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**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES**

**THE WHITE WEDDING IN GHANA: WEDDING PROFESSIONALS IN  
PERSPECTIVE**

**BY**

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN  
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## DECLARATION

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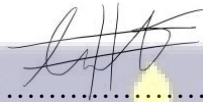
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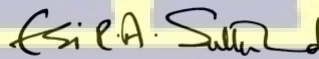
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## DEDICATION

To Mr. Paul Kyei-Sakyi, Mrs. Vera Kyei-Sakyi

And Judith Afriyie Kyei-Sakyi...

We did it!

And to all the “people like us”

Those who got too “tired” to continue,

Those who found the strength to continue,

And those who still seek the strength to do so;

This work is dedicated to you all.



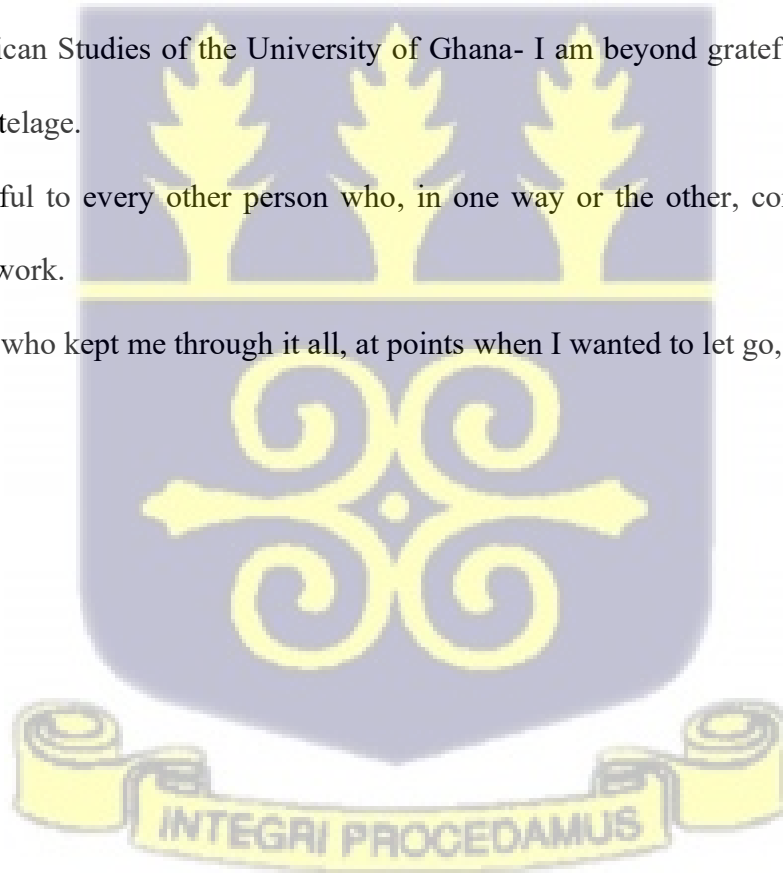
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To all the people who have supported me in my entire academic career who are too many to count- particularly from the African Studies Department of the University of Cape Coast, the faculty and international office of the College of Charleston, my colleagues and faculty of the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana- I am beyond grateful to have gone through your tutelage.

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Finally, to God who kept me through it all, at points when I wanted to let go, I am grateful.



## ABSTRACT

Marriage studies offer considerable insight into understanding African societies. Several scholars have written on the traditional marriage ceremonies of the various African societies. However, this scholarly interest in marriage has not been reflected in the contemporary marriage ceremony popularly known as the “white wedding”. In this work, I posit that there is a depth of knowledge to be got from focusing academic attention on the white weddings, and particularly on the wedding professionals whose festal services are highly sought after in today’s society.

I focus on their works and the functions they perform in the marriage process, analyse their general activities vis-à-vis the concepts of westernisation, modernisation, globalisation and glocalisation, and also look for nuanced gender issues. Through a series of cyberethnographic study and content analysis of other media documents, participant observation and interviews, I gather data and do a thematic analysis under blurring gender lines (particularly with regard to relationships, men and women’s works and exploring sexualities), functions of wedding professionals, adapting the global in the local- exchanging culture and showing social presence, and the future of weddings and further implications.

I find that there are visible shifts in socio-cultural expectations of the services rendered towards the success of today’s marriage ceremonies, and the changes are a continuous process that need further research data to understand contemporary Ghana vis-a-vis the institution of marriage.



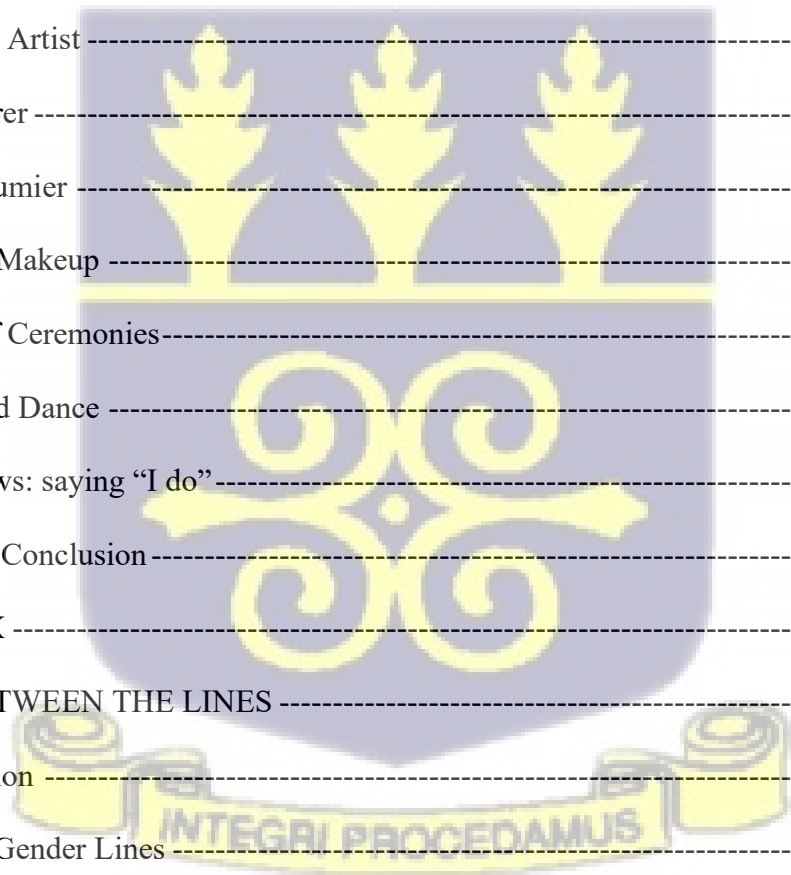
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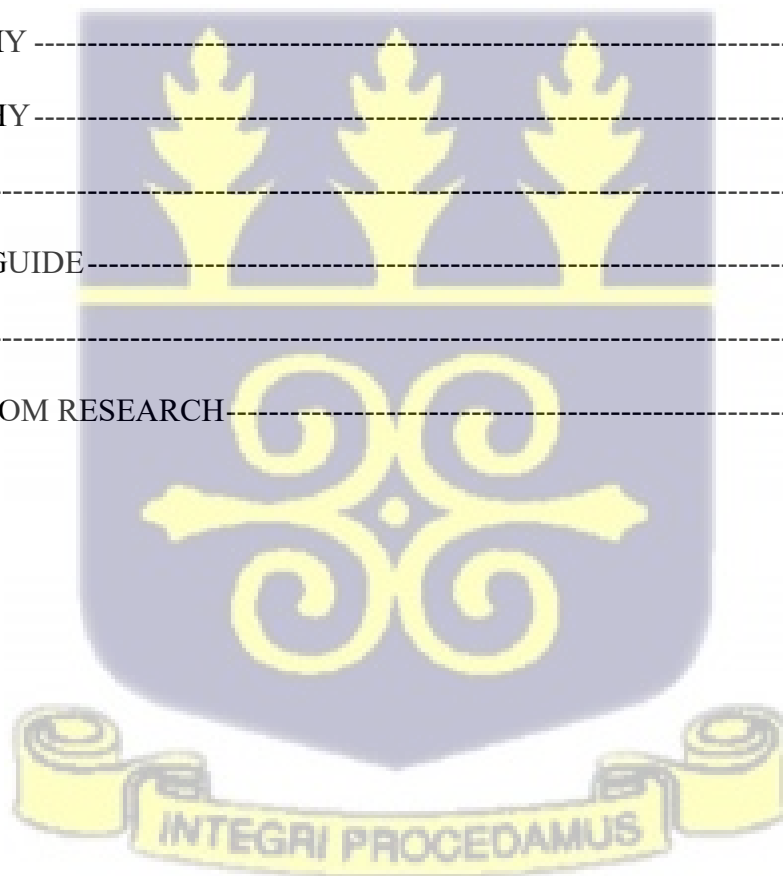
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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

*Even the people performing festal services were his friends. The bartender was an old comrade whose gift was all the wedding liquors and his own expert skills. The waiters were the friends of Don Corleone's sons. The food on the garden picnic tables had been cooked by the Don's wife and her friends and the gaily festooned one-acre garden itself had been decorated by the young girl—chums of the bride... There were, now, hundreds of guests in the huge garden, some dancing on the wooden platform bedecked with flowers, others sitting at long tables piled high with spicy food and gallon jugs of black, homemade wine. The bride, Connie Corleone, sat in splendour at a special raised table with her groom, the maid of honour, bridesmaids and ushers.*

- The Godfather (p.3)

Like the scene from the marriage of Don Corleone's daughter Connie Corleone, in the classic novel "The Godfather", many marriage ceremonies are carried out by such essential people who see to the smooth organisation, planning and implementation of duties. However, little to nothing is known of these people who provide the services, and it seems they have been of little concern to academia, particularly anthropologists who have been at the forefront of the production of knowledge about African marriage. This might be in part due to the fact that just as the study of marriage was progressing in the 1980s, significant developments occurring in the continent shifted the focus of academic studies of African families away from the institution of marriage on to issues such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as well as other issues of sexualities (Hunter, 2016). Prior to the shift in focus, marriage studies focused a lot on functions of the

family during these celebrations, as well as the rites and processes of the marriage and its payments.

However, it is this particular non-homogeneous group of wedding professionals whose activities in contemporary times, speak much to the changes – if any – that have occurred in the universal marriage ritual, particularly with the growing popularity of the “white” wedding ceremony, which derives its name mostly from the white wedding gown worn by the bride, and adopted from the western world. The study of marriage no doubt remains an insightful window into African societies (Hunter, 2016), and in contemporary times where societies continue to evolve, it is only prudent that the often-neglected aspects of marriage are taken up by academia to give some perspectives into society’s evolution. This study therefore focuses on some of the wedding professionals, particularly the wedding planner/ coordinator, the décor person, the photographer, the cake artist, the caterer, the costumier, the hair and make-up artist, the master of ceremonies, the music and dance coordinators, and the vow writer, whose works in the contemporary marriage ceremony popularly known as the “white wedding”—a name derived from the concept of the white wedding gown used for the western marriage ceremony (Baker, 2014)—expose some nuances in the marriage process, and in society as a whole.

In one of the few works on marriage studies which focus on weddings as a cultural event, Goldstein-Gidoni (2001) explores the changes that have occurred in the Japanese wedding ceremony in an effort to understand the processes in which the foreign and the local interact in a globalisation era. He argues that “both homogenisation and cultural hybridisation explanations are unable to fully explicate the complexities of these processes.” (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001: 22). Most importantly, he focuses not merely on the bride and groom and their families but, unlike many other studies, takes the point of view of what he refers to as “the wedding producers” whom he takes as the main ‘natives’ of the study, and who are actively involved in a process of cultural production. However, he also looks at these producers as a

rather homogenous group. This may have been due to the way the Japanese wedding was set up as his focus was on what he refers to as “the wedding parlour”, and “the wedding chapel”. He concludes that those who might appear merely as passive recipients of imported cultural ‘objects’ in a globalised hegemonic perspective are in fact actively involved in the production of new cultural forms. In the Ghanaian wedding context, it is worth interrogating whether the actors involved in the production of the wedding ceremony are merely passive, or are on the contrary, active and consciously producing new cultural forms.

Marriage, as stated by Mbiti (1970), is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. In this study, the crucial roles played by some emerging actors and actresses in the drama of the marriage ceremony, often overlooked, will be explored. In addition, the study will explore the implications of their roles and functions in the rite and the society as a whole, with particular regard to concepts of modernisation and westernisation, and globalisation and glocalisation. Gendered notions are also discussed in their works and their lived experiences in order to understand the current social ordering.

### **1.2 Evolution of the Family**

Marriage is obligatory among many African societies (Awedoba, 2002; Mbiti, 1970; Sarpong, 1974; Warren, 1986). According to Mbiti (1970), marriage is part of life long experiences, and also part of the social developmental process of a person and therefore, everyone must necessarily marry at a stage in their life. The importance of marriage in these societies cannot be overemphasised as many anthropologists and sociologists state that it creates an alliance between the two participating families (Mair, 1953; Philips, 1953) or unites two family-groups through the conjunction of the spouses (Allott, 1958).

In addition, Radcliffe-Brown (1950) shows how marriage and marriage customs function in a social system and organise societies into kinship groups. Nukunya (1999), writing on Ewe

marriage also indicates the importance of marriage and its significance in the kinship system of the Ewe.

Ghana legally recognises two broad categories of marriage- Christian marriage and non-Christian marriage. Christian marriage is a wider category of legally recognised marriage, which includes marriage under the Ordinance as recognised by the law of England. Non-Christian marriage, on the other hand, covers marriage by African customary law, and by Islamic law. The marriage types as recognised by Ghanaian law can therefore be classified as customary marriage, ordinance marriage and Islamic marriage (Allott, 1958).

According to Omari (1963) there is no doubt that marriage customs, and the structure of the family in Ghana, is evolving as it is quite apparent to the keen observer. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on marriage under the ordinance, either by civil rites or religious rites. However, the focus is not on the legality of the rites, but rather, the preparation and actual performance of the rites by professionals.

Awedoba (2002) stated that those in urban areas (and for the purpose of this research, the Greater Accra area) continue to retain ties with their family of nativity and so continue to visit their families and attend funerals. And yet, even from a cursory look, it is clear that more and more families are gradually shifting to what Durkheim (1997) in his theory of the evolution of the family in *The Division of Labour in Society* refers to as the modern conjugal family. This conjugal family, as Goody (1989) describes, is one which has the following unique traits: emphasis on marital bonds, lessened dependence on kinsmen and women for help, neolocality, free choice of mates, multilineality, and intensity of emotionality. Unlike the scene from "The Godfather" described in the introduction, it is this trait of lessened dependence on kinsmen and women for help which gives rise to the need for specialisations and the offer of these specialised services that can be offered to non- kinsmen and women. In this context, these specialised services are rendered by wedding professionals such as, but not limited to wedding planners

and coordinators, cake artists, wedding photographers, makeup artists, and other wedding specialising professionals.

### **1.3 Focus of the Study (Frameworks)**

My work is grounded in frameworks of post structuralism and symbolic interactionism.

#### **1.3.1 Post Structuralism**

Structuralism as a framework works on the assumption that human culture is understood as a system of signs reflecting ‘deep structures’ that shape the ‘common sense’ ways in which we give meaning to texts. Arguably, structuralism’s most prominent contribution has been in the field of Cultural Studies and Claude Levi-Strauss’ works remain relevant for Cultural and Media Studies. According to Levi-Strauss, the structures of culture are not easily observable only because we tend to accept them unquestioningly as ‘common sense’ and therefore can uncover them by structural analysis (Hill and Fenner, 2010). In spite of the relevance of structuralism, it has been critiqued and given rise to a counter theory of post-structuralism.

Post structuralists assert that structural components of a cultural text cannot be simply defined in relation to those of another, either on the grounds of commonality or binary opposition. Michel Foucault, in particular postulates that all cultural products, including those of the mass media, are shaped by the accepted structures of knowledge within the cultures in which they are produced. However, Foucault, unlike the structuralists, does not seek to uncover the ‘real’ meaning of a text by uncovering these structures. He instead, attempts to show how ‘truth’ is not to be found in the relationship between the text and the knowledge structures behind it, but is rather contingent on our acceptance of these discourses as the foundation of truth.

In addition, he questions the deterministic and fixed nature of knowledge structures and challenges Levi-Strauss’ perspective that the meaning of a structure is determined by the discourses through which we categorise the structural relationship between, or ‘order’ of, objects (‘things’) in the external world (Hill and Fenner, 2010). Using Foucault’s logic in ‘The

Order of Things’, I infer that the outcome of this study is not exactly ‘truth’, but a snapshot of ‘knowledge’ that is produced within a culturally specific discourse of the institution of marriage at a particular moment in time and amongst a specified people in this case. As such, the conditions of the discourse are subject to change as the epistemes are culturally, geographically and temporally situated.

### **1.3.2 Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism as a study represents one of several forms of interpretive sociology. Symbolic interactionism also known as interpretivism, is the study of lived human experience and is centrally concerned with how individuals make sense of their life experiences, and how they derive meaning from, and attribute meaning to everyday interactions. Symbolic interactionism is rooted in philosophical pragmatism on the notion that there is a relationship between the individual and society (Stryker, 1981 as cited in Hier, 2005). For pragmatists, a true understanding of reality is entrenched in the understanding of the processes of intersubjective interpretation and the symbolic construction of the social world. George Herbert Mead is one of the most influential pragmatic interactionists, and drawing from evolutionism and behaviourism, he posited that human beings are evolving biogenic organisms (evolutionism) that respond to various stimuli (behaviourism) (Hier, 2005). He also argued further that the development of the human mind, as part of the evolutionary process, makes humans able to act instead of simply reacting to stimuli in the social world. The term ‘symbolic interaction’ was coined in 1937 by a student of Mead, Herbert Blumer, and it is Blumer who points out the essential features or elementary premises of the study of symbolic interaction. He adduces that it is imperative to understand society as composed of interacting individuals who possess selves, and to recognise individual action as a process of meaning construction, and acknowledge action as occurring in the context of manipulating shared symbols (Hier, 2005). For Blumer, sociologists should pursue idiographic (non-generalising) research through

ethnographic methods that probe the life experiences and personal insights of human agents from the ground up (Hier, 2005).

Another important contribution to symbolic interaction is made by Ervin Goffman who proffered that human behavior is greatly shaped by factors such as social expectation and the normative constraints of social acceptance (Hier, 2005). Goffman explained social action in terms of “social scripts” and portrayed social actors as playing a role based on those scripts (Hier, 2005).

Although not considered an interactionist, Talcott Parson’s works are relevant for interactionism as they throw light on social actors and social actions. In the Parsonian scheme, relationships are interactive and the behaviour of individual actors has meaning in terms of motivations and orientations that take the form of social roles and cultural expectations (Hier, 2005). He further expounds on action as a process in the actor-situation system where there is motivational significance to the individual actor, or where there is a collectivity involved, there is significance to the component individuals (Hier, 2005). In the study of social action, the basis for the frame of reference is a group of interacting individuals or social actors who have particular goals they seek to accomplish and so take advantage of existing opportunities under specified situations (Parsons, 1951 as cited in Hier, 2005).

The relevance of symbolic interactionism for my work is in the attempt to subjectify wedding professionals as the human component of the contemporary marriage rite as an integral part of the rite. It also foregrounds the focus on their lived experience in order to make sense of their experiences and attribute meaning to their social roles and general interactions. By focusing on some key wedding professionals, I highlight their perspectives and lived experiences as key actors. Their roles and how they interpret them, enable me to make sense of their contributions in a broader cultural context, and make meaning of the evolving wedding industry.

## 1.4 Definition of Concepts

Some key concepts come up in the course of the study that lead themselves to understanding the trajectory of the work. These concepts are discussed below.

### 1.4.1 Modernisation and Westernisation

In Ghana, as in much of Africa, social change was largely imposed by colonialism or imperialism (Robertson, 1995). Colonialism refers to a sequence of material, political, economic and cultural forces used by a state or region to claim control over another state or region, and it takes the form of politico-economic domination, encompassing ideological forms of domination including literary, artistic and cultural modes (Hier, 2005; Hill and Fenner, 2010). In sociological discourse, western colonialism refers to a set of themes and theories concerned with how colonised peoples and nations deal with the legacy of colonialism as they struggle for and develop their independence, sovereignty and national identity. From theories of western colonialism post-colonial theory has emerged, working on the assumption that colonised people assimilate the language, consciousness and ideologies that contribute to their continued domination, with colonial ideologies masking relation of domination by normalising colonial beliefs and values such that they end up having a corrosive psychological effect on the souls of the colonised (Hier, 2005).

According to Mazrui (1986) African societies are not the closest culturally to the western world and yet they are undergoing the most rapid westernisation. This westernisation process permeates various spheres of life, and the institution of marriage has not been exempt. In Ghana, as in many other African societies, the marriage process, due in part to western influence, has evolved from traditional ceremonies as was practiced in pre-colonial systems to westernised forms as a result of cultural encounter. However, it is very common to see the two play out together in succession as most ordinance marriages take place after inter-family negotiations similar to those employed in customary marriages have taken place (Allott, 1958). In spite of

the changes that have occurred in the marriage process, few scholars have focused on the contemporary marriage festivities popularly known as "the white wedding". The few, such as Kobina Sekyi (1997), who have broached the subject, have done so through somewhat cultural lenses in a bid to criticise the superfluous nature of this contemporary wedding ceremony. Allott (1958) also points out that ordinance marriage carries considerable social prestige, often leading to ostentatious ceremony and lavish expenditure on receptions, and is desired by the female spouses for the enhanced position that it entails for them. For the males, it also does hold some prestige which can be explored with regard to the character, Mr. Okadu, in Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* who is much equally fascinated by the concept of getting married in the western fashion and has it confer on him relatively great prestige in the eyes of his male colleagues in the 'Cosmopolitan Club'. In addition, Kwesi Onyidzin after witnessing "a grand wedding of the type which only Europeanised West Africans can organise" begins to reconsider his career choice since he aspires to have such a wedding. The legacy of colonialism has influenced global relations well into the 21st Century (Hill and Fenner, 2010).

#### **1.4.2 Globalisation and Glocalisation**

Globalisation as a concept and a term is used more frequently than any other in the 21st century although it is uncertain when the term was first used. In social sciences, generally, it is often difficult to trace the origin of concepts, theories and ideas since they are often products of collective endeavours. Globalisation can be a heroic process or a sinister process depending on where one stood, with some seeing globalisation as a rakeless train which crushes everything in its path, and others seeing benefit in getting on board the train to head towards modernisation and economic growth. Initial theories of globalisation had focused on the economic aspects, until the 1980s when focus was broadened to include the cultural dimensions of globalisation (Khondker, 2004). According to Hier (2005), there is not a single correct definition for a concept as complex as globalisation as it has varied meanings and interpretations. However, it

is well agreed upon that it involves economic, technological, sociocultural, and political (including military) dimensions (Hier, 2005). Notions of globalisation have often viewed the process as overriding local cultures, polarising local and global cultures and pitching one against the other (Robertson, 1995). This has brought the need to introduce a new theory of glocalisation into discourse.

The origin of the term “glocalisation” is believed to be a coinage by Roland Robertson as an adaptation of a Japanese usage. Glocalisation is a hybrid of ‘global’ and ‘local’ made to address the problematic of treating the global-local as polar, and to erode the assumption that globalisation as a process overrides locality. The underlying premise of glocalisation is that culture is a two-way process and cultures in contact influence each other either directly or indirectly (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). According to Robertson (1995), what is considered as overriding local cultures, is more often than not hybridised local cultures. He also adds that cultural aspects that emanate directly from the West are received and interpreted differently by different groups, pointing out how much theories of globalisation tend to underestimate the power of local cultures and how the cultures they receive are modified to suit their specific time and place.

### **1.4.3 Gender**

Gender refers to the social category assigned to individuals in a society by virtue of their sex category as male or female. By these categories, societies have constructs of masculinity and femininity which embody expectations of both men and women, particularly how they should behave, be treated, dress, appear, what they should succeed at, and what attitudes and qualities they must possess (Bhasin, 2004; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011). These notions of masculinities and femininities are fluid and differ across time and space (Connel, 1998; Ratele, 2002; Adomako Ampofo and Prah, 2009; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011; Ortner, 1974).

In the Akan society, gender is quite pervasive and men and women are socialised to steer away from roles deemed inappropriate for their sex category, and an Akan person traditionally is not free to develop any competence merely out of individual inclination (Oduyoye, 1995). Feminist research in Africa over the past two decades shows that male dominance is pervasive and the accepted norm in Ghana as well as much of sub-Saharan Africa (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011). Men and women are expected to conform strictly to notions of masculinities and femininities.

Some of these gendered norms are even enforced by taboos. One such taboo dictates that the kitchen is secluded to girls and women and as such out of bounds to men (Oduyoye, 1995).

