same thing happened to Yusif's second and third wives. Haija considered a divorce but because her children were already grown and she would not give birth to more children, she decided to stay as being a single woman in northern Ghana is not only difficult, it is socially frowned upon. At the end, she decided to live separately from her husband for a while. Haija has the advantage of being educated and making an income, why she is able to take care of herself and have further been able to support her own three children through education, even though Yusif does not have the funds to support all four wives and their children. Instead, Haija often helps another wife's child with e.g. school supplies, and Yusif occasionally receives money from her. Still, he plans to marry more women when he will later become a higher chief in another community. Because Haija is in a position where she can support herself, her marriage means less and less to her: "[In] the end I just told my husband, 'marry more'. I do not even care anymore. I will still be what I am; I do not depend on him, he does not help me" **(App. 20, l. 222-224)** and "I do not feel like I have a husband anymore" **(App. 20, l. 328)**.

Haija's example can be transferred into Gerson and Peiss' concept of *boundaries*, which explores the division between genders and encompass a definition of changing patterns in a social relation. As Haija and Yusif are mutually dependent on each other, Haija is able to challenge the gender relations in her own marriage in small but important ways. As shown in the section *The Good Wife*, a woman's first job is to be a good wife to her husband and respect him. However, as there is interdependency between Haija and Yusif, Haija's position and role in the household is not easily replaceable, as Agadjanian and Ezeh found to be a tendency in high-polygyny areas **(cf. p. 34)**. The

interdependence between the spouses, however, is not strong enough for Haija to challenge Yusif's domination as a man and is, therefore, still in a subordinate position to him. It may instead be illustrated as her ability to negotiate privileges and resources as defined in Gerson and Peiss' *Process of Negotiation and Domination*. According to the theory, domination by the male and negotiation, which the woman use to bargain for privileges and resources, are two processes that are interdependent and exist concurrently **(cf. p. 41)**. As the men are supposed to take care of and provide for his wives, Haija is challenging her husband's domination on an everyday basis, as she no longer depends financially on him — rather, the financial dependency may even be said to be Yusif's dependence of Haija. Despite the fact that Haija still has a room at the chief's palace and that she is still living in Yusif's family's property in Tamale, Haija and Yusif no longer live together, and she no longer goes to the palace to perform her role as a wife on her duty days. Instead, she acts more as Yusif's formal wife on festive occasions at the palace: "[Society] sees the first wife as the most important wife; she is the queen of the house because she was there first. The new wife was coming to support her. So the society places her on a higher hierarchy" **(App. 8, l. 421-423).** However, when I asked Yusif about his relations to his other wives, the feelings seemed to be of a more affectionate nature than the impression I got when I asked Haija the same: "Because he has done all of this to me, he feels uneasy and uncomfortable with me" **(App. 20, l. 231)**. This and the fact that Haija only performs her formal duty as a wife can be interpreted as Haija challenging Yusif's male dominance, while Yusif tries to cover this fact up for me. The theory further states that women's power has to be found within her kin-based resources. Haija is the first wife, which does not only put her on the top of the social hierarchy among the four wives, but she also constitutes a role model for the other wives and supports their children. She, therefore, uses her kin-based resources to further renegotiate her position towards her husband and challenge his dominance. On the contrary, the last coming woman is left with extremely limited or no means to negotiate her own role or situation, neither towards her husband, nor the other wives. She is also the only wife living at the palace and performs all the housework.

Lastly, Gerson and Peiss bring up the concept of *consciousness*, which encompasses the mindset and expectations to both men and women's role in a marriage **(cf. p. 41)**. As should be clear by now, Haija did not expect her husband to become a chief, and as a result also polygynous. When marrying Yusif, her mindset was that they would only be those two and their children. Yusif was

educated and working, why she expected that the children and her would be well taken care of, and that their children would take care of them when they reached old age **(App. 20, 269-271).** Before the other wives came along, Haija was behaving according to the normative expectations to her role as a woman: she was a mother, took good care of the house and her husband, and was what society would call 'a good woman'. In continuation of the above analysis of how Haija is challenging her husband's male dominance on an everyday basis, looking at this from the concept of consciousness, we will find a new layer up for analysis. As Haija does not feel 'incomplete' or 'inadequate' without her husband or a male leader, although acknowledging that staying is easier than divorce, she is indirectly protesting against the social order in the very conservative and male-dominated North Ghanaian culture. She is challenging the existing power between her and her husband as her consciousness of her role as a woman has changed. However, her 'rebellion' against the polygynous practice has not been strong enough to change her husband's mindset, only towards herself, why Yusif's reason for engaging in polygyny has not changed. He is still determined to take a fifth wife the day he becomes chief in a larger community. This may be as Haija is the only of the four wives who is challenging her husband's mindset and behavior, why her rebellion is left without attaining changes.

Humu and Haija's stories are examples of how doing housework, as a wife is expected to, and making income on their own, gives the women opportunity to challenge the cultural indoctrinated gender roles, and by that also the relations among genders, although changes is not guaranteed.