Men who go contrary to this sanction are ridiculed as failing to live up to the prescribed masculinity and among the Akan are given disparaging names (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011; Oduyoye, 1995). In many societies, the chore of cooking is relegated exclusively to women, and yet, whenever a society has developed haute cuisine, men have almost always dominated the cooking arena as high chefs (Ortner, 1974; Clark, 1994; Agadjanian, 2002; Bujra, 1992). In this study of wedding professionals, I explore the extent to which these gendered roles permeate and are reflected in the works of the wedding professionals.

Of particular interest to current gender discourse among African scholars is the misrepresentation as well as the silencing of the sexuality of the African woman (Adomako Ampofo et al., 2004; Tamale, 2011). Although the only accepted form of sexuality in Ghana is heterosexuality, erotic displays of affection and sexual flirting beyond men and women are shunned (Oduyoye, 1995). However, paradoxically, young boys are encouraged to explore their sexualities whereas young girls are chastised and expected to be coy about sex and their sexuality (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, I also consider gender in light of the arguments of West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler (1988), and Lorber (2007) on the notion that gender is more of an

activity or a series of activities and everyone “does gender” either overtly or sub-textually. Individuals learn what is expected of them, see those expectations manifest, act and react in specific ways as expected of them (Lorber, 2007). Very often, however, people degender and regender or just simply degender, going contrary to what is expected of them, or briefly straying from their assigned category (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1998; Agadjanian, 2002). Gender is therefore not a stable identity, but instituted through a stylised repetition of facts (Butler, 1988). Some of these facts will be explored in this work.

### **1.5 Statement of the Problem**

According to Nukunya (1975), in the large urban areas and employment centres, the kin groups have become largely unnecessary for man’s economic well-being. It is perhaps then, no wonder that marriage in contemporary times, although a social binder for the families of the couple, includes as well, other key players such as wedding professionals who appear to be gradually usurping the roles and functions of the extended family even in the preparation of the marriage ceremony. This is especially more so with what is popularly known as “the white wedding”. Yet, despite the scholarly interest in the institution of marriage itself, most research works have only scraped the surface of the roles of the key players that work outside the family circle to make the ceremony successful in order to begin the ever important rite of passage.

### **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

The fundamental and most important reason for conducting research is to explain physical and social phenomena, and to add to knowledge (Creswell, 2009). This research attempts to do three main things:

- i) to describe the activities of wedding professionals, particularly the most distinguished categories of wedding professionals whose works are seemingly pervasive across all white wedding ceremonies, as well as describe the current terrain of the white wedding

tracing it historically through time and place, and to examine the factors that have led to the rise of the industry of wedding professionals

- ii) To attempt a gender analysis of the findings of the research.
- iii) To undertake a gender analysis of the research findings, exploring how gender dynamics are reflected in, and shaped by, the practices of wedding professionals.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

The study sought to find answers to these questions:

- i. Who are the emerging actors and actresses (wedding professionals) in contemporary marriage ceremonies?

What are the roles and functions of these actors and actresses in contemporary marriage ceremonies?

- ii. Are there any outstanding gender issues?

Are there instances where gender norms are upheld or dismantled?

- iii. How does the ceremony translate into theories of modernisation and westernisation on the one hand, and globalisation and glocalisation on the other?

To what extent do these ceremonies illustrate attempts to adapt the concept to the Ghanaian setting?

### **1.8 Research Method**

The research is ethnographic in nature and lends itself to qualitative methods. I employ participant observation and semi-formal interviews recorded on tape and transcribed. Ethical considerations are observed. I also use case studies of some professionals to throw more light on their works. The analysis is thematic and based on coding.

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

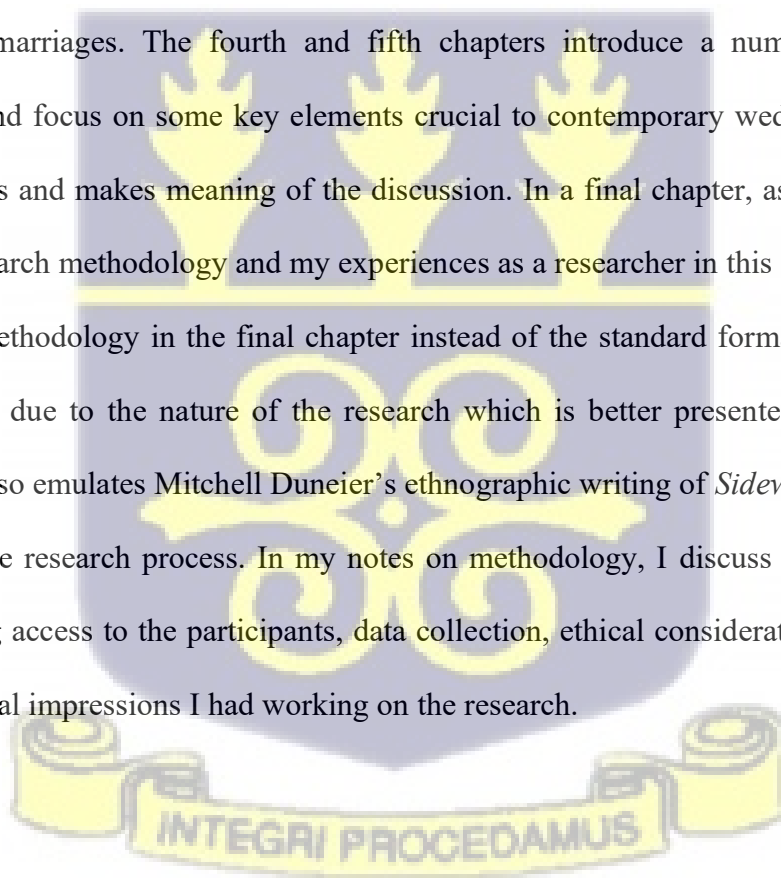
The study is significant in view of the fact that it sheds light on the roles and functions of those who by and large make contemporary wedding ceremonies what they are, as well as offer

insights into how their roles and functions add to academic discourse on the broader subjects of marriage, modernisation, westernisation, globalisation and glocalisation, and gender as applicable in the research.

### **1.10 Organisation of Work**

The work will be divided into six main thematic chapters. In the first chapter, which is the introductory chapter, I present a background to the study and the theoretical frameworks, as well as concepts that guide the research, the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, and the organisation of the study. In the second chapter, I discuss relevant literature that focus on social change with regard to marriage- both traditional and western. In the third chapter I explore media and representations of contemporary marriages. The fourth and fifth chapters introduce a number of wedding professionals and focus on some key elements crucial to contemporary weddings. The sixth chapter analyses and makes meaning of the discussion. In a final chapter, as an addendum, I discuss the research methodology and my experiences as a researcher in this study.

I discuss the methodology in the final chapter instead of the standard format of doing so in earlier chapters due to the nature of the research which is better presented in a novelistic manner. This also emulates Mitchell Duneier's ethnographic writing of *Sidewalk* which draws the reader in the research process. In my notes on methodology, I discuss the ethnographic journey: getting access to the participants, data collection, ethical considerations, challenges, and some general impressions I had working on the research.



## CHAPTER TWO

### MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

#### 2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the nature and works of wedding professionals in the contemporary Ghanaian milieu, it is important to first of all understand the institution of marriage and the changes that have occurred which has led to the influx of such professionals. In this chapter, therefore, I attempt a cursory overview of the nature of marriage both universally and in the African setting. I first examine the European Christian marriage, describing the ceremony and the important elements of the rites. I then examine the institution of marriage in some African societies as it was customary, prior to the encounter with the western world, as well as the changes in the contraction of marriage and the marriage process in general, and how the social changes have led to the adaptation of the Western marriage form leading to what is now the white wedding in Ghana.

#### 2.2 The Universality of Marriage

The institution of marriage is a universal one that perhaps predates any other organised human institution. It has often been traced to Biblical times when it was ordered by God that man and woman become unified and multiply (Wood, 1869; Tegg, 1877; Animasahun and Fatile, 2011). According to Letourneau (1900), sexual unions were branded impure and criminal in Greco-Roman antiquity with Christianity, and marriage was made a sacrament outside of which sexual union was forbidden.

In some societies, the refusal to marry was even punishable at a certain time period in one's life (Wood, 1869). Amongst the Romans, the Jews, and the Greeks for example, it was an imperative duty for parents to have their daughters married by the age of twenty-five (Wood, 1869). In ancient Greece as well, it was the duty of every citizen to have legitimate children and so anyone who failed to marry before the age of thirty-five was punishable under Plato's

laws (Wood, 1869). Marriage was therefore a means to an end with the main objective being procreation (Wood, 1869; Letourneau 1900).

### 2.3 The Traditional Western Marriage

According to Wood (1869) and Tegg (1877), Christian marriage as we have it today was developed from the traditional marriage customs of Greece and Italy, as well as customs of the Jews. Among early Christians, as well as the traditional English, a preliminary and most important aspect of marriage was a betrothal or nuptial contract called *sponsalia*. Although performed on different days, this would come to be performed at the same time. By civil law, a betrothal could only be done with the consent of the guardian of the intended bride. It was often done before a priest and was confirmed by giving of gifts, joining of hands, the exchange of rings (or sometimes only the man giving a ring), a kiss, dowry, an oath or written agreement signed before witnesses. The marriage proper was done forty days afterwards. Before the forty days however, although they were considered husband and wife, they were not permitted by the church to reside in the same house.

Marriage was previously seen as a civil contract and it is unclear when the church began to wield control over marriage, but it was in 1199 that marriage became systematically preceded by the publication of banns in the Latin Church, with Pope Innocent III decreeing that marriages should be done in a church ceremony. Tegg (1877) adds that the celebration of matrimony in unhallowed places was by canon expressly forbidden in order to preserve the sanctity of the union.

Marriage ceremonies were also by canon required to be held between the hours of eight and twelve in the afternoon to prevent clandestine marriages.

It was formerly the custom that the marriage ceremony be held in the bride's church but this law was later repealed such that it did not have to be in the bride's church (Tegg, 1877).

### 2.3.1 The Ceremony

Tegg (1877) provides a good description of the traditional Christian marriage. At the marriage ceremony, it was the norm for the man to stand at the right hand of the woman and the woman to the man's left for the biblical reason that the woman was made out of the man's rib. Another reason given was that the man was to stand at the right which was more honourable and befitting for him as the head of the wife.

Before commencement of the ceremony, the minister posed to the congregation that if anyone knew of any reason why the couple should not be married the person had a final chance to declare it. The couple themselves were also asked the same. According to the hundred and second canon of the church, reasons that could cause a marriage not to happen were a preceding marriage or contract, consanguinity or affinity, and a lack of consent from their parents or guardians.

The question was then posed to the man whether he would have "this woman" to be his "wedded wife to live together after God's ordinance in the holy state of matrimony and to love and comfort her, to honour her and keep her in sickness and health, forsaking all other, keep himself only to her so long as both shall live". Same was asked of the wife and to these, they responded "I will". This part of the declaration was previously held in a separate espousal ceremony spanning weeks, months or even years before the marriage proper, but was later merged as the preliminary part of the marriage ceremony.

After having declared their consent for the marriage to proceed, it was then asked of the congregation present "who [in the congregation] gave the woman to be married to the man", asking for consent of the guardian of the woman. Having been granted consent, the minister caused the man and woman to take each other by the right hand in a symbol of friendship and to enter a contract. They were then made, each to mention their names, and vow to the other by name, "to have and to hold, from this day forward, till death do us part, for better for worse,

for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health”, the man adding a vow “to love and to cherish” his wife, and the woman vowing “to love, cherish, and to obey” her husband. After the vows had been said a visible pledge in the form of a ring was presented by the man and put on the fourth finger of the left hand of the woman, saying, “with this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, with all my worldly goods I thee endow, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen”.

After this, the minister gave them the blessing of God while they knelt before him. Joining their right hands, he then declared that “those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder”, and pronounced them man and wife together “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”, concluding the Christian marriage ceremony.

A Roman act of 1837 permitted couples to be married by civil contract before a superintendent registrar of marriages at either his office, or a duly registered Roman Catholic or dissenting worship place. With this, the religious ceremony was permitted though it was not a mandatory part of the legal contract. It therefore became possible to contract marriage either at the Register Office of the district in which either or both of the couple resided, at any registered Roman Catholic or Dissenting worship place within the district provided they had the consent of the minister, at any registered building within two miles of the district’s limit, at a usual place of worship granted they had the consent of the minister, or at the nearest registered building where marriage could be solemnised according to the form of ceremony the couple wished to employ, granted they had the minister’s consent, and there was no such place within their district.

### **2.3.2 The Ring as the Symbol of Marriage**

The ring was, and still remains, one of the most significant aspects of the marriage process in many societies the world over. According to Wood (1869) and Tegg (1877) throughout ancient Greco-Roman history, the fourth finger of the left hand was believed by diviners as well as physicians to have a vein that led to the heart, and so it became the norm for nuptial rings to be

worn on this finger. This was later disproved (Wood, 1869 and Tegg, 1877). Nevertheless, the tradition continued.

Although there is evidence that the Egyptians were the first to introduce rings, the tradition of wearing wedding rings was in the ninth century used by Christians in betrothal ceremonies, but not in wedding ceremonies (Tegg, 1899). Among the Irish peasantry, a ring was highly significant and it was the general impression that a marriage was not legal unless a gold ring was used. Wedding rings were very important, so much so that wedding rings were available for hire (Wood, 1869; Tegg, 1877). In Yorkshire, however, it was seen as unlucky to marry with a borrowed ring (Tegg, 1877).

According to Wood (1869) among the Romans in the time of Pliny, an intended bride was sent a ring of iron set with adamant as a pledge to signify the perpetuity and endurance of the contract. In other eras, gold rings, brass rings, and even copper rings were used, all circular to signify continuity and eternity. Tegg (1877) also adds that rings have also been made of silver and even leather. Roman nuptial rings were often inscribed, and sometimes a stone was inserted. It was also not uncommon for a woman to give a ring to her lover (Wood, 1869).

In ancient days, as recorded in the Salisbury Diocesan Clergy Reference Manual of the Church of England, the ring was given to the groom by the priest, and moving from finger to finger of the right hand of the bride, the groom was to say, "With this ring I thee wed, in the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost", finally placing it on the fourth finger of her right hand (Wood, 1869). An ancient Pontifical later decreed it be put on the fourth finger of the left hand instead, using the same process.

In the Church of England the ring was seen as a remnant of paganism and traced to Celtic races (Wood, 1869). Mythologists also traced the first ring to Prometheus and so there was an attempt by the Puritans to abolish the use of the wedding ring during the Commonwealth on account of the pagan connotation attached to it (Tegg, 1877). However, today in Christian churches, the

ring is widely accepted and exchanged and worn by both husband and wife as a symbol of the marriage contract, and is symbolic of the infinite bond attached to the wedding ritual, as well as a symbol of proclamation of marriage long after the exchange of vows.

### **2.3.3 The Festal Services**

It is rather unclear exactly who performed what service at the traditional western marriage ceremonies. Music in Ireland was usually provided by a piper and a fiddler (Tegg, 1877). According to Tegg (1877), the cost of food served was borne by the bride's family and the neighbouring elites could spare their cooks to help with the services.

It is therefore unclear when the services of people who exclusively performed services for weddings came into being. For the most part, it appears these services were performed by friends and family who garnered what was needed for the ceremonies and so perhaps did not perform such services on a "professional" level as happens in contemporary times.

### **2.4 Marriage in African Societies**

Marriage is obligatory among many African societies (Awedoba, 2002; Mbiti, 1990; Sarpong, 1974; Warren, 1986; Animasahun and Fatile, 2011). According to Mbiti (1990), marriage is part of life long experiences and also part of the social developmental process of a person and therefore, everyone must necessarily marry at a stage in their life. The importance of marriage in these societies cannot be overemphasised as many anthropologists and sociologists state that it creates an alliance between the two participating families (Mair, 1953; Philips, 1953) or between two family-groups expressed through the conjunction of the spouses (Allott, 1958). In addition, Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950) show how marriage and marriage customs function in a social system and organise societies into kinship groups.

I explore a number of societies in Africa and the marriage process prior to and after western encounters. For all of the societies, an important aspect of the marriage process is the consent and participation of the family in the marriage process, and the exchange of commodities,

particularly prestations by the man's family to the woman's family. Awedoba (2002) describes prestations as the totality of all the goods, services and money that are exchanged between the bridegroom's family and the bride's family. Most significant amongst these, perhaps is the payment of bridewealth by which rights in *uxorem* and rights in *genetriciem* are conferred to the groom (Bohannan, 1949). Although they differ from society to society, these commodities give legitimacy to the marriage, much like the ring of the western traditional marriage which has now become a relic passed on to the institution of Christianity. In all these societies discussed, social changes have occurred, impacting the marriage process.

#### 2.4.1 The Kpelle of Liberia

According to Bledsoe (1980), among the Kpelle of Liberia, traditional marriage involves a series of processes and economic transactions which involves the payment of bridewealth. The order of the processes involved in the marriage could differ, but mostly involves Sande initiation, betrothal, co-residence with a payment of bridewealth, and childbearing. A father-figure or a sponsor stands in for a Kpelle groom and gives the family of the bride a token, usually in the form of a small coin. Bridewealth or brideservice arrangements can be finalised at this point, although they are not exactly compulsory, and can be done at a later time in the marriage. This marriage is however legally recognised.

Among the Kpelle, the contraction of marriage and marriage arrangements are largely done by the parents of both spouses, and they have a stake in the marriage of their children as choosing a partner from a wealthy family for their children has socio-economic and political significance for them and their family. The notion persists in Kpelle society that young women in particular cannot be left with the task of choosing husbands and so need help from their elders.

With the colonial encounter which came with Christianity and western education, as well as the migration of unmarried women to urban areas, however, there is evidence of women defying the norm and refusing to be 'passive pawns' by choosing their own partners

(Bledsoe,1980). In addition, more Kpelle people are opting to get married in the church in line with Christian doctrines propagated by the missionaries (Bledsoe, 1980). This newer marriage form is also seen as a sign of status and development (Bledsoe, 1980).

#### **2.4.2 The Tiv of northern Nigeria**

Bohannan (1955) emphasises the importance of a culture of exchange as part of the marriage process and the general life of the Tiv of northern Nigeria. For the Tiv, everything, with the exclusion of gifts, has an exchange value, and this includes women.

Tiv marriage is transacted either by exchange of a sister or cousin or by bridewealth payment and this gives the family a vested interest in the marriage process and even the selection of a partner.

The exchange of rights in women is the most supreme and unique category of exchange values, and the Tiv believe that whereas it is good to trade other items in the other lower categories, such as cattle or brass rods for a wife, it is bad to trade a marriage ward for cattle or brass rods. Marriage is therefore seen as a profitable investment associated with prestige. The ultimate success story for the Tiv man therefore is given below:

"When I was a very small child, my kinsman gave me a baby chicken. I tended it carefully and when it grew up it laid eggs and hatched out more chickens; I exchanged these chickens for a young nanny goat, which bore kids, which I put out with various kinsmen until I could exchange them for a cow. The cow bore calves, and eventually I was able to sell the calves and procure a wife." (Bohannan, 1955: 57).

A wealthy Tiv man who refuses to convert his goods in marriage transactions is looked upon with contempt, and a man who continuously converts his wealth by marriage is deemed to have "a strong heart" and is highly revered.

The marriage system of the Tiv has, however, been strongly influenced by colonialism (Bohannan, 1955; Piot, 1991). The British colonial administration in the 1920s prohibited

exchange marriages (Piot, 1991). According to Bohannan (1955), the cash economy system introduced by the West, made obsolete the previously existing categories of exchange commodities. Tiv elders therefore cursed money, and the Europeans who brought it as the cause of the changes in the marriage process and the general life of the Tiv. With the cash system, it became rather difficult for one to acquire a wife for one's self and one's sons with the money acquired from the marriage of one's daughter.

Moreover, using money acquired from a marriage transaction to purchase food items such as yam was seen to have no dignity and shook the very foundation of the social order of the Tiv. The longterm result of this was that the Tiv made the bridewealth higher, in order to maintain the prestige associated with marriage.

#### **2.4.3 The Kabre of northern Togo**

Among the Kabre of northern Togo, Piot (1991) notes a similar system of exchange as that of the Tiv, and an importance attached to marriage as a form of upward mobility. A man who desired to get married had to perform about five to ten years of labour on the fields of his intended father-in-law, and make small annual prestations of harvest to his intended mother-in-law.

For the Kabre, contracting marriage between their child and the child of their friend was the ultimate level of friendship and cemented the friendship and so arranged marriages were common, with years of gift exchanges culminating in marriage when the children were older. Whoever had given a daughter for a son would later be given a daughter in exchange for a son, completing the exchange process and stabilising what had been a hitherto unbalanced exchange since he who gives a wife is superior to he who receives a wife.

#### **2.4.4 The Akan of southern Ghana**

According to Oduyoye (1995), in Ghana, among the traditional Akan, female-male relations are primarily conceived in sexual terms with marriage being the only natural or legitimate link

between men and women with no bond of lineage. However, Akan marriages are not an avenue for merely uniting a couple for their enjoyment, but are important for the kin group largely due to the prospects of children. There is a great amount of value placed on children and this surpasses all other possessions as it is believed that it is by having children that one can become an ancestor in the life after (Gyekye, 1996). According to Oduyoye (1995), marriage is therefore mandatory since for one to be considered a responsible adult, one has to marry and raise children.

For the Akan, as for many other African societies, one of the most important elements in the marriage process is prestations (Awedoba, 2002; Nukunya, 2003). Opong (1981) also adds that the most important element of the marriage contract is the gift of 'drinks' (*tiri nsa*) which seals a marriage contract. This could be followed by a feast though not mandatory. According to Rattray (1927), the marriage rite itself is traditionally of utmost simplicity, and in exceptional cases, even the ceremonies and gifts could be dispensed with and replaced with a declaration before witnesses of the intention of the man and woman to be married, followed by cohabitation, and that alone constituted a valid union.

With the introduction of Christianity and the cash economy, however, elements of the traditional marriage, such as the drinks, have been replaced by the giving of cash, particularly among Christians who attach negative connotations to the giving of alcoholic drinks as was custom. In addition, the bible and the ring have become vital aspects of the traditional Akan marriage.

#### **2.4.5 The Anlo Ewe of southern Ghana**

According to Nukunya (1969; 1999), Ewe marriage is important and very significant in the kinship system of the Ewe, particularly since descent is patrilineal. Ewe marriage is contracted by the giving of a series of gifts or prestations by the groom's family to the bride's family, and the rendering of services by the groom to his intended mother-in-law and father-in-law.

With colonialism and the introduction of Christianity by the Bremen mission in 1853, however, the Ewe society has undergone some social changes with regard to the marriage process as Christian rites have been adopted. In addition, western education and the cash economy have weakened the dependence on the extended family group in the marriage transaction and general social and economic life of the Ewe. These changes have not been exclusive to the Ewe society.

#### **2.4.6 The Ga of southern Ghana**

According to Kilson (1974), Ga marriage is important as it marks a major transition in maturation of individuals. It also unites families and confers sexual rights on individuals, and offers an avenue for procreation, which is often the main objective of the marriage.

Traditional marriage among the Ga is two-fold: the betrothal and wedding rites. The betrothal involves the transfer of goods from the family of the groom to the family of the bride, and this confers onto the groom sexual rights over his bride. The second part of the marriage process, which is the wedding, is only performed when it is the first marriage of either of the couple. The wedding is a week of fasting which starts with the transfer of the bride, and is finalised with the blessing of the marriage at the shrine of a god. This second part of the wedding is not essential for legitimising marriage as it merely bestows prestige on the couple (Kilson, 1974). With the dawn of colonialism which was accompanied by Christianity and western education, a number of changes have occurred in the Ga traditional society. With Christianity, there is an emphasis on monogamy unlike the traditional marriage which allowed for polygynous marriages. Moreover, Christian wedding rites have usurped the traditional Ga wedding and many couples choose to wed in Christian churches instead of traditional shrines. Another change that has occurred in the Ga society is the reliance on non-kin groups for ceremonies and other life events. It is therefore no wonder then that wedding professionals would have gained popularity amongst this ethnic group, as well as other groups.

#### **2.4.7 Festal Services in African Marriages**

Much like with the western marriages, there is little data on who performed what services at the traditional African marriages. Perhaps much like the western marriages, the services were performed by kin groups who bore a lot more significance in the past.

Among the Yoruba, Atolagbe (2012) indicates that the 21st century Yoruba traditional marriage in a Yoruba-English marriage has two chief interlocutors; one each from the bride's family and the groom's family. These two interlocutors steer the discourse of the entire traditional marriage and are the mediators of the two families. Although functionally the closest to the Master of Ceremonies (MC) of the white wedding, these interlocutors are representatives of the families, and not necessarily the couple as is the case with the MC. These days, there are professionals whose services are also sought after and paid for in the traditional marriage.