Challenging Male Dominance

As we saw in the above analysis, Humu and Haija are examples of how, occasionally, women challenge the very male-dominated culture, consequently dissolving some of the boundaries between the very strict gender roles and gender relations in everyday life. The following analysis will look more into how power is exercised in polygynous marriages in between the husband and his wives, and amongst the wives.

When examining power, we must first look at two essential questions raised by Foucault: By what means is power exercised? And what happens when individuals exert power over others? **(cf. p. 42)**. As we saw in the above section *The Good Wife*, a woman's job is to respect her husband

regardless of what he has done or not done to achieve such respect. Women are expected to be submissive and not talk back at their husband. This is supposedly part of the Islamic religion: "Men do not respect women, so they just shout on you and you cannot reply. It is not allowed in our religion" **(App. 18, l. 257-258)**. I suspect this is an example of a fusion between religion and tradition. However, the way power is exercised, which might apply to the North Ghanaian culture in general:

> *So if you are married to a woman and she is not giving you the level of respect you need as a man, she is challenging your authority as a man. You know, as a man you should feel like you are in control, but you realize that a woman is challenging most of your authority. Then you would want to marry another woman, who will submit to you. If you ask her to do stuff, then she would do it. Your first wife would probably not comply with you, when you ask her to do it* **(App. 8, l. 74-79)**.

According to Foucault, power is not simply a relationship between partners or individuals, but a way in which certain actions modify others, as power only exists when put into action **(cf. p. 42)**. This is what distinguishes Foucault's concept of power from the one of Gerson and Peiss, who saw disparity in power among genders as a constant. In the above statement, we see how men may use polygyny as a way to control their wives. Although most of the interviewed husbands describe polygyny as a religious right or obligation, or due to privileges as a royal, not every Muslim man wants to have more than one wife, nor – when looking at polygyny in an urban setting – necessarily needs to either. I found that polygyny is always initiated by the man, and they tend to justify taking an additional wife without the consent of his current wife/wives because of her/their behavior:

> *Sometimes the woman will push you to go and take a second wife. Like if she was nice and good to you, but after the wedding she changes and there is not peace at home. If the first wife is not good to you, you are quarrelling and so, then she pushes the man to go and get another wife.*
> **(App. 14, l. 120-123)**

Taking an additional wife in order to control the first wife/wives is an act of power. The man's idea behind this act is that the first wife will see how the new wife is treating him, resulting in him in return showing her more affection. Hence, when the first wife then sees this, she will become jealous and then imitate the second wife, in order to get her husband to like her again. Unless the first wife is the stubborn type, her attitude will change automatically and will become "the good type and even become friends with the second wife, so that they will help each other and treat each other as sisters" **(App. 14, l. 114-115)**. The opposite pole of power, as Foucault describes, is passivity, as demonstrated by Ibrahim's second wife, Fatima: "He is the man of the house, so he decides what he wants to do. So if he decides that he wants to take another wife, I cannot stop it" **(App. 15, l. 52-53)**.

What characterizes the kind of power in this example is decided by the relationship between the partners **(cf. p. 42)**, which is emphasized through gender roles. Ibrahim and Fatima are married, and as we saw in the section *The Good Wife*, a woman has to respect her husband and treat him well unconditional of what he does for her. If not, the husband may take an additional wife, which leaves only two possible options for the women: change or divorce; divorce being the absolute last option:

> *What women are afraid of is divorce. If a man just says 'I will divorce you', he might as well say 'I am going to kill you'. (...) She will have to go back to her parents and be dependent on them, because she is probably not working. So they would rather stay at the man's house and go through all the suffering than go back to the parents. So staying is better than divorce.* ***(*App. 20, l. 101-106)**

This leaves only one option left for the women: change. The men are well aware of the struggle a woman must go through if she decides to divorce, as we also saw with Ibrahim's first wife. Samata chose to leave Ibrahim when he took a second wife, consequently also leaving her children. Samata chose not to be passive in this situation but paid a high price. Her children are considered the man's property due to the system of dowry/bride price and because of her high age, she is unlikely to have the opportunity to ever marrying again.

Hemunatu faced the same dilemma when her husband, Kazim, informed her that he was going to take a second wife. She was aware that Kazim came from a royal home and was a Muslim, and the

possibility of him marrying polygynous was high. However, she, as many other women, had hoped that it would not be so. Having to make severely life altering decisions, she was helpless in the situation:

> *Who am I to challenge my husband on this matter? If I had challenged him and said 'I do not want you to marry another wife', he could beat me up. He could tell people around that I am a naughty woman and I am making life miserable for him. He could even send me away to get the opportunity to marry the next wife. If he would send me away, where was I going to go? So I just said yes.*
> **(App. 11, l. 47-51)**

As illustrated in the above, the men will always possess the power to opt for polygyny if he wants to. A man's religious right to marry four wives further strengthens his power. When I asked Hemunatu how she would feel about her husband, Kazim, taking a fourth wife now, the answer was prompt: "If he wants to marry another wife, we would not agree. We would fight it" **(App. 11, l. 149)**. However, when appointed that the religion states that he can still marry yet another wife, the answer was quite different: "If the religion says so, then it is fine" **(App. 11, l. 152)**.