#### **2.5 Religion, Law, and Maintaining Tradition**

We recall history and analyse culture in order to understand how we arrived where we are and to see where we are headed (Oduyoye, 1995). In the fort towns on the coast of the then Gold Coast, Christian marriages were gaining popularity among converts of English law so that wives preferred to marry in court and take their husband's name (Oppong, 1981).

Prior to this, a married woman's property was wholly distinct from her husband's (Rattray, 1927) and married people had no community of goods, and so on the death of either, the relatives of the deceased could come and claim the deceased's property, leaving the widow or the widower with none of the deceased's properties (Bosman, 1967). In practice, widows were often more disadvantaged by this practice and were often left destitute upon the death of their husbands. In addition, polygyny was widely accepted under the existing customary laws and so in the 1850s, Christianity appeared to provide an escape for the coastal women and many flocked to chapels, refusing to cohabit with their polygynous husbands (Aidoo, 1985).

Many succeeded in contracting Christian marriages, and this was seen to provide a sense of security, and elevate their position (Aidoo, 1985). With this form of marriage, and under English law, the women took their husband's name (Oppong, 1981), whereas previously, under customary law she had kept her own name and maintained her legal personality at marriage (Aidoo, 1985). In the beginning, very few people contracted such marriages and these were mainly the educated salaried workers, most of whom had literate parents. Only few were illiterate or farm workers and marrying under the English law increased their prestige (Oppong, 1981). Ordinance marriage is presently more common in the urban areas than the rural areas of Ghana (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006).

Ghana legally recognises two broad categories of marriage under the Marriages Act, 1884-1985 CAP 127- Christian marriage and non-Christian marriage. Christian marriage is a wider category of legally recognised marriage which includes marriage under the Ordinance as recognised by the law of England. Non-Christian marriage on the other hand covers marriage by African customary law, and by Islamic law. The marriage types as recognised by Ghanaian law can therefore be classified as customary marriage, ordinance marriage and Islamic marriage (Allott, 1958).

## **2.6 Evolution of the Family**

According to Ogbu (1978), in many African societies, as with the ones I mentioned above, traditional marriage practices were indirectly undermined by the colonialists recognising and legitimising marriages without the payment of bridewealth, particularly by marriage registration. The cash economy system also affected payments that were hitherto not with money. This had a resulting effect of bridewealth payments being adjustable, making kinsfolk ask for higher amounts than would have been customarily possible.

In some societies, there was a very direct and conscious effort to eliminate traditional marriage practices as was the case in the Ivory Coast in 1964. Here, only civil marriages were given

recognition and bridewealth payments were abolished, all in order to weaken the lineage system while promoting the nuclear family system (Morris, 1971 as cited in Ogbu, 1978). In other societies such as Nigeria and Kenya, however, there was no such effort, and traditional African practices were allowed to complement the new western forms. In Ghana, however, attempts by the colonialists to make monogamy the only legal form of marriage failed (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006).

Also, western education afforded women the chance for upward mobility, particularly among the Toro women of Uganda and this had a resulting effect on gender relations and new ideas of spousal relationships (Perlman, 1966 as cited in Ogbu, 1978). This effect of colonialism and western education, however, is not applicable to all African societies as evidence shows that for some societies, women became worse off due to colonialism (van Allen, 1972).

There is no doubt that marriage customs and the structure of the family in Ghana is evolving as it is quite apparent to the keen observer (Omari, 1963). According to Takyi (2003), when it came to selecting a partner, individual choices and notions of romantic love were very often superseded by the family, particularly due to the economic and social function of marriage. Although different societies had different customs, it was the general norm for the man to seek a woman in marriage. When a man had identified a woman he wished to marry, his family would pay the woman's family a visit to request for her hand in marriage on behalf of their son. Depending on the ethnicity and socioeconomic status of the parties involved, a fixed amount or other accepted commodity was agreed on to be transferred to the woman's family (Takyi, 2003).

Presently, western education, migration and ease of movement have contributed to freer association of boys and girls, making it easier to develop individualistic tendencies and choose a mate for oneself (Takyi, 2003; Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006). Ardayfio-Schandorf (2006) adds that the higher one's level of education, the lower the chances of the individual's family

interfering with the marriage selection process. In addition, the motivation for previously selecting spouses for one's child is gradually disappearing. Parental support for one's choice of marriage partner is however still necessary.

## 2.7 Migration and Urban Life

The importance of migration as a consequence as well as a cause of social change cannot be over emphasised. Migration is defined as the movement of people from one place to the other with the intention of settling in the new locality, and is a socio-economic phenomenon as old as humanity, and results from complex mechanisms involving economic, psychological, political, social and institutional determinants (GLSS, 2014). Ghana's internal migration movement has often been from the northern sectors to the southern sectors and from the less developed (rural) areas to the more developed (urban) areas (Oppong, 1981; GLSS, 2014). Since the 1950s, there has been a massive shift of rural populations to the towns in Ghana, with people searching for paid employment in the public and private sectors (Caldwell, 1969; Oppong, 1981).

According to Oppong (1981), the population of Accra had a tremendous increase between 1960 and 1970 with over a third of the Akan population moving away from their native homes to other districts and regions by 1960. Of this group, the largest percentages were of the coastal Fanti, the eastern Kwahu and the Akwapim districts. The Ashanti, Ahafo and Bono constituted the least with less than one in five migrants. As of the 1960 census, the population of the Akan living in Accra was about seventy thousand, constituting 16 per cent of the population of the capital. The GLSS (2014) reports that 48 per cent of the population is made up of migrants, with the highest proportion (60.3 per cent) in Accra (GAMA) where the highest proportion of household heads identify as Akan (34.5 per cent), followed by Ga-Dangme (30.8 per cent), Ewe (20.7 per cent), Guan, Gurma, Mole-Dagbani, Grusi and Mande (3.0, 1.8, 5.4, 1.0 and 0.5 per cent respectively) and all others constituting 2.3 per cent.

Given this varied proportion of ethnicities in the capital, it becomes imperative for people to seek marriage partners by seeking cultural commonalities at a higher level. With migration and urbanisation come certain changes in the social ordering of a society (Oppong, 1981). One of such changes can be seen in not only the degree of inter-ethnic marriages, but in the nature of the age at first marriage. Whereas the mean age at first marriage is 21.9 in the rural areas, the age at first marriage in the urban areas is 23.3 with females marrying about four years earlier than males (GLSS, 2014).

According to Mazrui (1986) African societies are not the closest culturally to the Western world and yet are undergoing the most rapid westernisation. This westernisation process permeates various spheres of life, and the institution of marriage has not been exempted. In Ghana, as in many other African societies, the marriage process, due in part to western influence, has evolved from traditional ceremonies as was practiced in pre-colonial systems to westernised forms as a result of cultural encounter (Robertson, 1995).

However, it is very common to see the two play out together in succession as most ordinance marriages in Africa today take place after inter-family negotiations similar to those employed in customary marriages have taken place. Presently, more people are having what is the western traditional wedding (Aiyetan and Kolapo, 2005 as cited in Animasahun and Fatile, 2011). The legacy of colonialism has influenced global relations well into the 21st Century (Hill and Fenner, 2010).

According to Awedoba (2002) those in urban areas continue to retain ties with their family of nativity and so continue to visit their families and attend funerals. And yet, even from a cursory look, it is clear that more and more families are gradually shifting to what Durkheim (1997) in his theory of the evolution of the family in *The Division of Labor in Society* refers to as the modern conjugal family. This conjugal family, as Goody (1989) describes, is one which has the following unique traits: emphasis on marital bonds, lessened dependence on kinsmen and

women for help, neolocality, free choice of mates, multilineality, and intensity of emotionality. It is this trait of lessened dependence on kinsmen and women for help which gives rise to the need for specialisations and the offer of these specialised services that can be offered to non-kinsmen and women. In this context, these specialised services are rendered by wedding professionals.

Kilson (1974) also outlines three major ideas that have contributed to social change in the traditional cycle of the Ga society, which I find relevant as a contributory factor to the growing preference for the white wedding, and which has led to the influx of marriage professionals in the Ga society. The first is Christianity, which has brought with it the Christian idea of the wedding ceremony. A second idea is friendship which has contributed to the weakening dependence of family support groups and a reliance on non-kin groups. The third is the notion of affluence and what Kilson refers to as “the big man complex”. This is with regard to the commoditisation of goods and the value placed on consumption abilities, particularly foreign goods.

## 2.8 Chapter Conclusion

A cursory overview of the institution of marriage shows marriage as a universal one significant for the regulation of sexuality and procreation. The Christian marriage process is elaborate, and one of the most important commodities of exchange, the ring in the rite, has found its way into the Ghanaian marriage process. Examining some social, economic and political functions of marriage in some African societies highlights the most important element of the African marriage as the exchange of commodities, the most important of which is the bridewealth which makes the marriage legitimate.

Some social changes have occurred in the African marriage process due to the western colonial encounter which brought Christianity, western education and cash economy. Some changes have also occurred as a result of migration and urbanisation, and these changes that have

occurred have brought about the adoption of the contemporary wedding from the west, which in the long term has also created the need for specialised services by professionals in the marriage process.

In the next chapter, I focus on media and pop-culture representations of marriage and posit that although colonialism and Christianity in particular have contributed to the social change in the marriage process, it is the media and popular culture representations that have contributed to popularising the commoditisation of the wedding process and the need for specialised wedding services by professionals in order to meet the demands of “the big man” complex and to fill the gap that kin groups are no longer filling in the marriage process, due to the weakened dependence on the family system as a result of individualism.



## CHAPTER THREE

### MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND CULTURE

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores media and popular culture representations of the marriage process. I posit that although general social changes have led to changes in the marriage process, it is the proliferation of the media in particular, which has greatly impacted notions of marriage and has given rise to the influx of wedding professionals in the Ghanaian society. In addition, these wedding professionals have taken advantage of new media and technology to carve a space for themselves in the lives and ideals of the Ghanaian who aspires to get married as the traditional and universal ideal, and also to reinvent his or her identity as one who is in tune with the times.

The influence of the media is not seen in the marriage process alone, but also in the way marriage is even propositioned. The ever-popular hashtag, #SheSaidYes depicts several ideals of marriage proposals in the global scene that cannot be overlooked. Another concept popularised with the media is the bachelorette, and I describe one such bachelorette which I participated in.

Finally, the wedding day itself is one that is heavily popularised in the media, with a lot of attention given to celebrities in particular whose weddings are often made viral, as the weddings to aspire to. All this attention to how whose wedding was done, and whose wedding was the talk of town has accounted in part to the clamour for wedding professionals.

#### 3.2 The Media

The media are perhaps the most dominant and most frequently used resources for understanding social issues and helps in shaping everyday life, influencing how people think and behave, how they see themselves and other people, and how they construct their identities (Berns, 2001). So influential is the media that they, like art forms, do not merely reflect an already-constituted consciousness, giving us a window onto something already fully present.

They are themselves important means through which consciousness is articulated and communicated. (Dewey, 1934). Berthold Brecht also adds that “art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it” (Schumann, 2008: 17). Although Barber and Brecht refer to art forms, their descriptions also hold true for popular culture representations which are generally not so different from art forms.

The importance of popular culture is therefore in their sheer indubitable assertive presence as social facts as they tend to hint at important but unnoticed aspects of the societies in which they thrive. They represent what people think, believe and aspire to. They are also expressive acts and have an immense power to communicate either verbally, or non-verbally, and constitute a new consciousness (Barber, 1987).

Popular culture is problematic to define, particularly because they are constantly evolving through space and time. For the context of this work, however, I employ popular culture representations as ideas that have a wide range of acceptance and are carried across media platforms such as radio, television, print and electronic media, as well as traditional African literature passed around orally.

As popular culture is carried across media platforms, it is important to understand the media forms that have carried the representations of marriage and marriage ceremonies. Throughout global history, there have been two major forms of communication, namely dyadic media that facilitated private communication such as telephone conversations, and public broadcasting such as television, radio and newspapers, and (Miller, et. al, 2016). This, of course, was before the introduction of social media which came to colonise the space between these two forms.

By the 1980s, every African city was full of imported commercial entertainments (Barber, 1987). In many African countries the democratisation process that began in the 1990s created the conditions for alternative media outlets (Sounaye, 2011). Today, there are several locally produced entertainment forms, which are heavily influenced by commercial and political forces

as well as media corporations with vested interest in promoting representations of “knowledge” (Hill and Fenner, 2010). At the end of June 2016, there were 448 authorised FM stations, and 75 authorised television stations in Ghana alone (National Communications Authority, September 2016).

In addition, the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies and the recent rise of digital and social media tools have been significant in shaping ideas. Ghana presently has six mobile network operators (MNOs), with an estimated mobile subscription of 36,613,978 at the end of the second quarter of 2016. There has also been a steady increase in mobile data use since the third quarter of 2015, with the average user using 815.72 megabytes (MB) of data per month at the end of June 2016, up 19.2% from the previous quarter’s average usage of 684.12 megabytes (National Communications Authority, September 2016). This shows the significance of the online presence of the contemporary Ghanaian and begs for an interest in the nature of this online presence and how it relates to the current marriage terrain. Although media is often grouped in two as old and new media (Jensen, 2013) for the purpose of this work, I discuss media under three main categories to mark the past, the present and the on-going representations of the marriage process. The first is the traditional media or African traditional media which consists mainly of oral literature in the form of proverbs and adages, stories or folktales. Second, new media forms are classified as print media, audio, visual, and audio-visual media forms of radio and television. Third, in the newer media forms, I examine social media and the rise of Internet Web 2.0.

### **3.2.1 Traditional Media**

Throughout Africa, there have been proverbs that underline the social pressure to get married and stay married. One such proverb has it that “It is when a man wants to be ridiculed that he goes around saying ‘I have neither wife nor children’” (Oduyoye, 1995). Others emphasise the negative aspects of marriage, particularly for the man who might be caught or trapped by a

wife who is irritating. Such a situation is described as a necessary evil. One such proverb has it that “A wife is like a blanket that will irritate a man’s skin if he covers himself with it; but if he were to take it off, he would place himself in the hands of biting cold winds” (Oduyoye, 1995).

Traditionally, in many African cultures, marriage was desirable for both men and women so stories of spouse-hunting involved both sexes. However, women were not expected to associate too closely and or too frequently with men unless they had ties of affinity or consanguinity, and whenever such an unrelated pair was seen, it was assumed there was a sexual bond. The burden of responsibility lay on the woman not to let this happen as it was an indictment on her character.

Most stories were therefore geared towards advising the women, with the moral being that “good” girls get husbands and so the entirety of her education was geared toward preparing her to be ‘good’ for marriage which was often done as soon as a girl hit puberty (Oduyoye, 1995). Betrothals were not uncommon in many African societies and young girls could be espoused before marriageable age (Goode, 1963 as cited in Takyi, 2003). Parents were seen as the best judges in choosing a suitable spouse for their daughters, and several stories abound where fathers subject prospective husbands of their daughters to tests. A woman was advised against being too strong-willed about her spouse, particularly when chosen for her by her father. Stories were often told where a daughter refused the suitor chosen by her father only to realise her folly later through some mishap, and finally acquiesce to her father’s initial choice (Oduyoye, 1995).

### **3.2.2 New Media**

In Efua Sutherland’s “The marriage of Anansewa”, crafted in line with the Ghanaian folk-tale of the cunning Ananse, Ananse skillfully chooses a suitable spouse for his westernised daughter, Anansewa although she initially objects to her father “selling” her. “The marriage of

Anansewa” also points out the intricacies of the traditional marriage process as the acceptance of the bridewealth is shown as the key commodity that legitimises marriage.

In, perhaps, what is the earliest depiction of the evolution of the traditional marriage ceremony into a more western type, Kobina Sekyi in “The Blinkards” describes a change in the norm of the family’s involvement in the marriage process where friends rather play a key role in the marriage of Mr. Okadu and Araba in “the English manner”. The consent of the family of Araba is not sought, and Araba’s grandmother calls it barbaric to have a marriage without the consent of the family.

A vivid description of the English adopted wedding reception is given. There has already been a church wedding, and now at the reception, there is fine clothing and table laden with drinkables, glasses, and plates of cut cake, buns, and the wedding cake. The bride and groom are dressed according to western custom; the bride is in a white dress. There is a page boy, two bridesmaids and a best man. There are foreign drinks: whiskey and soda. The bride cuts the cake, with the help of the groom. Champagne goes round in glasses. There is a toast to the health of the bride and the groom. The groom gives a vote of thanks. Another toast is made for the bridesmaids to also be married soon. The best man responds. Another toast is made to the health of the couple’s parents. The father of the bride responds. The couple is advised by married or respectable persons. This description given by Kobina Sekyi is not very different from what prevails now, although there are notably a few more ‘professional’ elements to the wedding and the general order in which it is done.

Songs provide wide scope for individual expressions (Finnegan, 2012) and their importance as a vehicle for the transmission of norms cannot be overemphasised. The number of love songs recorded is surprising- at least to those brought up to the idea that the concept of personal love is bound to be lacking in African cultures (Finnegan, 2012).

Akosua Agyapong's '*Asiwa*' refers to a woman who defies her parents in their ploy to marry her off to someone she does not love, saying that marriage is about love and not wealth or other factors such as ethnicity. She writes off the concept of betrothal (*asiwa*) as an outmoded practice she will not succumb to. In contrast, Amakye Dede's *Mmaa Pe Sokoo* conveys the message that women like luxury and so without money, a woman will not love a man.

In "Small Small" a more contemporary song by Okyeame Kwame and MzVee, a man tells his girlfriend to grow with him as he struggles to make it in life, promising that when he becomes financially secure, he would buy her a "motto" and they will have "a wedding". The video of the song portrays a boy and a girl as neighbours who from the age of about five become attached to each other, date in their teens and both go off on individual journeys for higher education and work, and finally come back together to have a lavish white wedding. The significance of the lyrics and video of the song in portraying love in contemporary times cannot be overemphasised and it expresses a reality as well as an ideal.

Romantic love has become a popular notion and young people can date for a long time, planning their wedding without the necessary involvement of their families. Also, individual fulfilment is seen as a necessary precursor to marriage, and the couple could even help each other attain their goals as is seen by the young man trying to stay awake while he holds up a flashlight for the young woman while she learns in the dark of the night.

The importance of films is in the legacy they leave, and their ability to shape the way historical and social events are understood by generations (Hill and Fenner, 2010). Several western movies exist on the white wedding and a number of them have become popular on Ghanaian screens.

The 1970s classic movie, "I told you so" gives the first glimpse of the Ghanaian white wedding on screen. The main idea of the movie resonates with Kobina Sekyi's "The Blinkards". The difference however, is that whereas in "The Blinkards" it is the father of the bride who defies

tradition to marry his daughter off in the western fashion, in “I told you so”, the father of the bride objects to the marriage of his daughter to a man whom he knows little about. However, his wife and her brother are swayed by the suitor’s display of wealth and the prospects of affluence. They therefore defy him and proceed to marry off his daughter only to find out later that the suitor was not who they believed him to be. This theme of the father knowing what is best for his daughter is much like the theme discussed in “The marriage of Anansewa” as well as most African proverbs and stories (Oduyoye, 1995).

Although there are quite a number of movies that generally depict the white wedding in contemporary Africa, the Nigerian movie, “The Wedding Party” is perhaps one of the clearest depictions of the nuances of the contemporary wedding as well as the wedding planning and coordination process involved in making a wedding successful. The bride and the groom in the movie are both from different ethnic and social backgrounds and though this does not pose a problem to them, it creates tension between their mothers. The groom is from an elitist family and so his mother wants to use only elitist vendors and have only western dishes served at the wedding. Although also wealthy, the bride’s mother is rather traditional and wants to have traditional Nigerian dishes served at the wedding. This poses a problem as the groom’s mother deems these dishes “bush” and will not have them mar her reputation.

As tensions escalate, the wedding planner has to manoeuvre around these idiosyncrasies in order to have a successful wedding. In the end, two food stations are set: one with local dishes and the other with foreign dishes. Intriguingly, the guests do not patronise the foreign foods, and food runs out at the local food station while there are still more guests to be fed. The wedding planner becomes flustered as she tries to contain the situation and has to plead with the caterer at the local food station to provide more food. The caterer refuses, however, since she has catered for the budget she was working with. The movie leaves this unresolved, however, and it is uncertain what the planner did to resolve the situation.

Throughout the course of the movie, the planner is faced with an onslaught of problems. The bridal party gets delayed, and even the bride's dress gets muddied. The guests refuse to follow entry instructions and push their way through, making her guest list obsolete. The mothers of the bride and groom protest the order of entry as each wants to go in first. The partially drunk best man gives a wrong flash drive of the bachelor's night to be played on a screen projected and the bride gets agitated.

The MC is also tasked with controlling the situation as the guests become flustered by the dramatic turn of events. In addition, with the existing tension between the mothers of the bride and groom, it becomes necessary not to appear to put one before the other in any way. Also, when events do not go as scheduled, he has to adapt and remain calm to control the situation and try to steer back the affairs.

Although some of the scenes are rather exaggerated for dramatic effect, others show the complex nature of the wedding planning and coordination process and the number of things that could go wrong and how they could escalate if not handled expertly. It therefore highlights the significance of the wedding professionals, particularly the wedding coordinator whose job it is to coordinate all elements of the wedding process and act as "a fixer" in times of crises.

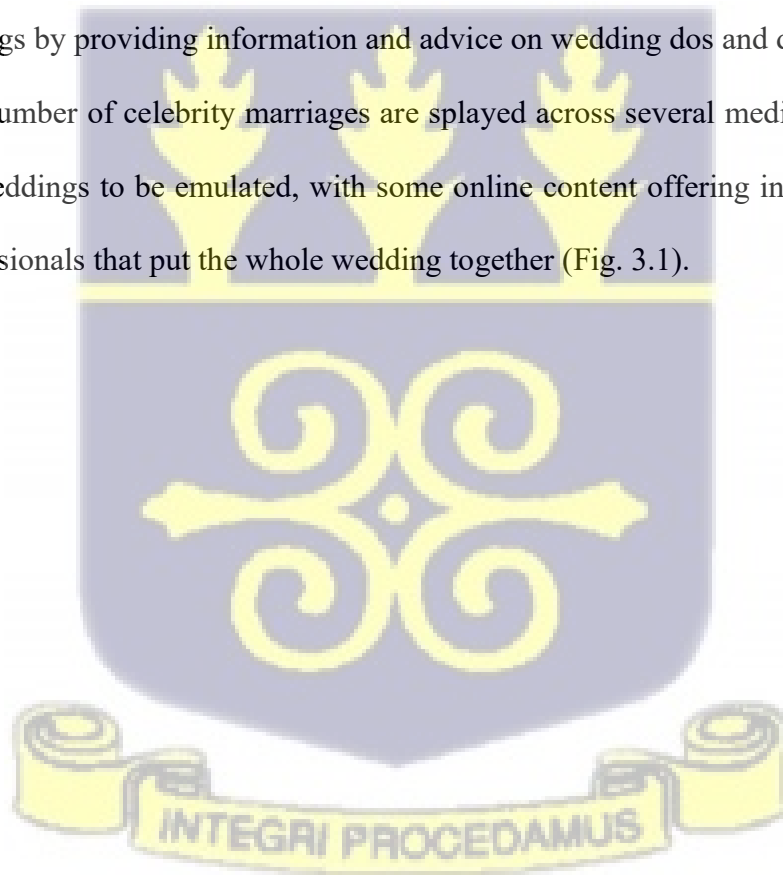
It also shows that although the family generally plays a minimal role in the marriage process, they are still present as a support group, although their support is mainly for the parents of the couple. It is the mothers in particular who appear most involved and influential in the process. For them, it is not just the day of their children, but their own day, and so activities of the day are seen to reflect on their own identity both as a mother and as an individual.

In addition, the movie shows how the Nigerian has globalised the white wedding by infusing several cultural elements into the wedding. The wedding, although western in origin, when done by Nigerians show their national and ethnic identity through their language, songs,

clothing and general mannerisms. This is not only akin to the Nigerian, but pertains to the contemporary Ghanaian wedding as well.

According to Holma (2013), the role of the media, the movie industry and celebrities, has been central to making the white wedding popular. In addition, since the 20th century, they have contributed to turning the solemn ceremony into a consumer culture, making weddings so popular that the wedding industry has become a hundred-billion-dollar industry in the United States alone. In Ghana, there is no definite statistic on the wedding industry. However, new shows coming up which are dedicated to the wedding industry are a reflection of the growing industry. Wedding television shows like “A walk down the aisle” (GhOne TV) and “Top weddings” (TV3) feature weddings and wedding professionals, and portray and enforce notions of ideal weddings by providing information and advice on wedding dos and don’ts.

In addition, a number of celebrity marriages are splayed across several media outlets and are presented as weddings to be emulated, with some online content offering information on the wedding professionals that put the whole wedding together (Fig. 3.1).