Part 3: The Aspects Of Capital In Polygynous Marriages

Although the analysis so far has found polygyny to be a structurally unequal practice enhanced by the divided gender roles and relations among genders, the polygynous systems is still upheld by the women. Being polygynous is not only beneficial to the husband. In a country like Ghana, particularly in the poorer north, there is no social system or similar institutions to help you. Consequently, social security net relies entirely on the family – the extended family system.
When gathering literature, I came across the word 'wealth' multiple times, and that polygynous men are often 'wealthy'. The latter is often the case if looking at many East African cultures like Kenya and Tanzania, where the bride price is very high **(App. 8, l. 196-197)**. However, I found the bride price or dowry in northern Ghana to be of more symbolic meaning – a gesture – to celebrate the union of two families. When conducting the interviews, wealth was not used in the sense that I,

as a foreigner coming from the West, would perceive it. To me, it means money or other means of assets, and symbolic capital such as expensive cars and branded goods, etc. In two of the interviewed families, the husbands worked as security guards, which pay approximately 250 Cedis (around 500 DKK) a month. They worked 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. One of them had a family of two wives (one divorced) and six children; the other had three wives and 17 children (not all children were staying in his house). When I interviewed the wives, particularly the first ones, they expressed rather loathing feelings about having to share the money, attention, food, gifts, etc. they received from their husband, and claimed that the practice caused jealousy, quarrels, and rivalry among the wives. However, I found the practice to also be very beneficial to all family members, which I will get back to. It is, therefore, essential to explore the term 'wealth' in this particular context, and how wealth influences both men and women's reasoning for marrying polygynous.

In Bourdieu's theory, capital is founded in *economic capital, cultural capital,* and *social capital*. When looking at the Ghanaian context, wealth is convertible into economic capital. This is not to say, however, that the investigated forms of capital do not have symbolic value or function as well, but this will be looked into using Coleman's notion of social capital. This section will look into how the families are converting its relative capital into other forms of capital.

Introducing Habitus And Field As A Device for Empirical Studies

First of all, we must clarify the interviewees reasons for being polygynous and the wealth and values they are striving for within the community's field: respect, leadership, unity, power, and responsibility:

> *Respect was given to a man based on the size of his family. So if you were a man and you had a big family, the people of the society would respect you: respect you for being able to administer such a big family, which means that they might give you the responsibility of leading the whole community as the chief.*
> **(App. 8, l. 51-55)**

Because respect from the community is earned by the size of a man's family, it generates a competition between the community's polygynous men to obtain the above-mentioned aspects of wealth. Before going further into the analysis of capital, I will shortly introduce two additional heuristic devices to explain the competition: *habitus* and *field*.

Habitus is the value and norm system, and historical and cultural habits an agent is born into, which most often lies outside the awareness of the agent. Habitus acts in accordance with the demands and norms within a given field. On one hand, it structures habitus as an internalized product of the field's inherent necessities, while on the other hand contributing to the constitution of the field as a world, which makes sense according to values that should be pursued **(Prieur & Sestoft 2006, 39)**.

A *field* is a network of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in a certain form of capital. Fields exist because of conflicts and power struggles between the agents; particularly in terms of the right to define what has value and is worth striving for, e.g. when it is of good repute to have many wives. A society is not a single entity but constituted by the various fields that are outlined and relatively isolated from each other by their internal laws, logics, and rationales - the field's *doxa*. At the same time, a field is outlined by the doxa and can only exist because of the consensus among its agents, who define what is worth fighting for.

Positions are where the agents are placed in the field according to their relative amount and kind of capital **(Ibid., 165)**. One may have high economic capital but low cultural capital, while another may have a lot of social capital but limited financial capital. However, as I do not have data indicating how much capital the interviewed men bring to their fields, the analysis will not focus on where in their respective fields the participants are positioned – only what kind of capital they bring to it.

For the sake of this analysis, let us assume that the interviewed polygynous men are in the same field, even though they do not share the same community or know each other. To be able to enter that field, the men must bring some kind of capital to it, in other words, the collected capital the family has, which then generates the competition that takes place in the field. Due to the competition, the field is not fixed but dynamic, and knowledge of the historical evolution of the field is therefore needed. In pre-colonial times, polygyny was particularly used to build up new communities in rural areas. An agent's position in the field is dependent on his relative amount of capital, and that amount is determined by the relative amount of capital that other agents bring into

the same field. Because the men possess the economic capital - as opposed to the women - they have the power to define that having many wives, is worth striving for. Strictly speaking, one man with four wives has the most capital, if the other agents in the same field have two. There through, when a man has proved that he was able to administer a large family, in some cases more than the now common four wives, he would become the chief. However, the capital is not only determined by the number of wives, as the field's doxa proscribes that it is also determined by his *ability* to provide for them and their children, which induces power and respect. Capital, in this sense, should be understood as the agent's resources and competences, which gives one the possibility to exercise power and influence within their field **(Prieur & Sestoft 2006, 167)**. Today, the competition within a field does not necessarily end in one man becoming the chief but it does induce a competition for relative capital between the polygynous men in a given field.
The relation between habitus and the field, the field of polygynous men, is that habitus poses the *understanding* of polygyny and *knowledge* of how to be polygynous and act in the field **(Ibid., 169)**.