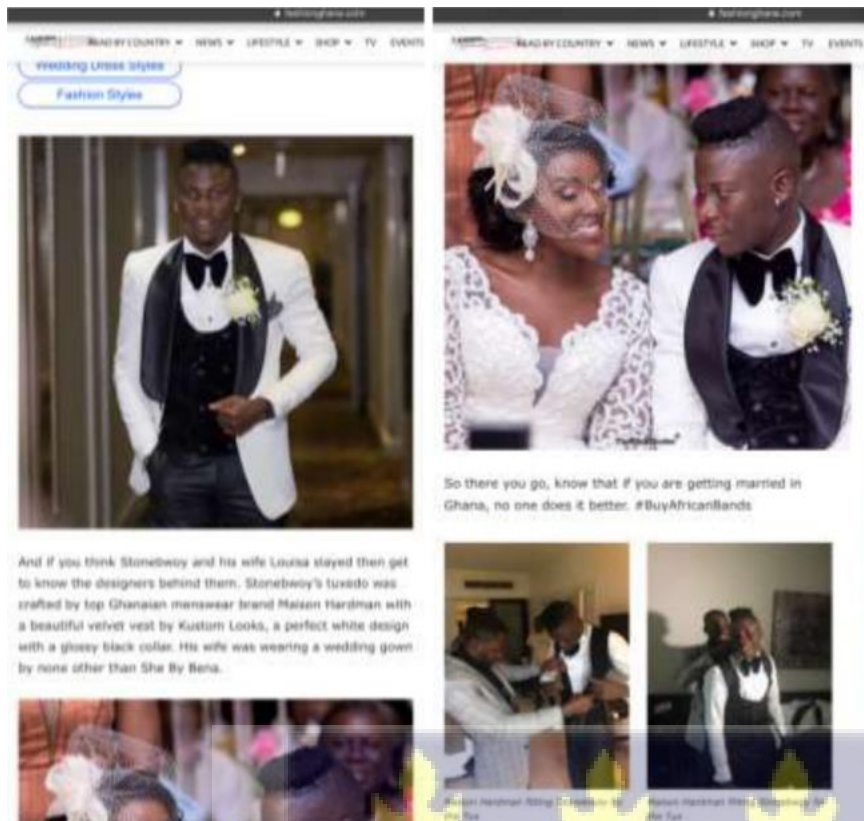


Fig 3. 1: Blog post of celebrity couple, Louisa and Stonebwoy

### 3.2.3 Social Media

The entry of the first ever advanced mobile phone with a touch screen into the global market in 2007, began a new era of mobile phone usage, and mobile technology (Bergstrom and Backman, 2013). Additionally, the emergence of user-generated content (UGC) and social media today, has completely altered the face of the internet, giving rise to a flow of diverse content that could not have been created by previous media forms (Latar, Asmolov and Gekker, 2010). Prior to this, most users of the internet in the Web 1.0 era were merely passive, and only received content, and very few were actively creating content. Web 2.0, however, increased user participation on the internet (O'Reilly, 2005 as cited in Bergstrom and Backman, 2013). Therefore, the main difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that whereas Web 1.0 emphasised a one-way communication, Web 2.0 has brought about a two-way communication that allows recipients of content to participate in the content by a variety of ways which generally includes liking, sharing and commenting on content.

The importance of social media is not merely in the platform, but the content of the platform. Social media has given rise to more visual communication and has given photographic images an unprecedented ubiquity as part of daily life. Virtually every business today has an online presence as various individuals are finding the need to have an online presence as well. Studies have shown that 63% of the time spent on mobile internet today is spent on social media (Bergstrom and Backman, 2013) and the increasing ubiquity of the smartphone is the catalyst for the use of social media (Miller et al, 2016). The pervasive nature of social media has created dimensions with new possibilities for research in the social sciences (Villegas, 2015).

Relevant to discourse on the white wedding in Ghana are two social media platforms: Instagram and Facebook. Instagram has gained rapid popularity as a photo-sharing app (Bergstrom and Backman, 2013) and due to its popularity of visual representations is very important for contemporary weddings with its predominantly visual aspects. It has therefore become a go-to place to find wedding professionals who post appealing high-quality images to their clients and intended clients.

Facebook is another popular platform for wedding portrayals. This platform however, is popular for its blend of visual as well as textual contents and is popular for professionals and clients seeking to interact. Invented in 2004, Facebook today permeates the lives of millions of people daily (Villegas, 2015; Snelson, 2016) and was reported to have about 2 billion users by June, 2017 (Facebook, 2017), and is therefore an important platform for anyone seeking clients to be on.

Seventy-nine percent of people have taken more photographs since they started to use social media, and sixty-four percent of people believe that a visual post on social media is more convincing than text-only posts (Wang, 2016) and are by far the most communicative (Miller et al, 2016). An example of communicative posts is the meme. Memes are images that tend to go viral and very often cannot be traced to the content creator unless watermarked with a name

or logo. A good meme is often popular for its humour and veracity and is widely shared because people can relate to them. While memes tend to be reflections of truth, some also forge and propagate truths and are important for reinforcing ideas.

A meme on African weddings shows why guests attend these social events represented as 78%, the food and drinks; 11% to dance *kukere*, *azonto* and *harlem* shake; 10% to find future husbands and wives for their kids, siblings or themselves, and 1% to celebrate the marriage (see Fig. 3.2). Although not based on real statistics, this meme is popular because most people do relate to the dominant reasons given to the reason for wedding attendance. Another thing it does is to reinforce the idea that wedding guests are particular about the food and drinks, as well as the music. It therefore subtly enforces the notion that it is important for a couple to invest in these to create lasting impressions on their guests.



Fig 3. 2: Memes on marriage as an ideal, and on African weddings

Wedding professionals create pages and post content which gets commented on, liked and shared, increasing their popularity in the cyber community of the wedding industry (Fig. 3.3).

In addition, wedding professionals tend to tag other professionals they work with on particular weddings, and this creates a network where they boost each other's online popularity (Fig.3.4).



Fig 3. 3: A typical social media page



Fig 3. 4: A post with tagged professionals



Fig 3. 5: Post of influencer ideal of a wedding cake

There is a growing trend of social media influencers who although do not specifically offer any services, have a large following who look to them for inspiration. Social media wedding influencers such as, IDoGhana, BellaNaijaWeddings, AfricanSweetheartWeddings and GhanaWeddings with hundreds of thousands, and even millions of online followers have a lot of clout and can spot and make trends for weddings (see Fig. 3.5). Some of these influencers also in recent times have organised bridal fairs which allow for client-vendor interactions, making wedding professionals more visible to the Ghanaian society offline.

### 3.3 Permission to Wed - Popping the Question: #SheSaidYes!

Media representations have had much influence on not just the wedding, but on the proposal process. Ideally, the contemporary Ghanaian marriage process begins with the proposal where the man asks for the woman's hand in marriage. Though they may have courted for a while and may be looking at a long-term relationship which involves marriage, the dating arena is such that not all courtships could lead to marriage as some end in break ups. Indeed, even the proposal and acceptance thereof may not always necessarily lead to marriage although that is the expectation. Moreover, the possibility exists that some women agree to proposals carried out in public out of shock, or in order not to humiliate the man.



Fig 3. 6: Real life proposal



Fig 3. 7: Down-on-one-knee proposal in media



Fig 3. 8: Engagement announcement



328 likes  
weloveghanaweddings Cute couple! Creative pre wedding shoot by @akiboatimpressions #weloveghanaweddings

Fig 3. 9: Creative pre-wedding photos

In the first episode of the TV show, “A Walk down the aisle”, the panellists talked about how they expect their marriage proposal. Their views were divergent and showed that whereas some women expect a down-on-one-knee surprise proposal (see Fig. 3.6 and 3.7), others felt the Ghanaian dating terrain is such that it is unnecessary to have the man propose since the goal is clearly to get married. That notwithstanding, there is clearly a growing trend of proposals on one knee, and in public!

The proposal and acceptance is often followed by a pre-wedding photo where the couple could announce their engagement and impending marriage in a variety of ways. The standard ones express that #HeAsked and #SheSaidYes (see Fig. 3.8), while others are more unconventional and are according to the imagination of the couple or the photographer (see Fig. 3.9).

### 3.4 A Ghanaian Bachelorette

With about two months to her wedding, Nancy (pseudonym) informs her close girlfriends of her impending marriage. This does not come as a surprise as most of them are already well aware of the relationship and its seriousness. Marriage plans have been discussed before already, but often in the tense of an abstract future. However, this time, it is certain. She will be getting married on a proposed date yet to be confirmed to her girls. But she has created a

group chat on WhatsApp to include all her twenty-five close female friends who will be bridesmaids of sorts. These twenty-five are not bridesmaids. But one will be her maid of honour. Nancy informs them that they will not be following the bridal train because her husband is not comfortable with that. Instead, they will be the bridal squad: “Nancy’s Angels”, she calls them.

Having informed the group of the purpose of the group she tells them her expectations of them on the day of the wedding, giving them the colour theme and possible dress codes which she tells them to decide on as a group. She then exits the platform. Over the course of the ensuing weeks her Angels make preparations towards the wedding, getting uniform attires and deciding on the shoe, jewellery and other coordinated details of their looks for Nancy’s day.

They also discuss her bachelorette and assign duties amongst themselves. Some would have to check on the bachelorette cake. Others would have to see to the food and drinks. Others have to get Nancy’s bachelorette dress, shoes and other accessories, including a bridal tiara and sash. The Angels decide to all wear white for the bachelorette: a white top with blue jeans, and a flower crown.

On the day of the bachelorette, all the Angels converge at a venue and set up in wait for the bride-to-be. Having created the group, Nancy knows there will be a bachelorette. However, she has no idea where and when it would be. Moreover, it is still weeks before her wedding and bachelorette parties are usually done during the week of the wedding, and very often on the eve of the wedding. The Angels however, particularly due to their time and busy schedules cannot seem to find a conducive date in the wedding week for the wedding. Besides, they rationalise; Nancy would be very busy herself with the engagement and may not be available.

Nancy is brought to the venue of the bachelorette very late in the afternoon under false pretence and is surprised to see her girls and the set up when her wedding is still a few weeks away. The timing works in the Angels’ favour and Nancy is really surprised when they scream “Surprise!”

She is steered towards a changing room and is dressed in a little ballerina dress, a bridal sash and tiara, and a pair of high heels. The night proceeds with merry making and a lot of chatter about general things: how they each met Nancy and their fondest memories of her, ex-boyfriends and past relationships and how she met her fiancé. There is a lot of talk about sex and relationships, and a lot of laughter and giggles as they play the game of truth or dare. The bachelorette drags into the night and time flies quickly until finally, in the late of the night the Angels start dispersing.

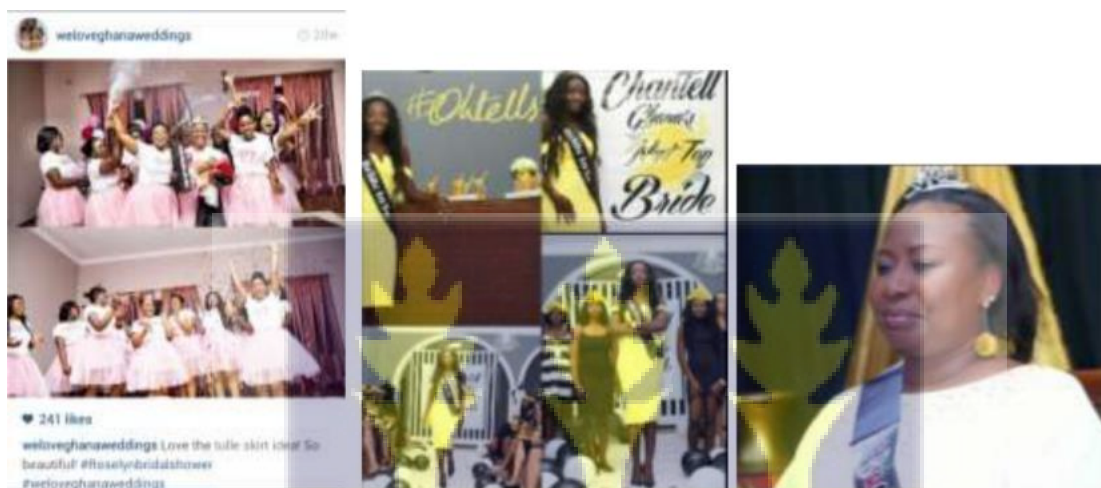


Fig 3. 10: Themed bachelorettes and celebrity bridal shower

Although often used interchangeably the bachelorette and the bridal shower are different in nature. Whereas the bachelorette is fun-centred and upbeat, the bridal shower is centred on gift-giving and is not as upbeat. Both bridal showers and bachelorette parties however can be themed. Bachelorettes and bridal showers are gaining popularity, particularly with social media posts of depictions of bridal showers and bachelorettes, particularly among celebrities (see Fig. 3.10).

### 3.5 The Big Day: “The Perfect Wedding”

A typical white wedding has a number of core elements: arrival of guests, bridal procession, declaration of purpose of gathering, exchange of vows, exchange of rings, and signing of marriage register, followed by the reception. Media portray the wedding as a glamorous event

with several depictions of what a “perfect wedding” looks like and how to achieve the effect, particularly by mentioning celebrity wedding professionals (see Fig. 3.1, 3.11 and 3.12).



Fig 3. 11: Appreciative posts by celebrities on their weddings (costumes)



Fig 3. 12: Appreciative posts by celebrities on their weddings (décor)



Fig 3. 13: Two of the most important elements of the wedding: the ring and the register.

Media representations of the perfect wedding show an ideal beauty type to emulate (see Fig. 3.14). Brides look resplendent with elaborate make up details and social media popularises what (in social media parlance) is referred to as a “beat face”. A typical beat face features a flawless face devoid of blemishes, and made up to “contour” and highlight standard beauty features such as a slender nose, lips and high rising arched eyebrows popularly known as “brows on fleek”.

In addition, recent media pictures popularise a growing trend of “illusion dresses”. These are dresses that are made of sheer fabric and embroidered fabric or other embellishments, made to look as though they cling to the skin, unattached to the dress (see Fig 3.14 & 3.15).

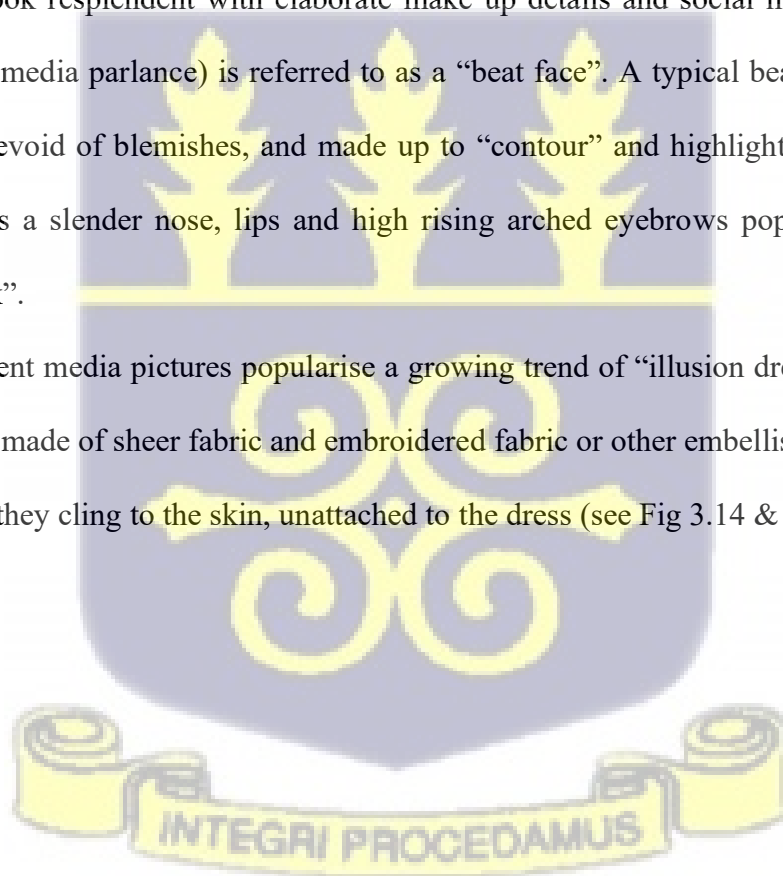




Fig 3. 14: Bridal campaign by Ghanaian wedding professionals



Fig 3. 15: Social media influencer post on an illusion dress

### 3.6 Wedding Professionals in Demand

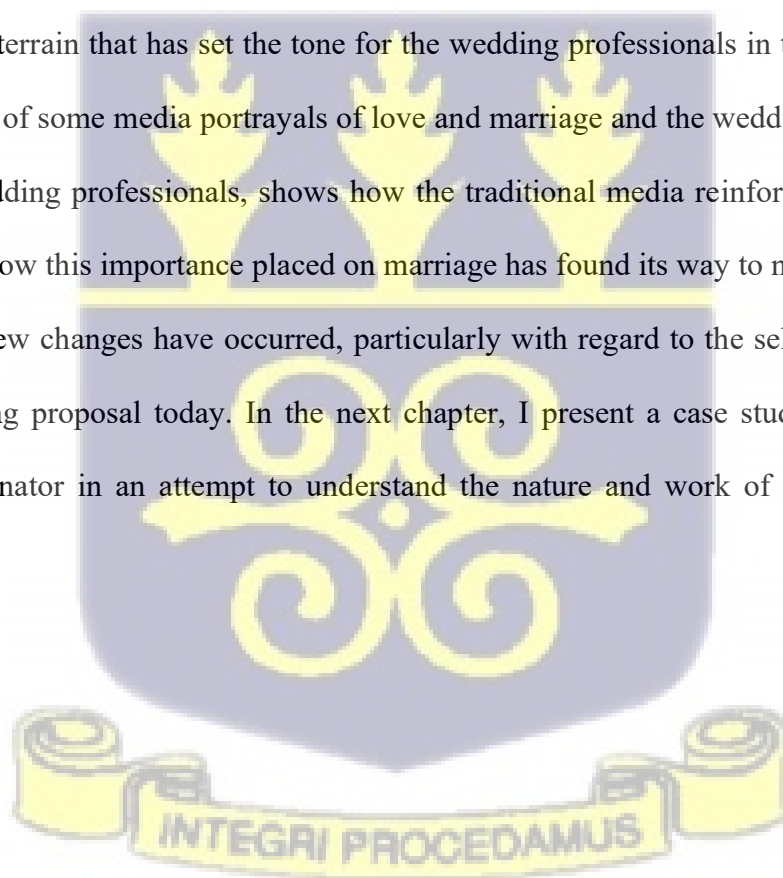
The demand for wedding professionals in today's wedding is highly significant and representative of a consciousness brought about by media presentations of the endless possibilities of the wedding and its transformative ability in creating a magical day.

In a study on language advertisements in wedding magazines from a gender linguistic perspective, Eliasson (2007) hypothesises that wedding magazines are mainly written for women and is reflected in the language of the advertisements. In the Ghanaian wedding magazine (the Dream Mag) as well as content analysis of hundreds of social media posts, in line with Eliason's hypothesis, it can be seen; even from a cursory look that the majority of the unisex products in the advertisements are women-targeted products.

Whatever the reason may be, wedding professionals in Ghana today have the ground work done for them as several media outlets allow them to boost content and promote themselves. They have also found a niche in the lacuna left by the weakened ties of kinship today.

### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion**

Examining the terrain that has set the tone for the wedding professionals in today's wedding, and an analysis of some media portrayals of love and marriage and the wedding in general, as well as the wedding professionals, shows how the traditional media reinforces the notion of marriage, and how this importance placed on marriage has found its way to new media forms. In addition, a few changes have occurred, particularly with regard to the selection of spouse and the wedding proposal today. In the next chapter, I present a case study on a wedding planner/ coordinator in an attempt to understand the nature and work of today's wedding professionals.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### A CONVERSATION WITH THE LADY WITH THE MAGIC WAND

#### 4.1 Introduction

Wedding planning/ coordination is becoming a popular profession as more weddings are happening every week. The wedding planner/ coordinator, if the wedding were a movie, would be the director who orchestrates every scene and makes sure all the other elements of wedding professionals do their work. For this reason, it is important to first understand the work of the wedding professional who is paramount to all other professionals.

In this chapter, I present a transcription of an interview with a renowned wedding planner/ coordinator, Abokuma Ellis of Purple Twirl. Although her experiences as a wedding planner/ coordinator could differ from other planners/ coordinators, her rich experience in the field gives insight into the terrain of the wedding planning professionals, their general roles, challenges and other nuances in the industry. She also lays the background for understanding some of the components in today's Ghanaian wedding, as well as the changes that have occurred, particularly with regard to the general planning and organisation of the wedding, and how the Ghanaian has globalised the white wedding. In addition, she provides information on the gendered patterns of the wedding industry, both with the professionals themselves, and with the clients.

#### 4.2 Abokuma Ellis: The Lady with the Magic Wand

I first met Abokuma at the Bliss Wedding Experience where she had been a participating wedding vendor and the person in charge of the entire planning and coordination. Prior to the event, I had seen quite a number of her works across social media platforms and she appeared, at least from the posts online, to know her business. At the Bliss event, I got to experience her magic and was awed. Coincidentally, her personal assistant, Phyllis, was an old colleague of mine, and Phyllis introduced me to Abokuma. Abokuma had a rather calm and soothing

demeanour and was affable and enthusiastic about my study. She asked me to schedule an interview with her assistant, and we met on April 10, 2016. The conversation with her is transcribed below.

### 4.3 The Birth of Purple Twirl

Event planning/ coordination appears to be a lucrative business as more people are venturing into the terrain. Some planners/ coordinators have teams and are well established as businesses which are highly sought after. Purple Twirl is one of such well-known names in the industry, and Abokuma talks about its inception:

Prisca: *Tell me about Purple Twirl*

Abokuma: *Purple Twirl is an event planning company. We're only into event management and planning and coordination. We're not a décor company-we don't do décor at all. We just do the planning and coordination.*

Prisca: *So how old are you?*

Abokuma: *I'm thirty-one.*

Prisca: *Sorry, my question was ambiguous, but I was going to come to that. How old is Purple Twirl?*

Abokuma: *Purple Twirl is five years old.*

Prisca: *Why the name Purple Twirl?*

Abokuma: *Well, Purple because purple is the colour of royalty, right, and I want my clients to feel like royals. And in fairytales there's always a fairy godmother, so I'm the fairy godmother and I have my little wand that I can twirl around and make everything happen for you. And apart from that, I wanted the element of [a] ribbon because ribbons are almost part of every wedding.*

Prisca: *What inspired the birth of Purple Twirl?*

*Abokuma: You know what? It was -um- I did not finish school thinking I was going to start an event planning company - not at all. I was helping a friend plan a wedding. That was how it started, and I happened to be really good at it. So that was how it started. I didn't immediately at that point think I'm going to start a wedding company, but then I was kind of in-between jobs at that time too, and I knew I was creative- I was good with my hands. I used to do hampers and stuff like that. And I kind of had played with the idea of weddings a little, but I never thought I'd have my company at this stage, to be honest... So, I was looking for a job, and kind of playing with the idea of Purple Twirl. So that's how it started. I just got my break-there was this job in Takoradi- before then I'd done a few weddings, semi-professionally, but then I think that one was my first professional paid job. You know when you're starting out and you're charging people you don't really make a profit, so this one was my first paid job. It went really well, and honestly, I feel every job after that was because of that, because I got a lot of referrals from that one. And even up till now, a lot of the jobs I get now are based on referrals because it's a service, and people need to experience it and know that this one [vendor] was good. You can't just see it online-I mean online you see a beautiful thing, but you don't see a service online.*

*Prisca: Tell me about yourself- your personal life, upbringing ...*

*Abokuma: I'm a science student. I've always been a science student. My whole family is [into] science. My dad was a doctor, so growing up you had to be a doctor. I have four siblings. My younger sister is in medical school. All of us escaped it but her; so, all of us did Science in Secondary School. And then I went on after Uni[versity] in Legon- I did biology, and then went into the work market looking for a job, going in and out of jobs. I worked briefly for a logistics firm as a*

*Corporation's Manager. I worked there for less than a year. And that was when I started doing the hampers and stuff. I was kind of looking for a job, kind of doing things on the side, and then that job came. Even up till now people ask me "are you doing this full time?"*

*Prisca: So, are you doing this full time?*

*Abokuma: Yeah, it's full time.*

*Prisca: So, you're not going back into science?*

*Abokuma: No. The thing is, science is a little boring for me. I actually worked at Medlab in a lab for a while. It was the same thing every time. It wasn't exciting. And it was the same thing with the office, doing the same thing every day...But now [with Purple Twirl] it's a different thing every time. You meet different people. It's fun. I definitely prefer this.*

*Prisca: So, you're looking to take this into the next level... [Do] you have long term plans?*

*Abokuma: Yes.*

Abokuma's job as a wedding professional is not without western influence, evident in her allusion to Disney fairytale godmothers and the Cinderella effect of weddings. However, the greater motivation is her own innate ability and zeal for creativity that sends her out of the monotonous career of science and into the more vibrant and ever evolving wedding scene.

She also points out the role of friends in the wedding planning process, showing that before the existence of wedding professionals, most of these roles of professionals may have been carried out by friends. Also, by helping friends, she got the platform to finesse her skill, and carve a niche in society by becoming a planner. Becoming a planner/coordinator, even with her background in the almost unrelated field of science, indicates a move away from family

occupations in today's society and the ability to recreate an identity different from that which one was born into.

#### 4.4 The Purple Twirl Team

Prisca: *Tell me about your staff. How many people are currently working with you?*

Abokuma: *Actually, I only have one permanent staff, [and] that's Phyllis. And everyone else is [temporary]- I'm actually just hiring a part time staff. So, we're going to be three official Purple Twirl staff. And then on the day of events, we have a list of coordinators we use as and when, so they only work with us on the day of the event to coordinate the event. And then we have an HR person who's like a consultant, and then an accounts person as well.*

Prisca: *All females?*

Abokuma: *No, the accountant is a guy, but then the HR [person is] female.*

Even though often not acknowledged, there are professionals whose works in different capacities behind the scene contribute to making the white wedding a success. In addition, wedding professionals outsource when the need arises and have people who work with them in unofficial capacities to make the wedding successful.

#### 4.5 The Purple Twirl Clientele: Class and Gender

Prisca: *So how many weddings have you done so far since you started?*

Abokuma: *It is not like a crazy number. It's probably maybe about twenty-five.*

Prisca: *How's your clientele like, in terms of class, gender...*

Abokuma: *Our clientele are usually in the middle and upper class- [the] working class. Most of the time, it's the working class because they're usually people who don't have time, and who are working...so they're usually the ones I do the weddings for.*

Prisca: *Is that your target group or that just so happens?*

Abokuma: *Yeah, that is my target group. My target is people who don't have time to do all the errands. So that's what we do for them. And a lot of them also-we have quite a lot of clients who are outside Ghana so they're not here and they don't know the terrain and what happens with vendors here... so we liaise with them... when they come even like a week or two before the wedding, that's when they meet the people for the first time.*

Prisca: *Which people do you normally meet with: is it the bride or the groom?*

Abokuma: *It's usually the bride, but then sometimes I meet both [of the] couple. It's rarely that I've had to meet only the groom. Unless the bride is not in town, then I'd meet the groom, but usually it would be the bride.*

Prisca: *What do you think accounts for that: more brides being involved in the planning?*

Abokuma: *Well, I guess it's, you know, girls are usually inclined to have the fantasy about the wedding. You know, they know what they want when it comes to their wedding so it's easier for them to make the decision. The groom is involved- don't get me wrong. They're usually involved, especially when it comes to the finances, but then when it comes to the details of what the wedding should be like and stuff like that, it's usually the bride. But then they always consult with the groom.*

Prisca: *Which one do you get more often: a bride who has planned everything and just wants you to handle it, or they want you to plan everything from scratch?*

Abokuma: *We actually have a good balance of both. We have people who go for the 'day of coordination package' where they plan everything, and we just coordinate the [event on the] day. And then we have those who let us come in [to plan] from the beginning. It's actually usually the people who are not in Ghana; with*

*them it's almost always whole service where we do everything for them. And sometimes the ones in Ghana too have us do everything for them [with regard to planning and coordination].*

The clientele shows the growing popularity of the Ghanaian wedding terrain as people in the diaspora opt to have their weddings in Ghana. This can give way for cultural exchange since guests from outside the country bring in their culture and also take back experiences of cultures in the Ghanaian setting. The influx of foreign guests into the country also has great potential for tourism and the local economy which cannot be over emphasised.

The predominant gender she deals with indicates the level of involvement of the brides and their decision-making powers in the wedding event. The reference to women wanting fantasy weddings also resonates with the fairy tale ideals in Figures 3.11a & 3.12b.

#### **4.6 Skill Set of a Wedding Coordinator**

Prisca: *Tell me about your training. You said you came into this without any expectation of doing so, but what [skill] does it take to be a wedding planner?*

Abokuma: *Professionally, I haven't had any training in wedding planning. A lot of it is good organisational skills, being creative, and thinking on your feet. You need to be able to think fast all the time. Attention to detail is very very important... It's not something that everyone can do, because [as] I was just saying, some personality types cannot do event planning. If you're not a patient person, you can't do event planning. If you get angry easily, you cannot do this job. You need to be patient with people. You need to know how to manage people. You need to know how to communicate with different classes of people because you work with different ranges of people- from the wealthiest to the poorest. There are different people you need to relate differently to depending on the situation. So, you have to have good people managing skills. It's*

*something that I'm learning as I go. It's a forever learning process. I'm always learning.*

According to Abokuma, who is a self-taught professional who is learning on the job, the essential skills to being a wedding planner/ coordinator are patience and tolerance, a proclivity to meticulousness, good interpersonal skills, creativity and ambidexterity.

#### **4.7 The Quest for the Unique Wedding Experience**

Prisca: *What do they normally ask for? [Give me] some of the adjectives they throw out there- like you said, something royal, ...*

Abokuma: *Unique, classic...it's usually the same words: "I want it to be different from this! I want something different! I want my wedding to be fun! I want my wedding to be different! I don't want anything that everybody does! I want it to be unique!"*

Prisca: *That must be a challenge for you.*

Abokuma: *It is! But then, [the essential] thing is [that] you just kind of get to know the person [you're working with] and know what they like, so you can do the same thing for another client but in a different way. So, if this person likes games in their wedding, for example, you can do the same game but add a little twist to it...*

Prisca: *When you say different, [do you mean] different from everybody or different from what's outside? Exactly what [is it different from]?*

Abokuma: *Different in terms of add[ing] a little twist to it. So, let's say the shoe game, for example, instead of doing the same type of questions that they usually ask, [I] change up the questions, and do a different set of questions, or incorporate an entirely new game that nobody has done at their wedding before- something that you wouldn't think someone would do at their wedding, and incorporate it.*

It is evident from the conversation above that there is demand for a degree of customisation when it comes to the wedding. Even as couples have a template of what a wedding is, they are very particular about not having an exact replica of another wedding they attended or saw. In this regard, it becomes clear that even as the general wedding is foreign in nature, couples in Ghana want a wedding that is a reflection of their individual personalities, and also projects an identity. It therefore behoves the wedding planner or coordinator to globalise and customise each wedding to each client. This also points out the dexterity involved in finding the balance between the norm and the distinctive.

#### 4.8 Getting a Planner or Coordinator

Prisca: *What's your highest level of involvement in an event? Where does your work start?*

Abokuma: *Well, if someone comes to meet you today, for example, [and says] "my wedding is in December", and they sign up with me, the first thing we will do is to get a venue. So that's like the first thing you would need, and a date, obviously. That one is up to you [as a client]. I won't help you choose that..., but we'll help you find a venue based on your budget and your taste. We'll try to find all of that. That will inform us to help you choose your vendors for the event. So, once you decide on the vendors, that's when we'll create [something] like a payment schedule for you. It depends on the clients. Most of the clients prefer to give us the money in bulk, and then we distribute it. But if they want to do the payment [by] themselves, that's fine [with us]. But it's more convenient for them to just give it in bulk, and then we distribute it to the vendors. And we go with them to all vendor meetings and help them to make decisions- we don't make decisions for the clients, ever. They make the decisions and we just guide them throughout.*

*So, if there's cake tasting, dress fitting, picking invitation, ... [we guide with] every single detail. We're like your best friend for your wedding!*

The work of the planner or coordinator, from the conversation, is not to impose on the bride or groom but mostly to serve as a consultant in the planning process. It therefore becomes clear that as each couple is different, there would be different demands from these clients and so each wedding would reflect the couple's personal choices which would be executed by the coordinator.

#### **4.9 Destination Weddings and Wedding Season**

Prisca: *Do you travel for work?*

Abokuma: *Yeah, we've had to go to Takoradi and Akosombo a couple of times... so if it's a venue that we haven't seen before, way before the wedding, we have to go there. And when it's getting to the wedding, we'll have to go there at least a day before [the wedding] and come back a day after.*

Prisca: *What's the destination of preference?*

Abokuma: *It depends on the time of the year. Like [during the] rainy season for example, a lot of people will avoid the outdoor wedding, obviously. And in the hot season, people will prefer an air-conditioned place. So, it depends.*

Prisca: *Do you have a wedding season?*

Abokuma: *Yes; Christmas time. November, December and January are the wedding seasons in Ghana.*

Prisca: *Why do you think that is so?*

Abokuma: *A lot more people come from outside, so a lot of people have family and friends who are outside coming for Christmas, and they just add the wedding to it. So, a lot more people have their weddings around that time. And it's not rainy season.*

A number of factors go into the venue and time of wedding, but it is evident that the most prevalent reasons are specific to the geographic location for the Ghanaian couple. In December or January when more Ghanaian weddings will be taking place, it would clearly be winter in Europe and the Americas and so would most likely not be as preferred. The season of weddings therefore speaks to how specific it is to the Ghanaian context.

#### 4.10 The Wedding Details

Prisca: *You talked about dress, invitation, cake tasting, and I know it's not entirely your work, but you've been with them, so tell me. Generally, when it comes to the cake what do they normally want? When it comes to the dress, what do they normally want, and those kinds of things?*

Abokuma: *Well, it all depends. Let's say with the cake, for example, you need to know the type of cake that you want. Do you want a round cake, a hexagonal cake, a square cake, separate cakes, tiered cakes, five tiers, seven tiers, ...*

Prisca: *What's the highest you've had so far?*

Abokuma: *Seven tiers. So, you decide on that, and then obviously the design as well. If you go online, sometimes [you realise that] people have no idea what they want. So, you have to show them different types of cake, different tier cakes, some with flowers, some without, some with patterns, some without, ... and you narrow it down. So, you have them at least pick a design. Once a design is picked, you need to figure out the number of tiers. Once you figure out the number of tiers, you need to figure out the budget. How much are you willing to pay for your cake? The budget will determine which cake vendor to go for, and we'll narrow it down to maybe three cake vendors, and then we'll get a quote from each one of them. So, the one that you decide on, we go to them or we get the flavours, and you decide which one you want for your cake and if you want a tasting, we*

*arrange that with the baker, and then based on the tasting you decide the flavours that you want and all the details you want. And with the dress too, that one, obviously the bride already knows what she wants. If the dress is being made here you come up with the design.*

With so many options to choose from, coupled with the issue of individual budgets, it becomes clearer that each wedding put together would be different from the next and no two would be exact as individual preferences vary.

#### **4.11 Contextualising the White Gown**

Prisca: *How often do you get the dress made here?*

Abokuma: *That one is recent. Maybe in the past year or two, that's when people have started making dresses here a lot. Before, people used to buy it out [of the country] and bring it a lot. But then, recently, a lot of people are making dresses here. So, you get the design, you go to the designer, and the designer will decide what she can and cannot do, the types of fabric that she cannot get, you choose your fabric and then they take your measurements and start making you the dress. We schedule the fittings based on the designer and client's availability. If anything needs to be changed, we manage all that...*

Prisca: *Have you ever got a bride who doesn't want a white gown?*

Abokuma: *Oh, yeah. We've had a bride who doesn't want a white gown.*

Prisca: *Just one?*

Abokuma: *Well, a number. But they end up doing white anyway because the mothers don't allow it. But then I've had one bride, it was not obviously white or ivory- it was like a blush pink, but it was so faint that you'd have to look hard to see...*

Prisca: *How come the mothers don't allow it?*

Abokuma: *They're very traditional. I know this bride, she certainly did not want white and she ended up going with ivory. She'd wanted pink – not like bright pink, but baby pink. But her mom said no.*

Prisca: *Have you had any bride who wants kente or Ankara print incorporated into the dress?*

Abokuma: *I have. Funny enough, she wasn't Ghanaian. She wanted kente in her dress so it was done by Rebecca Opuni [a renowned Ghanaian fashion brand].*

*And then another couple- the bride was from Spain and the guy was Ghanaian- she added Adinkra symbols. Adinkra was part of the theme for the wedding so their logo for the wedding was one of the Adinkra.*

The dress referred to here is the elaborate wedding gown, and not the simple white dresses or traditional Ghanaian *kaba* and *slit* which was locally made a few decades ago with white lace. A bride who wanted to wear the gown proper had to buy an imported one. However, as Abokuma points out, it is becoming common to have Ghanaian designers make wedding gowns just as elaborate as the western wedding gowns. It is therefore easy to have Ghanaian brides not merely have the gowns come already made with little or no personal details but have the entire gown made to preference.

Another fascinating detail Abokuma brings up is the involvement of family, particularly the mother of the bride in selecting the wedding details, especially where they try to draw the line on what is traditional and acceptable, and what is not.

Also, it is significant to note that Ghanaian cultural elements of identity are added to the wedding detail, even by non-Ghanaians, particularly in inter-racial marriages.

#### **4.12 In Search of “The Perfect Wedding”**

Prisca: *What would you say is “the perfect wedding”? Is there any such thing?*

Abokuma: *No. There's nothing like a perfect wedding because there's always something that goes wrong. It's just that, as a coordinator, a lot of my clients don't know the things that go wrong at the wedding because they don't need to know. One thing I've noticed about Ghanaians is [that] people want to feel like they're helping. And one of the ways that they do that is they report everything to the bride and the groom. You're not helping when you tell the bride who's sitting up there that the food's gone bad.*

Prisca: *You get that [happening]?*

Abokuma: *Well, the food hasn't gone bad. But it's an example. So, let's say [if] the bride asked for five finger foods, and [yet] the caterer brought only four, there's no point in telling her. At that point, there's nothing she can do, so why are you going to tell her to mess up her mood. But someone would be like "yie, ena omo amfa mbaa oo, omo amfa ambaa oo", it's not necessary because she's not going to be counting the food. The day goes by so fast for the couple they miss a lot of things, so you want to make sure they remember only the positive and the good things. You don't want them to be dwelling on the bad things or the negative things that happen during the day. And they are not things that you can't slide under the rug. There are some things that are just not necessary for them to know.*

Prisca: *What are some of the challenges you've faced with the couple or with the planning in general; the guests, all those things?*

Abokuma: *That's a difficult one. I usually don't face any problems with guests or anything like that because again it comes to me knowing how to manage the people well. But then it's usually with the people that I work with. Sometimes they don't know how to manage the other people so I have to come in. Another challenge is*

*trying to understand that I'm not a decorator. A lot of people think that as a wedding planner or coordinator, you did the décor as well. It's difficult separating that. A lot of people don't understand that planning and coordination is totally different from the decoration... There's no way I can ensure that the bride and the groomsmen are dressed on time and everything is fine while I'm also making sure the décor is done. As a coordinator, I have to make sure the décor is done, I have to make sure the food is there, make sure the DJ is there, make sure the bride has got her dress... So, we're coordinating everything, from pictures- pre wedding pictures till everybody leaves. So, we're coordinating every aspect of the event.*

*It is evident that perfection is difficult to attain for a wedding, however, the wedding coordinator's job is to get as close to it as possible, or at least to make the couple feel it is. It is also clear that wedding professionals are not a homogeneous group, and each performs a different function, which to the casual observer sometimes gets conflated.*

#### **4.13 The “Perfect” Budget**

**Prisca:** *You said there's no perfect wedding, but for want of a better word, let me use the word 'perfect'. Say I want to have a 'perfect wedding', how much is it going to cost me?*

**Abokuma:** *That is one of the questions that people ask a lot and one of the questions that is most difficult to answer because most people have their budgets. So GHC 20,000 for you could be chicken change, meanwhile GHC 20,000 for someone could be a lot. So, your budget is totally different from someone's budget. Your perfect is different from my perfect, so I can't put a number to it.*

**Prisca:** *What's the highest budget you've had to work with?*

Abokuma: *About a hundred thousand dollars (USD 100,000).*

Prisca: *So, I take it that was someone coming from outside [the country], so with those within Ghana what's the highest you've had to work with?*

Abokuma: *Probably about a hundred thousand cedis (GHC 100,000)*

Prisca: *If you don't mind me asking, how much does it cost to hire the service of a wedding planner?*

Abokuma: *See, I don't even know how much my competitors charge, but then from what people say, I'm really expensive. [But that's] because I feel like you're paying for the service. I don't think you're getting less for the service that we do here. So, for full service, planning and coordination it's USD 2,200. It's a flat fee for everyone. We have it in dollars because let's say someone books their wedding for next year April for example, if you charge in cedis, by next year April, it will be like zero. So, at the time that they're paying, they pay the current cedi equivalent. And they pay in instalments. Depending on your number of guests, the flat rate could go higher. If your number of guests is three hundred or less, that is the rate, if it goes higher, it graduates.*

Once again it is evident that each wedding would be different based on how much each couple is willing to spend. It is also clear that there are different costs involved, and ostentatiousness would be more often than not, relative for each couple depending on how much they have to spare.

#### **4.14 The Evolving Face of Weddings in Ghana**

Prisca: *How do you see the future of weddings in Ghana? Between the time you started and now, what are some of the changes that have occurred?*

Abokuma: *Oh, they're a lot! People spend so much more on weddings [now] than before. It didn't use to be this much. And then, because of social media too, a lot of*

*people are seeing things outside [that] they want replicated here. For example, before, Instagram wasn't that big a deal when I started, so what we were doing was the regular drapes and swags, but now people are seeing things outside, possibilities are like almost endless. It's definitely a challenge, especially to the decorators. Thank God I'm not one of them- I just have to find the good ones... but it's interesting.*

*And I've also noticed there're a lot more event planners now, but again people are confusing that with decorating. There're a few event planners and coordinators who are not decorators, but they're not as many, and people still confuse the planning and coordination with the decorating. I think there should be a distinction between the two.*

Prisca: *What are some of the other things that have changed in the industry besides people wanting to spend more? And could it be because probably people are earning more? Is that a factor?*

Abokuma: *It's possible that people are earning more. People are earning more, and I also feel like a lot more people are coming to Ghana for their wedding bearing the foreign currency so they can afford it. So, the type of weddings they have here compared to what they would have there is cheaper here. So, they'll rather come here and do it here. So instead of, say, paying USD 20,000 for the décor over there, they could pay GHC 20,000 and get something similar here. So maybe there's more cash involved. But then I think social media is the major one, because I know with some people, it's possible they cannot afford it but because they want it, they force it.*

Abokuma points to an important factor that has led to the surge for the demand of wedding professionals as I posited earlier- social media. Migration and the earning of foreign currency

also appears to contribute to how much is being spent as foreign exchange ensures that people can afford to spend more for weddings here, and yet get more value than they would have elsewhere, particularly as many of the wedding professionals in Ghana are just as good as the ones in the western world and they also have access to just as much knowledge with the internet.

#### 4.15 Glocalising the White Wedding

Prisca: *How do you think we've taken this white wedding- in our setting do you think we've made it more Ghanaian...?*

Abokuma: *I think the way we've made it Ghanaian is the number of guests. We cannot reduce the number of guests.*

Prisca: *What's the highest number you've had to work with?*

Abokuma: *900, 800... that's too many people.*

Prisca: *And the smallest?*

Abokuma: *80- that was very intimate.*

*Most of the elements in the wedding are not Ghanaian. When you're cutting the cake, asking someone to cut the cake is Ghanaian. It's supposed to be someone who's had a good marriage, and they're kind of blessing your marriage. It's not Western. I don't know where it came from, but I'm assuming it's Ghanaian because I don't know where it came from, because [outside] the couple cut their own cake. These days it's a lot more mothers- the mothers of the couple are the ones that help cut the cake... but majority of the wedding elements are still in vogue.*

Prisca: *Do you see that changing?*

Abokuma: *No, because what happens is that people tend to make the traditional marriage ceremony more Ghanaian and then the white wedding more western.*

Abokuma illustrates a consciousness about what is and is not western about the Ghanaian white wedding. She points out a few elements of the white wedding that are glocalised due to the Ghanaian cultural setting. She also infers that couples generally are well aware of the foreign nature of the white wedding generally and so make up for the western elements with the local whenever they can to achieve a balance of the two.

#### 4.16 Popping the Question: #HowHeAsked

Prisca *What's your level of involvement in the proposal? Do you get people getting you in on the proposal...?*

Abokuma *We've had a few. Not a lot. We've managed just one successful proposal. Two people have requested; the other just didn't come back. But then we did a proposal for one person. It was really fun. The lady had no idea, obviously. And the guy wanted to propose but he had no idea what to do so we had to come up with something. So, he said they like Labadi beach so he was taking her there, and she had told him that whenever the proposal happened, she wanted it caught on camera- that was a must! So, we got a friend, who had a professional camera, and we made out a sign "will you marry me?" with her name, and then she went to the hotel. She was there before they sat down, like nothing was happening. So, my friend with the camera she was going round taking random pictures, and then she asked them that she's an amateur photographer and would they mind her taking their photographs, and because the guy knew what was going on he allowed it. He was like, "sure", so she was taking pictures and I had someone stand at the back with a sign saying "will you marry me?" while they were taking the picture. So, she took the picture and showed it to them, kind of like when you finish taking a picture, and she showed it to the girl. She didn't initially see it. Next thing she knew the guy was coming around on his knees,*

*and she looked well at the picture, and he was on his knee and proposed and everybody started clapping.*

Prisca: *Where did you get the inspiration for that?*

Abokuma: *It just came out. I don't know where that came from.*

Clearly, the proposal process has become a big deal. Abokuma's story of an elaborate proposal involving friends and strangers shows the change that has occurred in the early stages of the contraction of the marriage.

#### **4.17 Of Bridal Showers, Bachelorette and Bachelor parties**

Prisca: *And what of bridal showers, bachelorettes...*

Abokuma: *We don't get too many of those, because usually it's the bride's friends. They're the ones that organise it.*

Prisca: *Are they two different things or they're one and the same: the bridal shower and the bachelorette?*

Abokuma: *They're two different things, but then you can have one or the other. The bridal shower is more intimate and more toned down like a baby shower. But the bachelorette is more like a party so that one is like going all out.*

Prisca: *Is it a new concept?*

Abokuma: *Oh, it's been there. I guess it's just now becoming a thing in Ghana, but it's an old concept. People have embraced it more and like to have a theme to it. And there're a lot more themed bachelorettes and bridal showers than before. Before, I think the bachelorette parties were more popular where a group of girls would just go out and just go and party. But now, it's becoming more- get a place, get a theme going...*

Prisca: *What about bachelor's parties?*

Abokuma: *Those ones have always been there- guys are very random, so they don't need any planning... they go like, "hey, let's go!" They don't do any of the planning stuff. It's just more toned down [in comparison to the bachelorette]. You won't see a guy taking a picture of his friends when they are getting drunk, otherwise it would be all over social media. You know, the girls would rather [go] "aww, this was my cake". Guys don't do that.*

Abokuma points to the growing popularity of bridal showers and bachelorette parties in Ghana, and the heavy involvement of friends of the bride in the pre-wedding process. She also points to the gendered nature of bachelor's parties and bachelorette parties, stating that women are more likely to be elaborate about the pre-wedding party while men are more spontaneous about it, with little or no planning.

#### **4.18 Gender Segregation in the Wedding Industry**

Prisca: *You've worked with a lot of vendors. How do you think they are skewed-more males or females in the industry?*

Abokuma: *It depends on the category, because if you look at photographers, for example, there are more male than female photographers. When you look at decorators, there are more female than male decorators. With the cake, there are more females than male; catering, more female than male. There are males, but more females. Video [has] more male than female; drinks vendors, there are more male than female. With the designers, it's almost a good balance, but I think there are more females than males. Makeup artists, there're more female than male; hair stylist, more female than male. So, it depends on the category.*

The wedding industry, from Abokuma's observation, is quite gendered with males and females dominating categories which are in line with traditional roles of what men do and what women do.

#### 4.19 Chapter Conclusion

The conversation with Abokuma gives some insight into what wedding professionals do, their non-homogeneity and the general terrain of the wedding industry, as well as a few general ideas about the changes that have occurred in the industry in Ghana. Her knowledge also throws light on the gendered nuances in the industry, the extent of uniqueness and glocalisation of the Ghanaian wedding, as well as the consciousness of what is borrowed and what is contextual in the wedding. It also points to the importance of the involvement of friends, and shows how family can still wield considerable influence in the marriage planning process. The next chapter zeroes in on individual categories of wedding professionals and how those categories illustrate certain nuances in the industry, and in the society in general.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### WEDDING PROFESSIONALS: A NON-HOMOGENOUS GROUP

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the lives, works and experiences of some wedding professionals in Ghana, namely the wedding décor person, the wedding photographer, the cake artist, the caterer, the costumier, the hair and make-up person, the Master of Ceremonies, the music and dance coordinators, and the vow writer. Although their stories present a glimpse of today's society, it is important to avoid essentialism as they are non-homogeneous and have varied encounters and experiences. Even their stories are not reflective of every other professional in their category, but give an insight into what professionals in their categories do, as well as their encounters in the industry and the possibilities of their encounter.