Knowing how capital or forms of wealth induce respect and create competition within a community or field, we can now analyze how families invest in relative capital and how this is converted into the three categories of capital.

Religion As A Cultural Capital

Islam constitutes another field, which can be seen as a *cultural capital*. According to Islam, a man can only take more wives if he is capable of taking equally good care of them. This means that if he wants to buy a present for one wife, he cannot do it until he can buy the same present for all of his wives. Paying unequal attention to the wives or not giving them the same amount of money, will cause jealousy, quarrels, and disunity among them. These are the doxa that exists within this field. However, traditional polygynous men (often people from the Upper East and Upper West, including royals and chiefs) do not share these rules: "The Traditionalists, whether they can take care of the wives or not, they just marry them" **(App. 9, l. 95-96)**. The difference is particularly evident when you see chiefs with up to 30 wives as e.g. the Yendi chief has. Therefore, all polygynous men do

not necessarily belong in the same field, as they may not share the same doxa. Various fields constitute a society, and an agent does not only appear in one, but in a number of fields. Polygyny constitutes a field, as we saw in the above, and Islam and tradition constitute the two other fields that I will use for the analysis.

All male participants expressed different reasons for being polygynous. Although Kazim comes from a royal family and can therefore in theory marry as many wives as he pleases, he does not feel comfortable marrying more, than the four wives his religion gives him the *right* to marry. Sulley, on the other hand, saw it as his religious *obligation* to be polygynous, as there are too few men compared to the number of women, and the religion states that if you can afford it, you *should* marry more than one. However, he also expects to become a chief one day, which is to a less extent, also one of his arguments. Although Yusif is a Muslim, he claims to be polygynous due to his chief office and therefore plans to take more than the four wives he already has, despite him already having difficulties providing for his current four wives and their children. Lastly Ibrahim, who did not expect to marry polygynous even though he is a Muslim, argues that he was pushed to do because of the problems his first wife caused him.

Looking at the Islamic field, an agent having a lot of knowledge about its practice and the Koran may be interpreted as cultural capital. Kazim, for example, was brought up in an Islamic school and is only trained in Islam **(App. 10, l. 5)**. He is illiterate but as religion is highly valued in the North Ghanaian culture, he brings a great amount of cultural capital to the Islamic field and less e.g. economic capital. Yusif, who is also a Muslim, states his reasons for being polygynous being his chief office. Therefore, he may have higher cultural capital in the traditional field than in the Islamic field but still he belongs in both of them. Although Yusif, Kazim and Sulley originate from royal families, only Yusif straightforwardly uses his royal background as argument for being polygynous.

As such, all men argued to be polygynous of reasons that can be converted into cultural capital. However, the fact that the men all use different arguments for being polygynous, points to an inconsistency in the cultural practice of polygyny. On one hand, it can be argued that religion and tradition are used simultaneously. On the other hand, it points to a situation where men use their religious right, obligation, or royal status for personal gain, which does not necessarily have

anything to do with neither religion nor tradition. The practice is fully acknowledged by and integrated in the North Ghanaian culture, then "why not take more wives?" **(App. 8, l. 93)**.

"A Man Who Is New To This Does Not Know Anything"

When investigating the women's reason for engaging in polygyny, I found the general attitude to be driven more by economic capital.

Because the northern part of Ghana is very poor compared to the rest of the country, the men must firstly prove to be *responsible*, which I found to be an important factor for the women's reasoning for marrying polygynous: "Because there are more women than men. I mean responsible men. There are men, but not responsible ones" **(App. 9, l. 271-272)**. Responsibility proved to be the most important reason for women when accepting a marriage proposal, regardless of whether he is already married or not. As we saw previously, Sulley was the only responsible man in Humu's community and although she was aware of the difficulties in living in a polygynous home, she went through with the marriage anyway. Fatima, however, actually preferred marrying a polygynous man, as he has already proven his ability to take care of his wife and their children:

> *I would prefer to marry polygynous. I believe that a man who is already married have experience and knows how to treat a wife well and knows the value of a woman. So I would prefer to go for someone who already has a wife. A man who is new to this does not know anything.*
> **(App. 15, l. 145-148)**

Women's perception of wealth is in this aspect shown by the man's ability to take care of and provide for his family. If a woman sees that another woman is properly dressed, it is instantly assumed that the man dressed her properly, which will make the other woman to go after that man. Marriage is a way of surviving, especially for young women. Yusif's fourth wife, for example, is almost the same age as his first-born child **(App. 20, l. 144-145)**. She, however, was given to Yusif because he is a chief **(App. 19, l. 39)**. It should be noted though, that this only goes for the second or later wife. The first wife does not share this experience, even though she has someone to share

the workload with at home: "When I first got married, my expectations [to my role as a wife] were fully met. Until the other wives came along. When they came, I had to share everything. Affection, food, attention, you know" **(App. 11, l. 60-62)**.