Having previously explored the wedding planner/ coordinator whose work encompasses all others and who coordinates the works of all the other professionals (sometimes referred to as vendors), I now explore today's wedding décor person, photographer, the cake artist and caterer, the Ghanaian costumier, the hair and makeup artists, the Master of Ceremonies, the music professionals, including the dance instructor, and the vow writer.

#### 5.2 The Wedding Décor: The 'Perfect' Ambiance

Wedding décor in contemporary times has undergone a lot of changes and has been particularly influenced by the proliferation of social media and an abundance of visual images. The décor is often the first thing one notices at a wedding and sets the overall tone of the wedding. It is also what stands out in almost every picture that is taken at the wedding. Couples are therefore investing a lot in this arena where previously was not so much invested in. Many weddings are going for custom looks based on themes and everything is coordinated; the bridal party's attire, the cake and the décor are made to either match or complement each other. The wedding

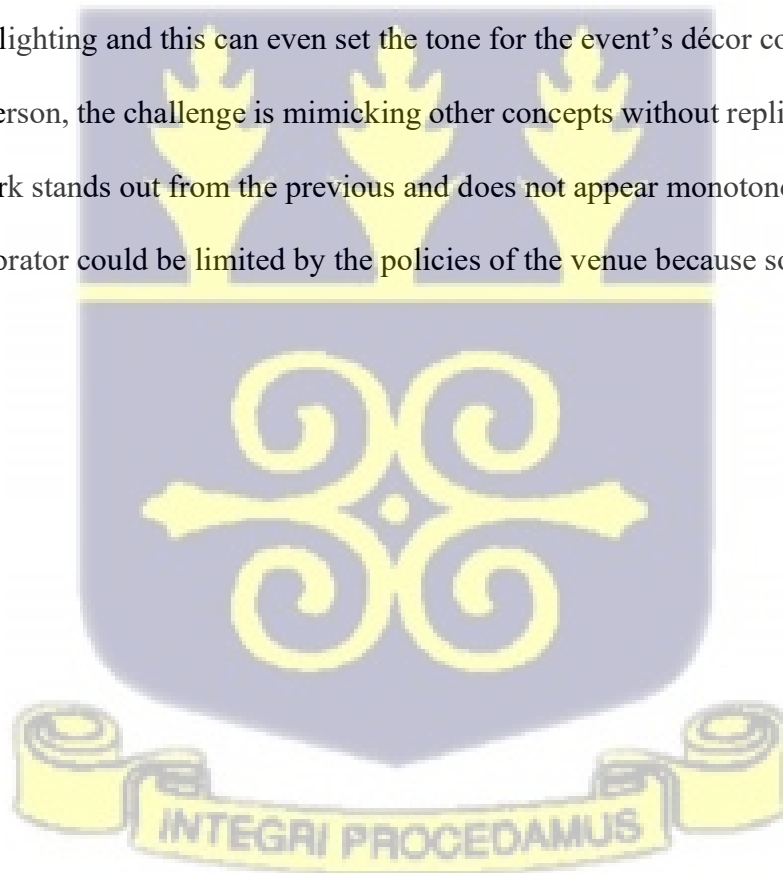
colours are incorporated into everything, and colours and colour combinations are becoming more and more varied.

### 5.2.1 Location

Destination weddings are becoming more and more popular with couples opting to have their weddings in venues away from either's residence. Resorts are becoming go-to venues with people travelling away from Accra to places in Ada, Aburi and Akosombo to have their weddings. Others opt for plush locations such as luxurious hotels like Kempinski, Movenpick, and the Labadi Beach Hotel. Very often, the venue influences the décor. A beach side wedding has to factor in the breeze when setting up. Unless done in the evening, an outdoor beach wedding will not require a lot of light. In contrast, an indoor or closed canopy event will need to have a lot of lighting and this can even set the tone for the event's décor concept.

For the décor person, the challenge is mimicking other concepts without replicating them such that his/ her work stands out from the previous and does not appear monotonous.

A wedding decorator could be limited by the policies of the venue because some fixtures may be immovable.



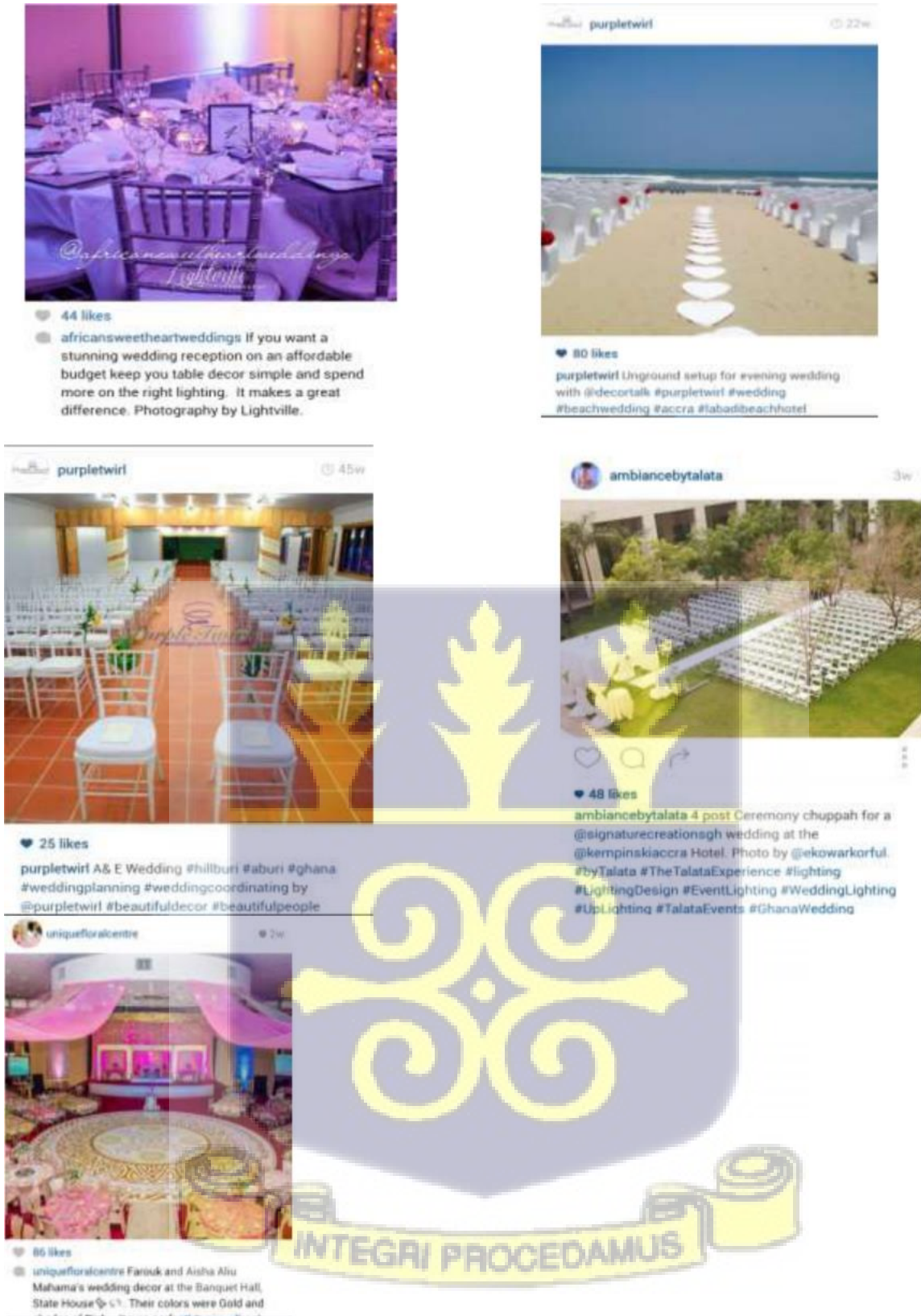


Fig 5. 1: Wedding décor set ups for different locations

### 5.3 The Photographer: Say Cheese!

Wedding photographers are among the highest paid and most respected photographers on earth (Hurter, 2010). Today's wedding photographer often adopts the photojournalistic approach to photography instead of the former traditional photography. Whereas the traditional photographer relied on posing and staging activities to capture, today's photojournalist adopts the documentary style of photography where events are captured as they unfold (Hawkins, 2003). This, of course, requires a lot of skill and means that the wedding photographer must be constantly alert and ready to capture spontaneous events and emotions. Without having to be constantly reaching for camera flash, film and batteries, photographers today have become more emboldened in their works and can work unnoticed without the whirring of the flash.

In addition, the lab fee for processing as was done in the past is no longer a barrier for photographers. Unrestricted by limited film space, several digital images can be taken within the shortest time frame, without worry about cost.

A few decades ago, wedding photography was barely a profession and not of a very high status (Sekyi, 1977). Wedding photography has metamorphosed completely in the last two decades. (Hurter, 2005) Today, many wedding photographers have attained a status which can be likened to a superstar (Hurter, 2010). The importance of wedding photography stems from the fact that for the couple, it is a permanent record of their special day, and the day when the bride and groom will probably look and feel the most beautiful and handsome in this once-in-a-lifetime ceremony. Photographers provide visual records of roles and relations, solemnising and materialising climactic moments of social life (Miller et al., 2016).

Wedding photography is fast becoming a booming one, and yet, the field of photography is a latecomer to institutional attention and intellectual respectability, only finding itself the arriviste of academic discourse in the 1980s (Nickel, 2001). Whereas it was previously seen as a field for mostly people with little or no formal education, today's average wedding

photographer has at least a first degree. An example is in the case of DextDee of DextDee Photography, a medical doctor in his late twenties who is now practicing full time photography. Men still continue to dominate the photography field. However, some women have made great strides to earn their position at the top of the photography industry, namely Akiboat Impressions, VeraObeng Photography, and Mumble Photography, all headed by females.

### **A case study of a wedding photographer**

I interviewed Ekow Akorful of Ekow Arkorful Photography for an insight into the profession:

*Ekow Akorful has a background in Urban Planning with a Bachelor's degree from the University of Science and Technology. After his first degree in 2008, he served as a Teaching Assistant for a year for his National Service and then left for the United Kingdom where he pursued a Master's degree in Environment and Development (Sustainability Option) on a scholarship. It was there in the United Kingdom that he purchased his first professional camera, a DSLR. It was a camera he had seen with a friend and he had loved the quality of its pictures. He therefore saved money from his stipend and managed to purchase the same type. Back home in 2011, he had to attend the wedding of his best friend as his friend's best man, but opted to forfeit his position as the best man and instead offered his services as the wedding photographer to his best friend. It was his gift to his best friend. And that launched his career in wedding photography.*

*Presently, on the average, he does two-three weddings in a month, with December being what he calls "the cocoa season for weddings" where there are more weddings held than any other month of the year. Asked which sex of clientele he is often directly hired by, he mentioned it was the women, adding that "women like pictures". His target clientele, he says, are upper and middle-class citizens. However, he started with a lower-class clientele. He attributes the current shift in the class of his clientele to his current charge. He gets clients in the lower class too however, as some focus more on the quality of his work than his charge.*

*When he first began commercial wedding photography, he could charge “as little as” GHC 500. Today, as an established creative wedding photographer, he charges between GHC 4000 and GHC 6000 per wedding; however, covering engagements tend to cost lower to cover for an amount of about GHC 2000. In the past, he used to take 50% of the charge before the work and take the rest later, but currently, he takes 70%, or even full payment before delivering his services, as he has learnt from past experiences that some clients become reluctant to pay after he has already shot the wedding.*

*He indicates he did not learn photography from any formal training, adding that in Ghana there is no official training. Photography is therefore often self-taught and the internet is employed in addition to learning from other photographers. He understudied team1000words without being charged and it was there he managed to build a portfolio which is very crucial for a photographer to have since most couples would want to see a photographer’s previous works before trusting a photographer with their wedding. He has worked with quite a number of photographers and photographers tend to network and invite each other to gigs where they need more hands. So far, he has only worked with male photographers although he knows of some female photographers who are doing great. He alludes the domination of the field to a perceived notion that photography is more of a male art, recalling that even as a child, he never encountered a female photographer and all the popular church photographers were males.*

*The work of the photographer can be very challenging. One such challenge is with people, particularly the family interfering with his work. Ekow mentions that it appears the older generation do not seem to grasp that with digital technology, a photographer is not exactly paid by number of pictures, but is booked for a particular time frame and has to capture as many memorable moments as he or she can. He often has the family of the bride or groom coming up to him to complain that he is taking too many pictures and therefore running up the*

charge. Other guests are also prone to calling him to take pictures of them with some getting upset when he has to refuse. For him, although the guests are as much a part of the occasion, the main focus of the day is the couple and during some time periods, a photographer has to be alert and be able to anticipate when something capture-worthy is about to happen so as to not miss special moments the couple would want to see. Another challenge he mentions has to do with bad lighting, which has the potential to reduce the quality of his images. Lighting becomes more problematic, particularly in the churches when the minister of the ceremony restricts where he can position himself to capture the best images. One other problem he constantly faces is timing. For him, timing is one of the biggest problems for Ghanaian wedding professionals because events don't often proceed according to schedule and this becomes a problem when programs have to drag on beyond the time they were supposed to end. His most bizarre client experience, he mentions, happened to be with a couple who had complaints about the bride's face, demanding that the pimples (acne) on her face had to be eliminated from the pictures. He mentions that that task is more of the work of a graphic designer, indicating that even the makeup artist could not hide the spots.

Asked what has changed in the wedding industry over the time frame he has been working in, he mentions that people have got a much bigger appreciation of weddings and wedding photography now than before.

#### **5.4 The Cake Artist**

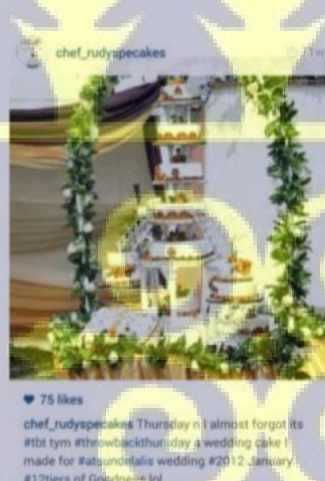
*The central object is something entirely new. It is a wedding cake, of the kind one might expect to find at any American church wedding: three tiered, frosted in white, topped with the inevitable miniature figures of a bride and groom in Western wedding dress. – Edwards (1982)*

The wedding cake is one of the oldest and most important rites of the wedding ceremony. Among the ancient Romans, Confarreatio was the most solemn form of marriage where a man

and woman were joined in marriage by the Pontifex Maximus, or Flamen Dialis, before at least ten witnesses, with a set form of words and by tasting a cake made of flour, salt and water, which was also offered with a sheep as a sacrifice to the gods. This form of marriage could only be dissolved by another sacrifice known as Diffarreatio (Wood, 1869; Tegg, 1877). According to Scott (1953) the modern cake evolved from the use of biscuits or smaller cakes in 17th century English weddings which was also an evolved form of the Roman rite where eggs, plates, pots, spoons, branches, or furniture were broken to symbolise the breaking of the hymen. Other related rites at the time included the use of fruit, nuts and grain products, all of which were symbolic of fertility and prosperity (Westermarck, 1921).

Over the past few decades, wedding cakes have become universally popular (Edwards, 1982).

In the Ghanaian society, this popularity can be seen in the diverse types of cakes often seen at Ghanaian weddings as can be seen in the figures below.



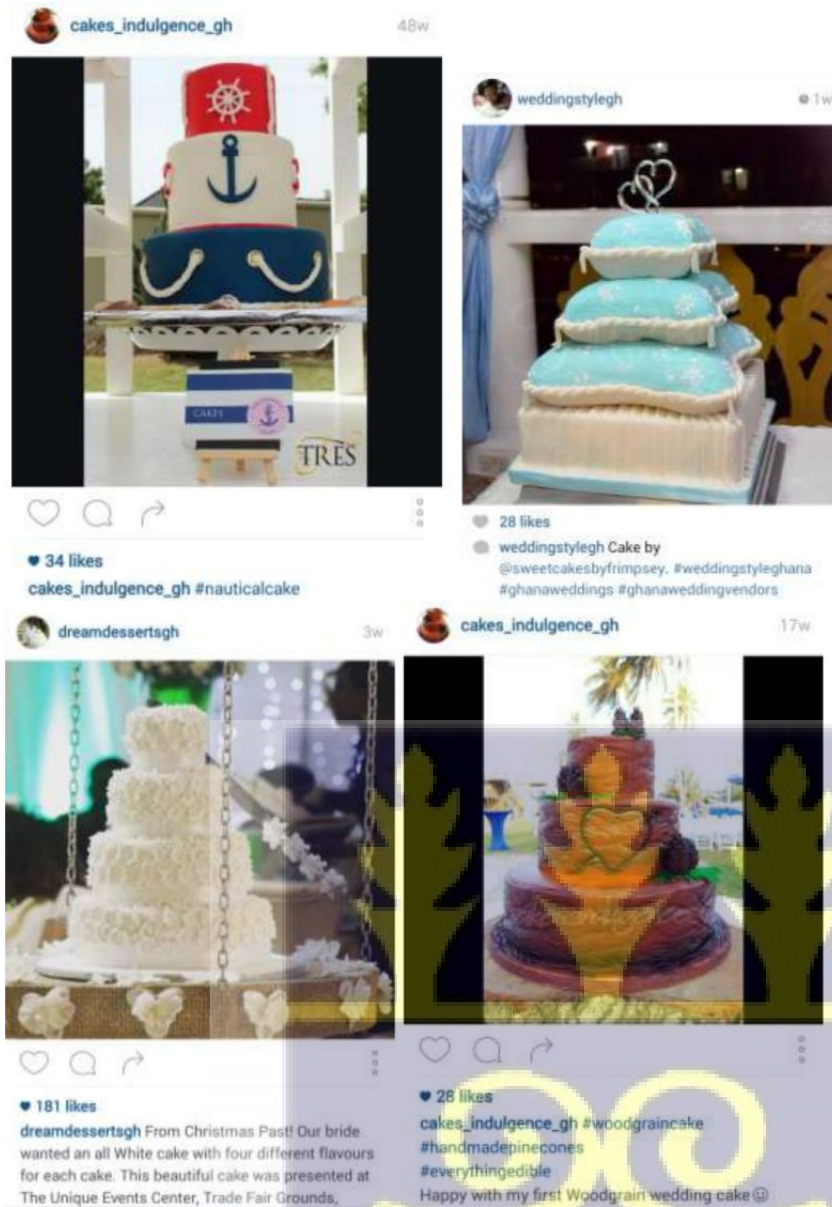


Fig 5. 2: Diverse wedding cake concepts

The role of cakes in weddings can begin long before the ceremony itself. In recent times, in Ghana, cakes have been known to play a part in the proposal process; either as a box for the engagement ring, or as part of a celebratory feast upon the woman agreeing to the proposal (see Fig. 5.3).

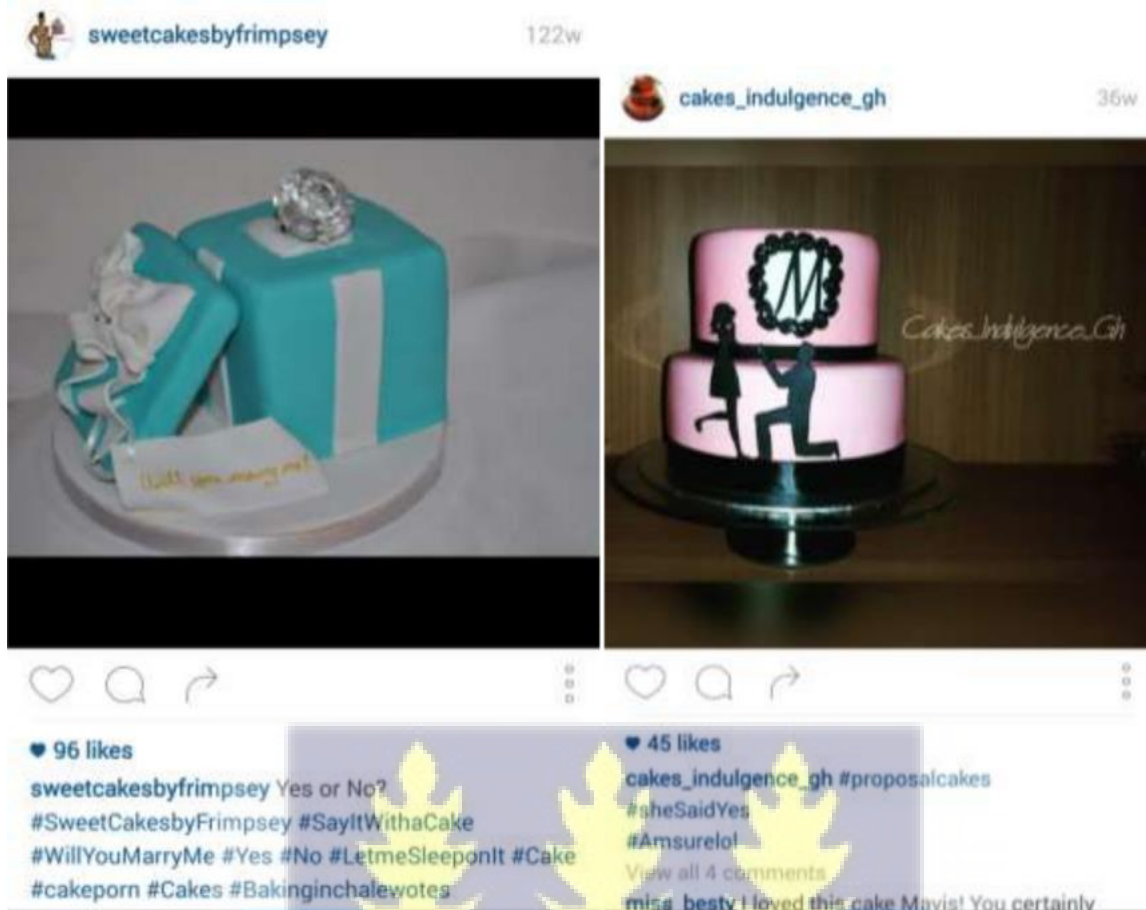


Fig 5. 3: Proposal cakes

An interesting twist, fast becoming a trend in the contemporary marriage process is the bachelorette cake. These cakes, typically, are ordered by friends of the bride for a surprise party in celebration of, and in preparation towards the forthcoming marriage ceremony. These cakes ordinarily are designed in the shape, colours and preferences the friends deem fit for the bride. More often than not, they have a humorous twist with inscriptions indicating her soon to be status as a bride and a wife. The most conspicuous of bachelorette cakes are the naughty bachelorette cakes. These have sexual and erotic themes and come in the form of phallogentric cakes.

Frimpomaa of SweetCakesByFrimpsey specialises in making naughty cakes, among other cakes. On her Instagram, she has a collection of them which she captions with stories about the making of the cakes. On one picture, she indicates how long it has been since she started

making bachelorette cakes (see Fig. 5.4). In another, a naughty cake (see Fig.5.5), she indicates how her first naughty cake was made in December 2009. According to her post, she had been clueless about the existence of such cakes when she got her first client request for a naughty cake. The client had specifically asked for a “penis cake”, a phrase she first mistook for “peanut cake”. She had to therefore go online and run a search for what would later become one of her more popular cakes. In subsequent posts, she shows the variety of cakes her clients request of her. In one post (see Fig. 5.8), she captions it “...*my father was embarrassed when he realised what I was making. He couldn't look me in the face. #iHadToTellHimToStopShakingHisHead #HeWasShocked His girlfriend couldn't keep a straight face, she left the room. I can confidently say if my Mama was alive she would have disowned me today...#iCanHearHerNow #OhMaame ...#TheClientMadeMeDoIt #DontJudgeMe ...*”. The penis cakes in particular, have inscriptions ranging from equally explicit, to milder ones, such as “cum get it”, “spit or swallow” (see Fig. 5.6), “my ride or die dick” (see Fig. 5.10), “to have and to hold”, “till death do us part” (see Fig. 5.9), “happy married life”, and “*Fati men suro*“ (Fati, don't be scared) (see Fig. 5.9b). Although not as common, Frimpsey also makes bachelor cakes for grooms and these can also be as equally explicit in the form of “pussy cakes” (see Fig. 5.11) and “boob cakes” (see Fig. 5.7).