The above examples illustrate that there is a gap between the first and later wives' different reasoning for marrying polygynous. The first wife does not have an actual reason; she simply has not got a choice: "I could not have stopped it. I had to accept her and welcome her" **(App. 11, l. 58)**. However, the economic capital influences her acceptance of the new marriage: "If the man can take care of all of [us], there is no harm. So in this sense, I was not harmed when my husband took another wife" **(App. 11, l. 72-73)**. When speaking of the later wives, they were all aware of the fact that the man was already married and entered the marriage voluntarily. The voluntariness, however, is relative. As mentioned, Humu describes her marriage as 'circumstances', while Kazim's third wife, Adamy, was around 30 years old when she got married and was, therefore, directly pressured to marry, due to her high age and low fertility aspect **(App. 13, l. 6)**. However, both express that the man had proved his ability to financially provide for his family and was respected in the community, and that these were their main reasons for marrying polygynous.

Social Capital Embedded In Extended Families

Ghanaians, regardless of married monogamous or polygynous, has the 'extended family system', which means that you help extended family members out. Members covered by the extended family spans from the immediate family to distinct cousins and friends of the family. If you have an extra bedroom in the house, a job, or any type of means to provide for or help another person, you cannot turn your back on them **(App. 8, l. 144-148)**.

The wealth aspect of the extended family can be investigated by Bourdieu's social capital. It is a network of connections not naturally or socially given but rather constituted by an initial act of institution, necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits **(cf. p. 43-44)**. Social capital and symbolic profits are Kazim's main reasons for being polygynous. To him, being polygynous is not necessarily about financial resources, which I found to be the women's dominating factor. Rather, he believes that a large family will benefit all family members in all aspects of life. As he describes, one child may grow up

to be very rich. Another child may not be rich but very intelligent, so the rich child will be able to pay for his/hers school fees. Another child may grow up to be very respected in society or get a high positioned job and thereby benefitting his whole family: "(…) everybody has something to bring back to the family, whether it is money, respect; it all goes back to the family name. Because of the collectivity that polygyny causes, the family becomes a larger force" **(App. 10, l. 143-145)**. As stated, a marriage in this context is not only a union between two people but more essentially also a union between two families. In this sense, marriage can be seen as an investment strategy aimed at establishing social relations that are directly useable in the short or long run within the immediate or extended family **(cf. p. 44)**.

Using Bourdieu's theory, marriage is an investment. When a man marries a wife, he pays dowry or bride price, meaning that his wife and their children are his property, may eventually bring prosperity back to the family in terms of money, respect, etc. The woman may also come from a family that the man has an interest in marrying into, e.g. if the family has a higher status, or own land and property, as well as her family might in the reverse situation have an interest in marrying her into his family. Many women in Northern Ghana are given to men; particularly if he is a religious scholar, from a royal family, or a chief. Yusif's fourth wife, Zeinabu, was given to him due to his chief office, and Fatima was given to Kazim because he was being helpful to her father. Kazim met his first two wives when he was working as a tractor operator in a small village up north. Both were given to him because he was a Muslim scholar and a respected man in their community:

> *Sometimes when you do something nice, when you are courteous to people, they want to give their daughter for you to marry, so they are sure that their daughter will be in good hands. Because of the gesture I gave to the family, they wanted me to marry their daughter.*
> **(App. 10, l. 28-31)**

These are not isolated cases, merely examples of how women are being traded for different purposes to be beneficial for one family or both, and this exchange is very often a marriage into a polygynous home. Although this may sound like women are being forced into marrying a rich man, the mindset is also embedded in the women themselves. As opposed to the motivations for

marrying in a Western society like mine, marriage in Northern Ghana is a way of surviving, particularly for women from families with limited resources:

> *[Most] women from poor families are definitely looking for rich guys to marry. So when a rich guy comes, she is already looking for him. The benefits of marrying a rich guy exceed the benefits of staying at home and not marrying.*
> **(App. 8, l. 290-293)**

In this sense, the culture of the North Ghanaian society promotes polygyny for both men and women.

Bourdieu moreover emphasizes how social networks provide access to a group's resources. In this setting, women become an asset that can be exchanged for access to a family's social capital. However, the outcome of Bourdieu's theory on social capital, is ultimately economical reward, e.g. when one child pays for another child's school fees, someone brings prosperity back to the family, or in situation where the whole family comes together and pays for hospital bills, for a wife or a child in times of sickness. Therefore, Bourdieu cannot stand alone when investigating polygyny.

The Functioning Of Social Capital

Focal to Coleman's theory is the *functioning* of capital, which in this study is embodied in human and social capital, and will be used to investigate the aspect of respect, unity in the family group, and the relations among family members.

In Coleman's theory, *human capital* is defined by what each family member brings to the marriage in terms of educational background or other means, and that could potentially put the family higher up in the social hierarchy in the community or generate *financial capital*[7].

Having a large family has a functioning outside the family group, as it induces respect from the community and creates a competition among the men, as we also saw with Bourdieu. As a man, you have to prove that you are capable of taking care of your large family:

[7] As I do not have the data to measure what kind or amount of capital members bring into the family, I will use financial capital more loosely to explain a family member's relative ability to bring this to the family.

> *You have to work really hard to prove that you are a man; you are capable to take care of a large family. Everybody respects you because of the size of your family, (...) whether you like it or not, they will respect you.*
> **(App. 10, l. 132-135)**

Although it is expected that the husband should be able to take care of all his wives and children, I found that it was rarely the case. All the wives, particularly the first ones, expressed that they had not received the same amount of money after their husband took a second wife, as they are supposed to according to customs. In this sense, a large family has an external function, as it induces respect, social capital, from the community regardless of the man's capability to provide for it or not. It furthermore has an internal function: human capital that is convertible into financial capital, as "a large family can get you benefits in all aspects of life" **(App. 10, l. 138-139)**.

For a polygynous marriage to function, there has to be *unity* between the husband and his wives, and among the wives. This is what Coleman calls *social structures*, which refers to obligations and expectations, norms and sanctions that constrain and/or encourage certain kinds of behavior **(cf. p. 46)**. The social structures are what produce *social capital*. Disunity occurs if there are conflicts, sabotage, envy, or jealousy among the wives **(App. 9, l. 53-54)**. These are caused if the man does not treat his wives equally, e.g. if he does not give the wives the same amount of money and gifts, or pays equal attention to them:

> *If I am with the man and then you come in (...) then we are rivals. (...) I feel jealous inside, because I have suffered with this man for so long, and then you come in and I would know that he has been giving you money, but I have not received any money. I will never like you; I will be jealous of you.*
> **(App. 20, l. 338-344)**

Quarrels and jealousy most often occurs when a new wife enters the marriage as the husband often finds her more interesting, as she is probably younger and more beautiful. The system of duty days,

however, often prevent this situation, as he is not allowed to spend the night or time with the new wife outside her days, and furthermore that all the wives must have her own room in the compound: "The unity is very important because without unity, there will be no peace in the house and no one would be happy. We all try to play a role in getting peace around the house" **(App. 11, l. 96-98)**. Although everyone play a role in keeping the peace around in the house, it is the husband's role to ensure the unity: "If there is a misunderstanding among us wives, our husband will go in and control it" **(App. 12, l. 72-73)**. As mentioned in *The Good Wife*, a wife is expected to respect her husband, as well as treat the other wives as sisters. They are expected to help each other, e.g. support the one on duty and treat the other wives' children as their own. Hemunatu describes her relationship to the other wives' children as "very courteous" **(App. 11, l. 85)**, and elaborates: "I love all the children and (...) I treat them as my own (...). They almost do not know the difference between their own mother and me because they all relate together as if they were their own siblings" **(App. 11, l. 89-94)**.

The unity in the family is also upheld by a social hierarchy among the wives. When a new wife enters into the marriage, she is introduced to the first wives prior to the wedding (except in Yusif's case, which consequently caused disunity and jealousy among the wives). The women are perceived as easily replaceable **(cf. p. 34)**, and do not have a say in the decision: "I could not have stopped it. I had to accept her and welcome her" **(App. 11, l. 58)**. When a new wife is introduced, the first thing she will be taught, is the ranking of the wives:

> *When I bring in a new wife, we will all sit together and I will let her know that this is her seniors and this is the ranking of the house. This is the first, second, third, fourth, and you are coming in as the fifth one, so you must respect them.*
> **(App. 19, l. 63-65)**

Although all wives are legally married to the husband, society places the first wife higher in the society: "Society sees the first wife as the most important wife; she is the queen of the house because she was there first. The new wife was coming to support her" **(App. 8, l. 421-422)**. She is also the one attending formal gatherings with the husband notwithstanding it is her duty day, is the first to receive money or gifts from the husband, and is the one distributing food in the house **(App.**

11, l. 81-83). The latter two, however, do not actually have a function in northern Ghana, as the wives must receive the exact same amount, and the wife on duty cooks for all family members and shares everything (compared to other places polygyny is practiced, where women receives money and/or food based on how many children they have). Worth noting though, is that this is more in theory than how it in fact works in practice. The function of the hierarchy controls the behavior of the wives in order to obtain a fulfilling mutual interest for all members of the family: peace and unity, and to avoid jealousy and quarreling.

The above analysis has endeavored to explain how social capital is generated according to Bourdieu's theory of capital in the various fields the men occurs in, and the *functioning* of social capital in Coleman's theory within polygynous families. Human and financial capital is generated from a large family's various functions. Social capital is derived from the *relations* among family members - both between the husband and wives. The social capital is dependent on the physical presence of family members, particularly the husband. As we saw with Humu and Haija's stories earlier, the human and, therefore, financial capital in the families, suffer under *structural deficiency*. It is restricted or non-profitable for them, as the social capital is missing due to disunity among family members, and absence of the husband. They are, however, empowered through their ability to create human and financial capital on their own, as shown in *New Gender Role: Women as Financial Contributors*.