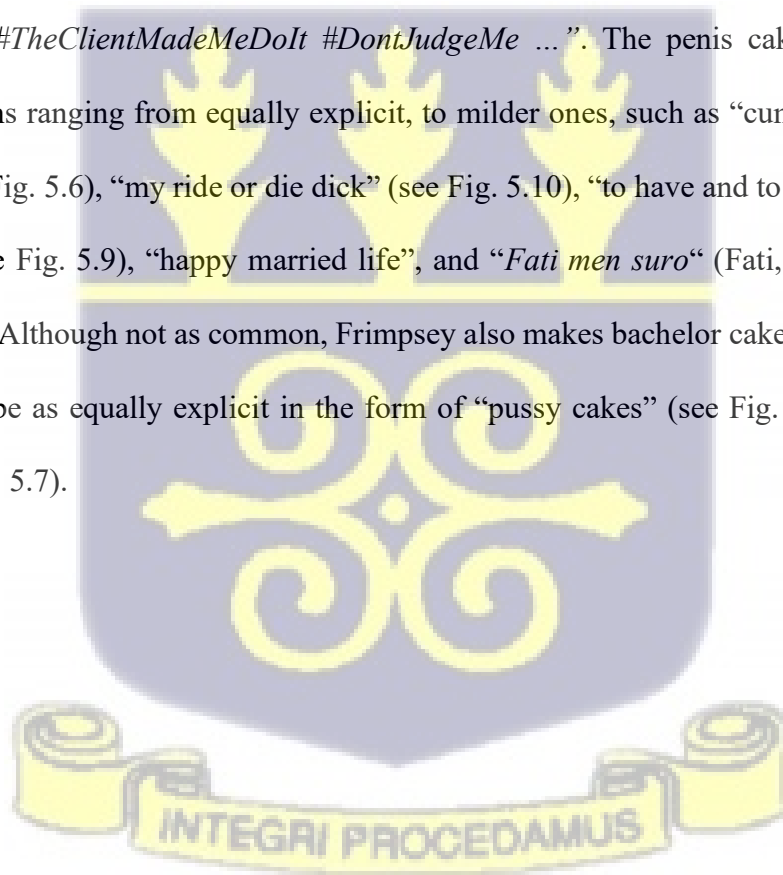




Fig 5. 4: Bachelorette Cake



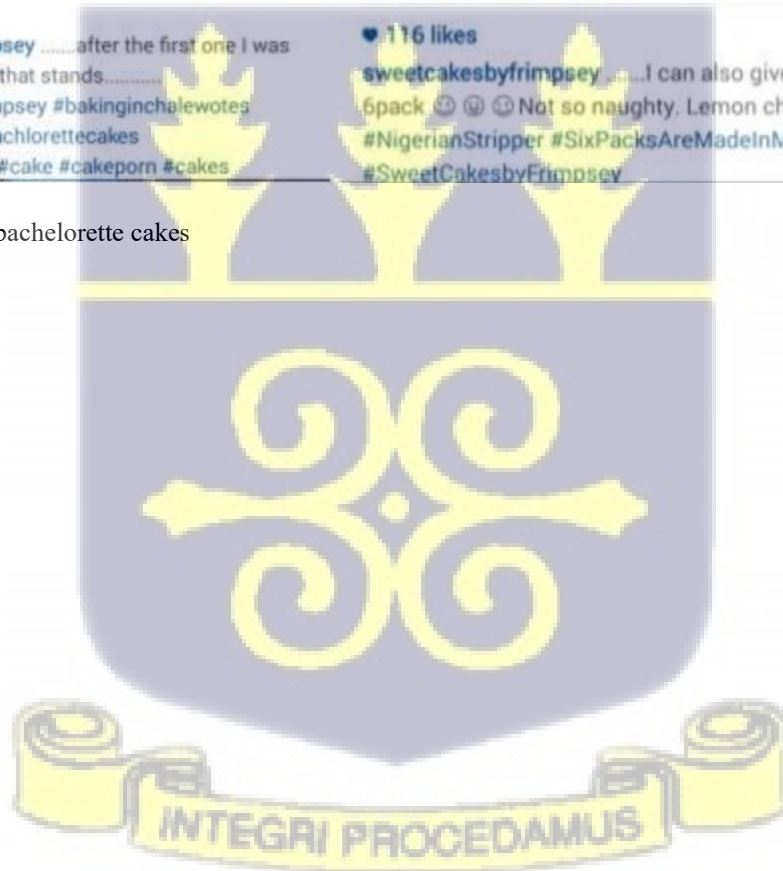


Fig 5. 5: Naughty bachelorette penis cakes





Fig 5. 6: Naughty bachelorette cakes





217 likes  
sweetcakesbyfrimpsey Strawberry & Baileys cake.  
Still not naughty enough  
#AtLeastIGotTheSideEyeFromMyDad  
#Progress Anywho..... #SomewhatNaughty  
#SomeDoubleDee #NaughtyCakes

Fig 5. 7: Boob bachelor's cake



Fig 5. 8: Well captioned naughty cake



Fig 5. 9: Naughty penis cakes



Fig 5. 10: Naughty cake

Fig 5. 11: Naughty bachelor cake

## 5.5 The Caterer

Very often, the one who caters for the food, and the cakes and pastries are one and the same. Although there can be chefs and cake artists who specialise in just one and not both. For a chef catering for an event, there is an endless choice of foods his or her clients would want from local and continental dishes. There appears to be a hybridisation, although these foods are actually presented side by side. The diversity of food is often based on the clients' class and the guests expected, and those of higher class tend to go in for more complex and rare continental dishes in addition to local foods. Clients of lower classes, however, barely go for these and opt for simpler, more common dishes.

The location of the wedding could also determine the array of dishes as some venues offer event catering. In addition, the ethnicity of either or both clients is a factor that influences the choice of foods as different ethnicities have different staples and couples often include ethnic dishes to cater for their extended families. According to Chef Rudy, “a party without *jollof* is a meeting” pointing out that *jollof* rice is a constant highly sought after dish at virtually every event catering, weddings inclusive. *Banku* and tilapia is another popular dish his clients request for. *Fufu* is less common on the menus in Accra but is very common in Kumasi. The face of wedding catering in Ghana has undergone quite a change from pre-packaged foods handed out to guests as “take-away”, to a growing preference for a buffet offering up to four courses, with separate menus for local and continental choices in the starters, mains and dessert sections.

I interviewed a caterer who also doubles as a cake artist. His experiences provide useful insight into the work he does and is expounded on below.

*Born Joseph Rudolph Lartey Okine, Chef Rudy grew up the last of six children. As the last child, he spent a lot of time with his mother, particularly in the kitchen and this is where he picked his passion for cooking. As a child, he had wanted to become a doctor but diverted his attention to his passion for cooking. After all, he says, being a chef is just like being a doctor*

*because they are both responsible for the health of individuals. He pursued a degree in hotel management which included hotel and catering, and in 2010, started his cakes and catering services.*

*Chef Rudy is a full-time chef and caters for an average of twenty weddings in a year. He marks December as the peak season for weddings although the wedding season can begin in October till February. He gets most of his clients from referral as well as his social media accounts on Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat. He has no target clientele, however, and tries to work within the budgets of his clients, as long as it is convenient for him. He charges an average of GHC 1,200 for a three-tier cake, the most common number of tiers couples opt for. His minimum number of tiers he has done is two, and his maximum number is thirty-one, a number he concedes is very unusual, but was for a celebrity couple.*

*More often than not, he deals directly with the bride and he gives the reason that “wedding cakes are for women. Women like cakes. Most guys don’t like cakes”. He has however met a few grooms who “extremely like cakes”. Comparing the general reaction of the brides to the grooms, he mentions that whereas the women tend to gush over the cakes, the men just make casual remarks or compliments. There are groom cakes which are mounted together with bride cakes and cut after the bride cakes are cut. However, it is seldom done.*

*People in recent times are more aware of exactly what they want. Often, brides will come to him with pictures from the internet and ask him to make a cake like that. He tries not to imitate but modify what is in the pictures to make it more of his work and less of the others. He indicates a changing preference for moist cakes now over the traditional wedding fruit cakes. He offers about twenty-one flavours brides can choose from and the most popular are chocolate, vanilla, red velvet, caramel and butterscotch. Some of his recipes are tweaked to suit his style and add a touch of authenticity. Monogram cakes are also becoming less common in recent times with people asking him to incorporate their wedding colours or themes.*

*One of his biggest challenges used to be with clients refusing to pay after delivery, but now he takes full payment and so has no such problem. He also notices that clients in Accra do not complain about his prices as much as his clients in Takoradi and Kumasi do. One of his biggest challenges is timing of events which are almost always not according to schedule.*



Fig 5. 12: Ghanaian dish buffet



Fig 5. 13: Hybridised fruit buffet

The selection of drinks has also been somewhat revolutionised with a growing preference for locally made drinks and natural drinks. In a Facebook sponsored advert for Kubae, it reads “When daring university students get behind coconut sales, expect zeal and exquisite service. Order cracked chilled coconut and pina coco for all your events, and experience the reason why there is much talk about this team...The customer is our bae”. It is becoming more common for brands to utilise foods and other fruits in the natural Ghanaian habitat to make drinks, starters and desserts.



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\*Fresh crack-Chilled coconut & mint  
Whatsapp 0202255994 or call 0302964964.

REGRI PROCEDAMUS

Fig 5. 14: Modernised natural foods

## 5.6 The Costumier

According to Baker (2014), the name “white wedding” is from the concept of the white dress used for the western ceremony. However, despite assumptions that the whiteness of the dress symbolises purity and virginity, it does not. On the contrary, the colour has nothing to do with virtue per se, but rather is mainly a symbol of ostentatiousness. The concept can be traced to 1840 when Queen Victoria wore a white wedding gown in her marriage to Prince Albert. This was in an era when washing of clothing was an onerous task and so only the affluent could afford such a garment which could only be worn once since it was nearly impossible to clean once worn.

Today, the white gown still remains a highly relevant part of the white wedding. However, whereas the gown was in the past ordered from outside the continent, a growing culture has emerged of getting the gown made by local designers who have made themselves brand names. Pistis, Adwoa Akwaboah, Sima Brew, and She by Bena are popular brand names that offer custom made gowns, tailored to the specifications of their clients. Although more brides tend to still go with traditional white gowns, others have other themes and styles incorporated into their white gown to make it more unique, and to represent their style and identity.

Grooms have also not been left out in the localisation of their wedding attire, with brands emerging to cater for their tuxedos, and even their shoes.





Fig 5. 15: Wedding gown made by a local designer



Fig 5. 16: Elaborate pearl-beaded wedding gown



Fig 5. 17: Glocalised Ghanaian wedding gowns with kente



Fig 5. 18: Made-in-Ghana shoes and clothes at a celebrity wedding

### 5.7 Hair and Makeup

The most interesting change that has occurred in bridal hair styling is the growing preference for the use of Afro-textured or kinky hair for brides and bridesmaids. In the last few years, there has been a growing trend of middle and upper-class Ghanaian women in the south in particular, shifting from chemically relaxed hair to maintaining their hair texture in its natural state or texture. In the past, some women had indeed kept their hair kinky but felt more obliged to use straighter, silkier weaves. Although weaves are still in vogue, it is not uncommon for today's bride to keep her hair in its natural state either pinned, or worn out, defying relics of colonial imperialism and the notion that kinky hair is bad, and making political statements about her identity as Africans in seemingly apolitical ways (Andrade, 2011).

In *Natural Girl*, a popular song by Ghanaian female musician, MzVee, she declares she needs no weave or perm to define her as a woman, and that she embraces her “natural” kinky hair. It has gradually evolved to become something of a social movement, or a “hairvolution”. The

song also reinforces the notion of negritude, as postulated by Leopold Sedar Senghor, which is the simple recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as black people, of our history, and [of] our culture (Adeeko, 2002). This is seen in the way she defies European imperialism with its prescribed standards of beauty that demand that hair must be straight as opposed to the natural African textures, which tend to be kinky, coily, and wavy. By embracing one's natural hair texture of African origin, therefore, one says implicitly, that "I am black and beautiful".



Fig 5. 19: Natural hair brides and bridesmaids

Despite the growing trend of 'beat faces' which refers to total make-up transformations, makeup today still appears to be the preserve of the bride, and it is quite unheard of, particularly in Ghana, for a man to wear makeup unless he is seen to exhibit overtly effeminate characteristics. This gives credence to the popular acclaimed notion by renowned Nigerian

author, Chinua Achebe, that a man must be fearful and ugly. For the bride on her wedding day, makeup is her best friend as it helps define her best features and prevents her face from looking drab from the effect of filters in photos (Hawkins, 2003).

The makeup industry, aside from being mostly patronised by females, is highly dominated by females as well. Most makeup artists (MUAs) are female. Although there are a few men in the industry, it is rather rare. Most makeup artists today are self-taught, utilising how-to videos from YouTube and other social media platforms. However, there are cosmetology schools where make-up artists are trained.

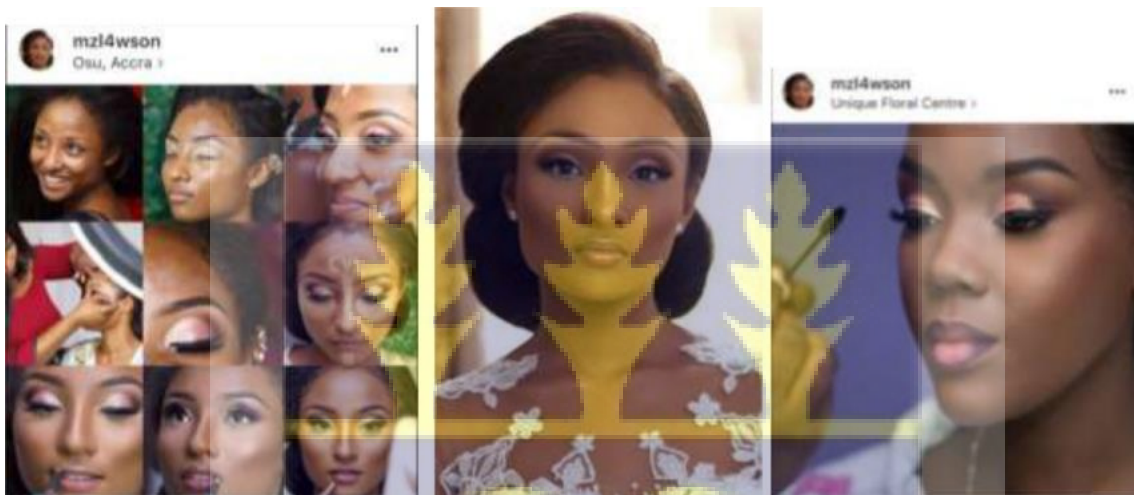


Fig 5. 20: “Beat faces” and “brows on fleek”

### 5.8 Master of Ceremonies

Atolagbe (2012) writes of the ‘Alaga Iduro’ and ‘Alaga Ijoko’, Yoruba English bilinguals of the traditional Yoruba wedding, who act as professional spokespersons hired by the parents of the bride, that their performance at the end of the day determines how much they are paid and whether they will be getting more invitations. These two spokespersons do not particularly, in contemporary times, have to be related to the bride or groom and yet are key participants in the traditional Yoruba wedding.

The Master of Ceremonies, much like the spokesperson of the Yoruba marriage is very significant for the smooth transitioning of events at the ceremony and has to mediate in a swift, tactful, witty and polite manner (Atolagbe, 2012).

Kabutey Ocansey has been a professional event MC for five years. He keeps a log and has recorded every single event since he started: he has emceed 200 weddings, 85 corporate events, 67 religious events and 27 entertainment events since he went commercial. He emcees as a weekend job and refers to it as a hobby he has commercialised, and although he takes it seriously, it is not his full-time job. He explains what he does, the changes that have occurred in the past five years, and his motivation for becoming Kabutey My MC:

*I am a professional event MC, weddings being a major part. Essentially an MC is just a chaperone for an event so you're just guiding the event to a successful end. The planner would have done their work, the décor person, the DJ is there, so all the different elements of the event have been done, but somebody needs to make it all come together in terms of an experience and in terms of an orderly flow of things. So that's where an MC comes in. So essentially, the MC makes all the other aspects meaningful because the décor can be top notch but if the event doesn't flow orderly or it doesn't flow in an enjoyable way even the best of décor becomes meaningless to the guests or to the event host. Same thing: the DJ can be good, the food can be good, but if it all doesn't come together in a coordinated, logical and nice way, people will walk away and not have anything to connect them to the event so that's the basic thing of an event MC- just help the program move orderly from one point to another. But that is the most basic of it.*

*In contemporary times event hosts have become much more demanding, and events generally have become more demanding in terms of the experience of the guests and the expectations of the event hosts. So, they don't want an event that is just orderly. They want an event that has a certain emotional touch to it. So, if it's a wedding, they want some fun; they want the joy. They*

want the guests to come and be happy. When the guests are going away there should be something that makes them smile about the event. So that is when-if you like- extra skills are required in terms of being an MC, in terms of how do you keep it orderly, but now make it more meaningful, more substantial, but also more entertaining...The priority of the host is to make sure their guests have an awesome time. And the expectation of the host is that their event will be more than the last event...so the expectation keeps going higher and higher and the standard keeps going high so ... especially if you call yourself an event MC and you're charging people to pay you for your services then you're also required to invest a bit of thinking and planning into your art as an MC. So, it moves from just being a job, or just being a straight forward execution to an art form, if you like. So, today's MC is more of an entertainer in addition to someone who's letting the event flow. Because anybody can pick up a mic and say "let me introduce the chairman", after the chairman speaks, "can you come and cut the cake..." ... anybody can do that. But now you need to be entertaining and because they're paying you for it, they're expecting at least a basic value. They want something surprising, even for the host. They're not sure what they want, but once you do it right, they know this is what I wanted. It was a result of circumstances. I think growing up, we were the ones who people thought were not shy... the poetry, cultural dancing, and those kinds of things. So, when we were growing up, anytime there's any kind of function or something, maybe children's day at church, they'd say you're the one who's not shy so you come and read... and it built confidence. Then later at family events I'd be asked to put up a show to entertain everybody. Then later in secondary school and university, when the church was having an anniversary... and then a few friends started getting married. Those times there was nothing like a professional MC, particularly for weddings. Most of the time it was always a church member or a friend or a cousin or something who just comes.

*Events have evolved over time. There was a time when the most important thing about an event was the fact that the event is happening k&k&. Because there was some time back, receptions were not even a big deal. It was just about the church, and then right there at the church, some packed food and that's it. Then it got to a point reception started so food became the most important thing. Then after food, décor became the next most important thing. So, people were now investing more and more into those things. Back then even DJ- you just get your brother or your cousin, that's all. Of course there were also influences from outside. People travel, and irrespective of how far you travel, when it comes to things like marriage, funeral, ... you always come back home. So when they come back home, they come with the influences they have had, so people started investing in reception, in venue, then in décor, then in music. So once all these elements have come together you still can't use the same person or neighbour to just come and do anything. And people became more conscious about the kind of impression that they give.*

*So, I went for two weddings -back-to-back- and these were very 'money-no-be-problem' kind of weddings. Everything was top notch, but in both cases the MC was wack! The MC was terrible. So, I remember sitting there, and I was just looking at the couple. And I could tell that everything had been made nonsense of, just because the MC was not good enough, and not necessarily because he said something wrong, but his mood, his orientation, the things he said; he was very dull.*

*So, I remember sitting there and looking at the beautiful décor and one of them was in a hotel, and the couple just looked miserable. It was definitely not the kind of energy they wanted. And I remember sitting there, and I was like oh, as for this one, I could have done better. Then the following Saturday we went for another wedding of a similar scale. And again, it was also terrible. So, throughout the week, it kept coming back to mind. And I'd done a few and I could tell- if you do a good job and people are happy, you could tell. So, I remember going through*

*the week, and then on Friday it just hit me. So, I went to work on that Friday and I was doing something completely different from what I'm doing now. So, I went to work on that Friday and got onto Facebook and created a page. I don't even know how the name came up- Kabutey My MC- I think I just wanted it to be possessive. I wanted you to take ownership of me without even being conscious that you were.*

From the conversation with Kabutey, it is evident that the role of MCs in Ghana has greatly evolved and become crucial for curating a memorable wedding ambiance for both the couple, as well as the guests of a wedding. His journey emphasises a shift in expectations, personal and socio-cultural influences, and the commercialisation of a craft, which also heightens the expectation of professionalism and high standards for the service. Wedding MCs have evolved largely from a community-based support service to one that has become a more competitive market-place.

### **5.9 Music and Dance**

The importance of music as a part of social ceremonies cannot be overemphasised, and in wedding celebration, music forms an integral part in conveying an atmosphere of festivity and also publicises the union to the community (McNeill, 2011). It has become the norm to hire the services of a professional for wedding events. A couple often have the choice of a DJ or a live band, with the latter often being more expensive. Having DJs at weddings is therefore more common. However, others go for the two, or hire in recent times, a professional wedding singer. The MC and the DJ coordinate to know what songs will be played and at what times so as to have a flow in the events. The couple may have provided them with a list of songs they may want played, or even a list of songs they may not want played. The most popular songs played at a wedding are a Ghanaian and Nigerian blend, and often low tempo songs begin the ceremony. A keen observation made with regard to music is that very often, Ghanaian highlife songs begin the festivities; a conditioning Kabutey explained helps the older generation to feel

more involved in the ceremony and get involved in the dance floor before the more youthful upbeat songs begin. By the end of 2016, I observed the most common wedding songs played in the year were Amakye Dede's *Sokoo Na Mmaa Pe*, Becca's *Hwe*, M.I.'s *One Naira*, Bisa KDei's *Samina*, Masterkraft's *Finally*, Aka Blay's *Take Away*, Runtown's *Mad Over You*, Tekno's *Pana*, Mavin's *Adaobi*, BisaKDei's *Jwe*, Guru's *Samba*, Galaxy's *Papa Bi*. The popularity of these songs may be alluded to their lyrics which mostly romanticise love, or the rhythm which makes it easy to dance to.

It has become usual for the couple or the bridal party to entertain the guests with choreographed dances, and Yvonne Afriyie Okyere specialises as a dance instructor. She had been dancing professionally and in videos since 2008, and recently started teaching dance. She is often booked by clients who are the bride and bridesmaids, and want to have a special entry dance to entertain the guests and set a fun tone as they make their entrance to the reception grounds. Once in a while, however, a bride and groom come to her for help with their couple's first dance. She meets with them over a few weeks on booked sessions and teaches them to dance to a mixed selection of songs.

### **5.10 The Vows: saying "I do"**

The first time I came across the concept of vows being written for a couple for their wedding, I was fascinated to say the least. The norm is to have the priest or whoever is overseeing the wedding read out traditional vows, to which the couple respond "I do". It is however not uncommon for a couple to read out their own vows. However, to have someone write out the vows for the couple sounded entirely novel to me. When I brought up the vow writer to my supervisor, he appeared just as fascinated, and so I knew I was on to something. The first time I met KeniKodjo, I was rather surprised it was a woman... The name KeniKodjo, which I had taken as a hybrid of Kenny (Kennedy) and Kodjo, was not as I had assumed but was Maukeni Kodjo. My first encounter with her at the Bliss Event II was refreshing. With such a bubbly

personality, I began to understand how she could write vows on people's behalf. I told her about my research and she was more than willing to participate.

Maukeni is one of a community of budding young writers, and she found a niche in the wedding industry. Maukeni is a law student and a blogger, and now as a wedding vow writer, she explains:

*People know me for telling stories, and I like to think that those stories are as real as they can get so that anybody who's out there can relate to those stories. And for me, it was one of my readers who suggested to me that I should write vows... and it's really because I like to call myself a hopeless romantic: I like love. So, love stories and anything about love gets me excited.*

*And I've written a few- I won't call them love poems, but things that had to do with love. And they're on the blog [www.kenikodjo.com]. So, a wedding planner read one of them and said, "why don't you write customised wedding vows?" it started as a joke, but I said, well, why not 'cause I like writing stories and I like love so it felt like a good marriage.*

*...It's pretty novel, I'll admit. There's a whole lot of "Ei, why are you writing our vows?" But you can ask any couple I write for; they sort of admit that it had more meaning for them than they writing it themselves, and this is not because they don't know how to express themselves. I'm a story teller, and for me, I feel like every love story should reflect in the promises you make to each other. That's what the whole idea has been for me. I think that if you can spend so much money customising your wine glasses and your bathrobe and everything that goes into your marriage right down to the perfect hashtag, you might as well customise your promise to each other. I know it's a pretty new idea but everything that we have become accustomed to today started as a new idea.*



♥ 18 likes

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS

**vovsbykenikodjo** The vows! 😍

Fig 5. 21: Kenikodjo vows for the Bliss Wedding Event

### 5.11 Chapter Conclusion

Tracing the works and lives of some wedding professionals, particularly the décor person, the photographer, the cake artist, the caterer, the costumier, the hair and make-up persons, the MC, the music and dance coordinators, and the vow writer, shows that they have diverse roles as well as individual encounters that have helped form their identities as professionals. In their encounters in their profession and even in executing their work, it is possible to trace a number of changes that have happened in the industry, as well as get some insight into the society in which they live. In the next chapter, I interpret the findings of my research and attempt a thematic analysis of the work.



## CHAPTER SIX

### READING BETWEEN THE LINES

*I am only going to report on what I conclude from studies of this kind that I've done. And I can only begin by repeating... that what you get in all of this ... is rationalisations, and we're in the precarious position of providing them.*

ERVING GOFFMAN, "On Fieldwork" (March 1974)

#### 6.1 Introduction

Wedding professionals in the Ghanaian wedding, with their works and encounters show a number of themes which are worth academic attention. These are grouped under four major thematic terms namely, gender, functions, and globalisation/ glocalisation. Studying these professionals, and the white wedding, also gives some insight in the future of marriage ceremonies in Ghana.