Chapter VI: Discussion

In the analysis, I have endeavored to present polygyny in a very local context based the narratives of the people who practice polygyny, without problematizing the practice myself. However, the interviewed women themselves problematized the practice. Although feminist writers call for an abolition of the practice, the interviewed women did not. They acknowledge its existence and functions in the North Ghanaian society, and believed that men generally are superior to them. By the same token, women are just as responsible for the continuation of the practice as men are. The first wives expressed that it was "automatic" **(App. 11, l. 16)** that the husband would take more wives without questioning his reasons for doing so, while the later wives intentionally went for a married man **(App. 20, l. 134-137)**. Therefore I believe that the problematic about polygyny should not be found in the actual practice but rather *how* it is practiced.

The table below illustrates men and women's general and contrasting reasons for being polygynous.

Reasons for Marrying Polygynous	
Men	**Women**
Not enough men	Not enough responsible men
Being a leader of a large family	Manage a household
Extended family	Own children
Respected family name	Responsible family home
Few children with more wives	More own children

The differences in the two genders' perception of polygyny do not necessarily equal male-dominance and inequality. The difficulties about polygyny may be found in the gender relations: are they voluntary and unproblematic? The discussion can be seen from the aspects of *force* versus *consent*.

A stated, marriage is culturally important for women, as they are considered to be 'minors' until they have proved their ability to manage a household on their own. That is the *direct* force from society. The indirect force comes from the woman's own family. If the family has the ability to support her through education, they will not expect her to marry before she graduates, as they have 'invested' in her. However, if this is not the case, she depends on finding a husband financially capable of providing for her and/or is a good trade in terms of uniting the two families. Often the case in the latter example, the woman is very young and her family may be struggling to feed all the children. However, the Ghanaian system has laws and a special police department - the Domestic Violence and Report Unit - that is able to go in and stop a marriage from happening if the woman is forced into it. Should the wedding be stopped, though, the woman would have to go back to the family she is having conflicting interests with, as there is no social system to take care of her but her extended family: "The laws are there, but basically, it will be in the interest of the girl to marry him anyway and bow for the pressure instead of rejecting it" **(App. 8, l. 281-283)**. The pressure from the family to marry or accept a proposal is seen as the indirect pressure. The direct and indirect force, however, does not only apply to polygynous marriages, but Ghanaian marriages in general.

The main difference between my perception of marriage and the interviewees', is that the marriage has a *practical function* in northern Ghana, particularly when looking at polygynous marriages. It is entered into, on completely different values: "There is love, but there is this saying that love cannot be shared. But we are forcing it" **(App. 18, l. 228-229)**. As none of the spouses are allowed to show affection in front of one another, love is demonstrated by the husband's ability to provide for his wives and children by giving presents and spending time with them; there is as such no difference in love demonstrated by emotional treatment and material provision: "The provision of material things is a demonstration of love. If my husband is annoyed with me, he can choose not to give me. (...) He will use material things to

grade the level of how much he loves me" **(App. 11, l. 122-125)**. The practical function and beneficial aspects of the polygynous family is particularly employed by the investigated extended family system. The system does not only demonstrate a man's ability to lead a large family but also works as a social security net for all family members. The more wives a husband has, the more family relations are available to the entire household. If a family member is sick and hospitalized, for example, and the husband cannot pay the medical bills himself, all members of the extended family will come to his rescue. The same happens if he cannot support all of his children through their education. Unity within the immediate family group, meaning that the wives see each other as 'sisters' and not 'rivals', is another positive aspect. When there are more to do the housework, no one gets unnecessary tired and have more freedom. A freedom that Fatima expresses she no longer has after she married and her husband's first wife chose to leave: "I cannot go visit my friends as I used to, because I have responsibilities at home" **(App. 15, l. 27-28)**. This is not going to change unless men start taking part in the domestic work.

An additional point is the religious aspect. Although I found that men tend to generally use their religious 'rights' or 'obligation' as an excuse to be polygynous for personal gain, the women do not question God's way: "I believe God made it so and that he said that a man should marry more than one" **(App. 15, l. 136-137)**. The women thereby give their full consent to polygyny based on their beliefs and acknowledgement of the practical and cultural circumstances around marriage, regardless of the personal consequences that follow.

Polygyny undoubtedly has its advantages in the North Ghanaian culture. Furthermore, the alternative - to be single or marrying a less able man - is not a better option for women. The problem is that the men hold the ultimate power to make decisions that affect everyone involved. The women have no say in their own marriages and are easily replaceable if they have any kind of objections. In addition, they fear divorce, which gives men a relative power to do basically whatever they please. Although both religion and the culture states that men are only allowed to take an additional wife, if he is able to provide for all of them equally, it is rarely how it works in practice. Reasons for men to practice polygyny is to be found in the male-dominated culture in which women's voices are suppressed. In the analysis, I found

gender roles and relations to be relatively voluntary, as they are indoctrinated from the early childhood. However, they are not unproblematic when investigating polygyny. The problematic about polygyny are hence not in the practice itself, but in *how* it is practiced.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

This study has provided an in-depth analysis of how polygyny is practiced on an everyday basis in Tamale in northern Ghana, in order to answer the problem formulation: *How is polygyny practiced and embedded in the North Ghanaian culture?* In order to answer this question, I have developed specific research questions, which I will go through the answers to in the following.

I have found the different gender roles of men and women to be an important aspect of polygyny. Gender roles are indoctrinated from early childhood. Girls are from a very young age expected to assist their mothers in her roles and help take care of younger siblings, as well as help the mother out at the market or her small shop. Likewise, expectations are also for boys to help in their household throughout their childhood, but to a lesser extent. These differences in gender roles become more apparent when a child reaches adolescence. Boys are at this age expected to learn how to be a provider and work outside the family home, while girls are taught how to be a good wife, which encompasses duties such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and child caring. The participants did not question or identify this division of roles as a problem in the interviews, as these are highly embedded in the North Ghanaian culture and value system. In fact, I found that women are ready to both take on the responsibility of managing their own household and search for a suitable husband from a young age. Compared to a rural setting, where polygynous practice originates from, women in urban settings are to a larger extent expected to get an education before marrying, and take on an additional role as a financial contributor in their family. Although there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of education for women, I did not find it to prevent women from marrying polygynous, as other writers have. I did find, however, that education and being able to provide for oneself makes women more empowered in their marriage.

Based on the interviews, I argue that the development in the female roles concurrently maintains the high level of polygyny in the Northern Region, compared to the lower number of polygynous unions in the richer and more modern south. In an urban setting like Tamale, however, I found that the number of wives in each marriage is lower than the number of wives you would see in a more rural setting, from where most of the conclusions from previous studies are drawn. I found this to be due to a new mindset in this particular setting, where living costs are higher and education is

becoming increasingly more valued for both men and women. In this sense, the expectations for women to contribute financially to the family in addition to her other duties are increasing. This has not changed, however, the expectations of husbands to their wives, or their attitude towards helping her in her duties. Concluding, the strict division of gender roles promotes polygyny, as women do not have the time to be housewives, mothers, as well as financial contributors.

I found the relation between genders and amongst the women in a polygynous marriage to be what caused the more problematic aspects to polygyny. The North Ghanaian cultures dictate that the current wife or wives should approve of a new marriage before it is arranged. However, the 'approval' is merely that the husband 'informs' the wives about a new marriage. Nevertheless, a blind eye often turns to this, as it is embedded in the culture that men are superior to women.

Generally, I found men and women's perceptions of and expectations to marriage to be very different. As a woman is indoctrinated to be a good wife, a mother, and a manager of her own household from early childhood, her expectations are not met when being polygynously married. In this type of union, she is only performing her role as a woman on her duty days, which defies the whole purpose of and original idea behind polygyny. Although the wives are expected to support one another when they are 'free', this is not the case when there is disunity among the wives, which is often caused by the way a husband introduces a new wife to the marriage.

Concluding, I found that men find the practice of polygyny pleasurable, and that they use it to keep their wives in place, or even if they no longer find the company of and intimacy with the current wives pleasing. The practice is, furthermore, used to continuously establish his role as a male, a leader, and induce respect from the community.

The North Ghanaian culture and the Islamic perception is that, in theory, you can only take more wives if you are able to treat them equally, although from the interviews it was also argued that *if* a man is able to provide for more wives he *should* do so. Traditionalists, on the other hand, would marry more wives notwithstanding he has the ability to provide for them. This is particularly the case when speaking on royal families and chiefs, who are more concerned about their outwardly ability to be a leader than the well-being of his family.

In this sense, I found that there is incoherence between theory and practice. In none of the interviewed families was the husband able to provide equally for all of his wives and their children.

All the participating women are working, and although they may not pay for their children's school fees, they paid for everything else concerning their *own* children. This, furthermore, defeats the purpose of polygyny: to have a large and united family that helps each other. I furthermore found that men would use religion or tradition as their main argument for being polygynous. However, the argument is not the same from all. Some say it is their religious *right* or *obligation*, while other used polygyny to control his wife or argued that it was expected of him due to his royal status.

Although I, as a foreigner, found polygyny to be a structural unequal practice, which subordinates women to their male counterparts and stripe a woman from her right to have a say in her own marriage, the practice itself is generally supported and upheld by the interviewed women. This is not only because I found the women to be generally passive about how their husbands single-handedly made decisions that concerned the entire household, but because there is no real alternative for these women. Although divorce is possible, a wife would loose her children and maybe the possibility of ever marrying again if she was to pursue one. The interviewed women, furthermore, emphasized the importance of marrying a responsible man, who has proven his ability to provide for a household and family. Concluding, being in a bad marriage is better than not being married at all. In this sense, I found the reasoning of men and women for being polygynous very different.

The practice of polygyny does indeed have its benefits for all family members in Northern Ghana, as people only have their extended families to rely on. Instead of rejecting the practice, however, efforts should be made to give women more co-determination in their marriage. This could e.g. be done by regulating how many women a man can marry depending on his economic ability.

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APPENDIX