#### 6.2 Blurring Gender Lines

##### 6.2.1 Relationships

Oduyoye (1995) notes, of gender definitions and human relations, that the ancient resting places do not have to be ours, and that change is inevitable. One of the things that stand out in this work, and per one of the research questions, is the face of changing gender relations today. It is evident that relationships between men and women have undergone a number of changes. Whereas in the past it was uncommon for men and women to mingle and so spouses were often chosen for by parents, today's young women in particular are not as stigmatised from having relations with non-family men. Migration, and urban life has led to a diversity of cultures, and promoted inter-ethnic marriages based more on individual choices and romantic notions of love, popularised by today's media age. The family, however, though with diminished control, still often has to give their approval to intended couples, and this consent still remains important before one can proceed on a civil rite.

Although the man continues to be seen as the head of the household and is therefore seen as the one responsible for decision making (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011), when it comes to pre-wedding and wedding-related decisions, the woman appears to be the decision maker although the man is consulted. It is therefore very common for wedding ads to target women (Eliasson, 2007). It is however, unclear whether the financial responsibilities are borne by both the man and the woman, or by either. It is also evident that the bride's mothers wield a considerable amount of influence in the wedding process, particularly in choosing the bride's dress, and they tend to be very traditional and unyielding in their choice of colour which they insist has to be the traditional white colour. However, it is very clear that the modern woman has a shifting preference from the traditional white gown and would want something that reflects her individuality and her identity. She however tends to conform to the prevailing expectation of modesty and innocence associated with the white gown (Holma, 2013).

### **6.2.2 Men and Women's works**

Tradition is adaptive, and not frozen and homogeneous, and so indigenous people have modified their rituals whenever the traditions have become unfavourable to their lives, and when the resources and ingenuity was available to modify the rituals (Izugbara, 2011). Men and women across various classes and groups in societies are socialised to conform to specific spaces and are given expectations of what they can and cannot be (Bhasin, 2004; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011).

However, the growing spate of education and the proliferation of social media have led to a cultural mobility where individuals can attain skill sets that would not have been possible to attain a few years ago. Whereas in the past individuals took on ascribed roles per their class and gender (Miller, 2016), today's generation have the ability to switch roles by acquiring skills either through formal education or self-teaching (Omari, 1963; Hill and Fenner, 2010).

It therefore becomes possible for persons to take on completely different roles or professions from what they were formally trained in, as in the cases of Abokuma, Ekow and Kabutey, amongst other wedding professionals.

However, some fields continue the legacy of gendered roles, and photography remains male-dominated as food remains female dominated. These are however norms, and not necessarily rules, and so allow for people to enter fields dominated by the opposite gender as in the case of Akua Boatemaa of Akiboat. Intriguingly, when men venture into female-dominated works, they often attach a higher level of prestige to their work, as Chef Rudy has done with the title ‘Chef’ (Agadjanian, 2002), and yet the same is not seen for women who enter male-dominated fields.



Fig 6. 1: Women who do “men’s work”; female photographers in Ghana



Fig 6. 2: An Instagram profile of a self-taught Ghanaian designer

### 6.2.3 Exploring Sexualities

There is a visible gap in knowledge about the nature of reticence regarding sex in Africa (Prah, 2011). In most African societies, it is tabooed to talk about sex except in exclusive female spaces (Tamale, 2011) and patriarchal sanctions disable women's sexuality (Adomako Ampofo, 2003; Ratele, 2011). Religion has also been a powerful tool used in silencing women's sexualities (Sounaye, 2011).

Akosua Adomako Ampofo (2011) discusses the paradox whereby gender norms tend to expect girls to display little knowledge about sexual matters ('Good girls don't know such things'), while boys, who are permitted some sexual license and knowledge about sex, are rarely provided with the information, counsel or guidance on issues of sexuality that they need. Several studies suggest that boys are actively encouraged by peers and family members to engage in sexual experimentation during their adolescent years (Piotrow et al, 1992; Zelaya et

al, 1997; Nzioka, 2001; Adomako Ampofo et al, 2007; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011), yet girls are expected or encouraged to remain virgins until marriage (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2011). This silencing and misrepresentation of the African female's sexuality is among the issues currently receiving researchers' attention (Adomako Ampofo, 2006).

In studying the current wedding terrain, I found elements relevant to discourse on sexuality. The growing trend of bachelorettes with their explicit erotic cakes shows an attempt by today's women to express their sexualities and to challenge the norm of silenced sexuality. The erotic cakes exhibit the woman's control of her sexuality, and her knowledge of the male sexual anatomy, and also show an eroding coyness about sex, albeit slow. In addition, bachelorettes, with their conversations about sexuality, show that today's woman is knowledgeable about sex and is willing to have conversations about sex. Nyanzi (2011: 478) asks some of these questions. "...who is having sex? And who isn't? Who do we think is having sex? And who do we think isn't? Who can have sex? And who can't? Who should have sex? And who shouldn't? Who must have sex? And who must not? And what is sex, anyway? And what is not sex? And who cares what the answers to these questions are?"

Censorship of sexual content is a sticky issue offline as it is online. Online content has several layers of corporate control and the gatekeepers are often inconsistent, operating in a policy vacuum that defaults to sex/gender conservatism that cyber feminists are challenging: Corporate actors such as internet service providers or social media platforms, who often take the side of internet freedom in public discourse, have often censored sexual speech for questionable reasons. Feminists are increasingly challenging Facebook's content policies.

### **6.3 Working as a Wedding Professional**

The works of wedding professionals are a much complex and difficult one. On a day that is considered a once in a lifetime event, a lot could go wrong and the wedding professional has a duty to ensure that nothing goes wrong, and where things do go wrong, as they are prone to,

they have the difficult task of fixing them, even when not caused by them. For the wedding coordinator in particular, he or she has to be on the alert all the time to make sure events are moving as scheduled, and be able to fix problems as they come. It can be difficult dealing with a lot of people in a small space and tempers are bound to flare. A lot of skill is therefore needed in doing damage control and handling social conflicts. For the photographer as well, when things go awry and the couple is disgruntled, it can be very challenging and the good photographer would have to put on a mask of a comedian to calm the couple in order to capture shots they would later be content with. In addition, the photographer has to be quick on his or her feet and anticipate moments before they happen. The MC also has a difficult task of entertaining a diverse group of people and would often have to be able to read people and know whether he or she is losing the attention of the audience, and to take on a role as a comedian. For the cake artist, the costumier and the décor person, the challenge is to provide what the clients ask for without mimicry. Every work they do must be different from the other and no two works are the same. In addition, things tend to go wrong with the cake, the dress or the décor, even at the eleventh hour, and during the event, and they have to be able to fix the problems within the shortest possible time. The music and dance coordinator also has a duty of keeping guests entertained enough to leave a lasting impression on them. For the vow writer, getting the guests to share in the love story of the couple in order to feel like a part of the journey is very important. All these professionals have an important role and can make the marriage ceremony either a success or a failure.

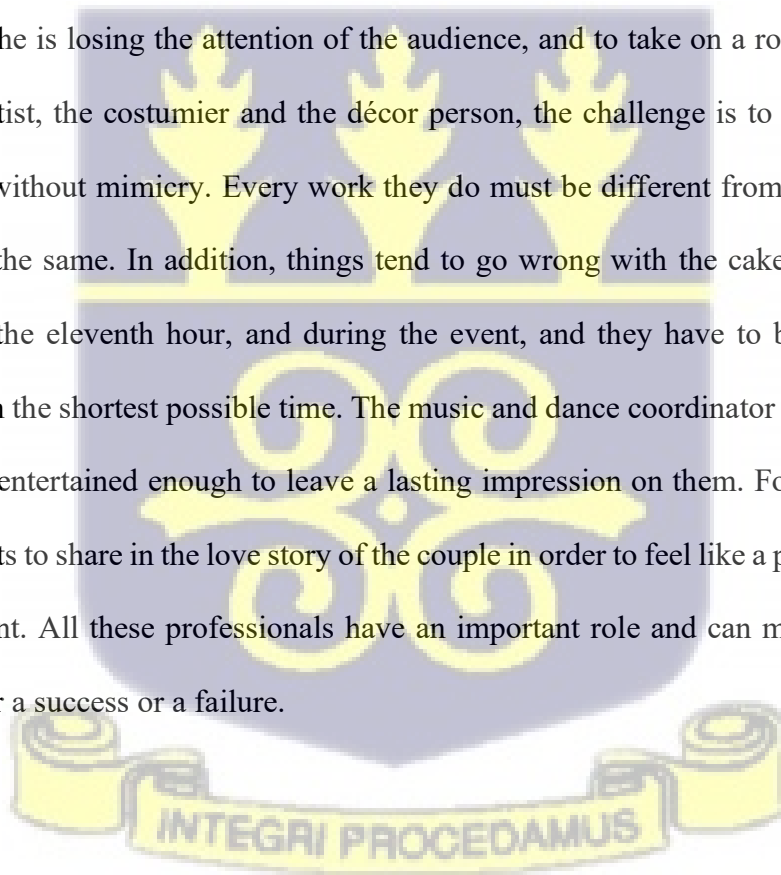




Fig 6. 3: Wedding professionals at work

#### 6.4 Adapting the Global in the Local- Exchanging Culture and Showing Social Presence

The white wedding in Ghana today is no doubt an adaptation of the Western white wedding. It is impossible to deny the tradition of borrowed exchanges in the contemporary world. The intercultural exchange, however, is not one sided and although the main form is for the most part Western, it is clear that there is a conscious effort to constantly modify and personalise every element of the wedding process. The wedding professionals I studied are well aware of the Western connotation of the white wedding, but do not consider what they do as exactly what is done outside Africa, or even what their colleagues in the industry in Ghana do. For them, it is clear what is and what is not Ghanaian, and there is a conscious effort to add elements of their own individual identities to the works they do. There is also a clear attempt at hybridisation of the local and the borrowed to produce newer forms.

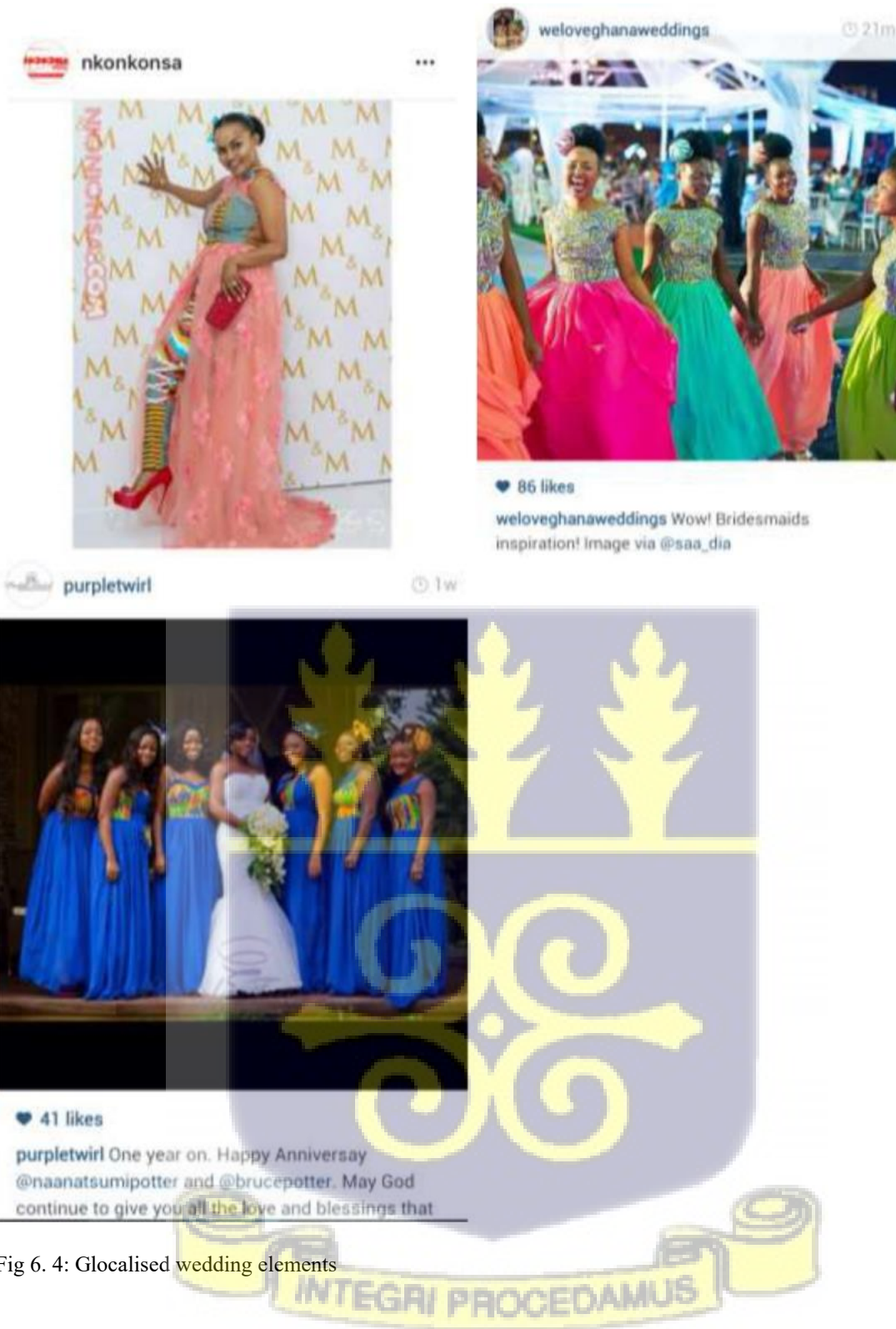


Fig 6. 4: Glocalised wedding elements



Fig 6. 5: Glocalised wedding cakes

## 6.5 The Future of Weddings and Further Implications

*“If before we [the industry] made the plans and the customers had to follow the contract, now, it has become the complete opposite; we adjust ourselves to the customer’s plans... Young people go to bookshops and look at the many beautiful books that they can find there and say; ‘I also want to become like this’... So we must learn all the time.”*

- (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001, p. 29)

Marriage and the family have undergone constant modification in the past such that one cannot state that they will stay crystallised in their states (Letourneau, 1900), and since we do not accurately know the cultural limits of “human society” (Hier, 2005), the future of weddings in Ghana is difficult to predict.

However, one thing that is certain is that changes will occur. For now, however, it is safe to say the wedding industry will continue to boom over the next few years, given that the institution of marriage is one that has and will continue to withstand time. Much as many of the changes may have been propelled by westernisation, Letourneau’s assertion that in several cases, men of every race, time and place have conducted themselves in similar manner, had similar ideas and practices, even without knowing each other or the existence of each other (Letourneau, 1900), points to a universality of changing ideas and the inevitability of the transformation of the Ghanaian marriage process.

Moreover, with the globalised access to the internet and the proliferation of social media in particular, where the youth are constantly seeing the endless possibilities out there and merging their own ideas, it is possible that more and more elements of the white wedding will be altered and wedding professionals will find their jobs competitive and challenging, such that there may arise the need for more studious works by these professionals.

Perhaps the academic field will open up to the study of the white wedding proper, and the wedding industry, and there will be more detailed social descriptions and statistics than what I

have obtained. Economists would also do well if attention is given to the economic contribution of the wedding industry. With the growing popularity of patronising Ghanaian wedding goods which are made of impeccable quality as those found in the west, there is no doubt that weddings are adding to the tourism industry in the country. However, exactly how much is yet to be determined. In addition, as the white wedding in Ghana, with all its hybridised forms, is gaining popularity here and beyond, external cultures will begin to borrow from the Ghanaian white wedding and also patronise local vendors. It is therefore my recommendation that researchers continue to gather data- both qualitative and quantitative- on the white wedding and all its elements, even as it evolves. This will provide crucial insight into the institution of marriage, and the greater social context in which it resides.



Fig 6. 6: Instagram post about patronage of local designers

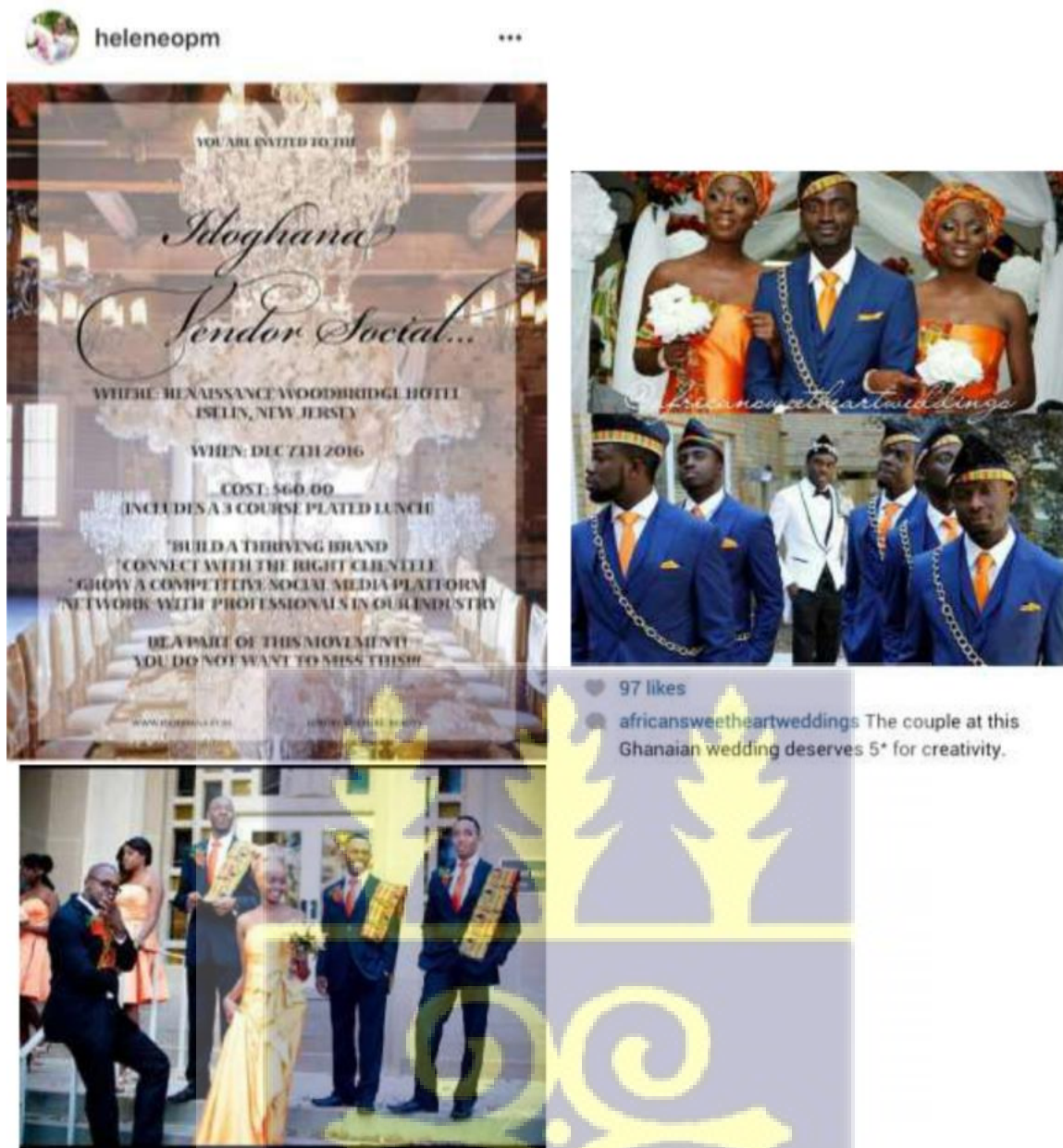


Fig 6. 7: Transferred elements of Ghanaian weddings to the west



## NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

*...I am convinced that the actual evolution of research ideas does not take place in accord with the formal statements we read on research methods. The ideas grow up in part out of our immersion in the data and out of the whole process of living...*

WILLIAM FOOTE WHYTE, Street Corner Society (1955, p. 608)

When I first set out to conduct this research, I had but a vague idea of exactly what it was I sought to find out. I knew the wedding industry was a booming arena, and yet unexplored by academia. Having been familiar with the works of some wedding professionals, and being keenly enthusiastic about marriage ceremonies in general, the research work promised to be much of a walk in the park. However, upon commencement, I would find there was a lot more I had not considered in my pre-research years and the task was not so clearly laid out. I had barely begun, and yet was already guilty of ethnographic fallacy by taking my casual observations at face value. I sought to take a look into the lives of the professionals, *vis-a-vis* their works in the industry, what motivated them to enter the industry, their perceptions of their own as well as their colleagues' works, as well as many other issues I hoped to come up, but was not sure what would come up, or what faces they would take.

### **Getting in**

The first wedding event I attended as part of this research was rather disappointing. It was a much-hyped event I had come across in my social media search, and its Facebook advertisement promised it to be a well patronised event. I hoped to encounter and make the acquaintance of some of the known names in the industry. Rather unfortunately, however, it was not as patronised as I envisioned, and the vendors there seemed like new names looking to introduce themselves to the industry. These were clearly not the wedding professionals I was looking for since most of them were for the most part inexperienced. However, their presence

pointed out one thing clearly: there continues to be an influx into the industry with more and more people patronising the services of professionals for their weddings.

Although my initial focus had not been elite professionals per se, but those who were experienced in the field, a series of events would bring me into contact with mostly elite groups, which was not exactly a problem, seeing that they were experienced. It only meant that my findings may be mostly applicable to middle and upper-class groups as they could mostly afford the professionals I was researching. One such event, which actually paved the way for me and gave me access to a lot of professionals, some of whom would become the subject of my research, was the Bliss Wedding Show, a bridal show inspired by the real wedding experience where top notch wedding vendors worked in a real wedding setting, in plush locations.

At a substantial amount of one hundred and fifty Ghana Cedis (GHC 150.00), I was able to book a ticket to the second edition of the Bliss Event, dubbed The Masquerade Ball, held at the Labadi Beach Hotel on March 13, 2016. The location and the cost of getting in was enough to know that it was going to be a plush event and as the goal was to observe as much as I could without sticking out as a researcher, I had to conform to the formal/ semi-formal mode of dressing to blend in as a participant observer.

### **Research Method**

Qualitative methods were preferred because they foreground the experiences and voices of the research participants as well as incorporate other important factors that define their everyday life (Adomako Ampofo, 2006). Lending the research to traditional and modern ways of data collection, observation was one of the most crucial data collection methods I employed. It is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing but, in reality, be doing something else. Therefore, the only way to know is through observation. In addition, persons may either not be consciously aware of, or not be able to articulate the subtleties of what goes on in interactions between themselves and others. Observation, therefore, puts the researcher right where the

action is, and in a place where they can see what is going on (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Observation, however, is not without potential drawbacks as a researcher may give meaning to action/interaction based on observation without checking out that meaning with participants. It is therefore always beneficial to combine observation with interview or leave open the possibility to verify interpretations with participants (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Employing what Patton (2002) calls creative fieldwork, I sought to use every part of myself to experience and understand what I was studying and to be directly involved in the setting being studied.

The mock wedding itself had been brisk, with the ceremony involving the exchange of vows and the ceremonial rites. The most peculiar session was the reception where it was very obvious that the professionals had spared no detail. Prior to that, there was a brief break where potential clients had the opportunity to interact with the professionals in set up table booths, amidst a number of waiters who passed on an abundance of cocktails and *hors d'oeuvres*. Although this afforded me the opportunity to get acquainted with a number of the professionals there, owing to the time constraints and how many people were gathered at a booth at a time, I was unable to interact at length with them. However, I introduced myself to a number of them and told them of the research. All of them seemed enthused and were willing to avail themselves for interviews to be scheduled at a later date. From time to time, I stood by and watched and listened while potential clients asked questions and were supplied answers. One of my initial observations about the interactions before me was that the professionals were very attentive and friendly. I managed to engage a few booths in enlightening conversation about the growing interest in the services of wedding professionals. One such conversation contributed to my decision to dedicate a whole chapter to the role of media and pop culture representation as social media seemed to be one factor most people attributed to the popularity of wedding professionals.

When the cocktail and interaction session was over, all proceeded to the reception area. I made a conscious effort as a participant observer to be aware of both the physical space (objects present, activity, light, colour, sound, and smell), as well as the participants (physical characteristics, behaviours, body language, and verbal behaviours). My first impression upon entering the enclosed reception area was of awe. The place had a warm and inviting ambiance with long rows of candle lit tables and chandeliers suspended from the high ceilings. The whole room had a golden feel, with gold candelabra, lined with tall golden vases filled with lots of white, ivory and pale pink flowers, set on tables already lined with rows of flowers. The chair covers and table covers were also of a golden hue and the view was spectacular. There were hushed whispers and faint chatters in the background, with music playing faintly.

I quickly observed, as the people started to take their seats, that most of the guests were female, a few with male partners. I did not observe any duo of males although a lot of females were in groups of two or more. I had earlier made a casual observation about the skewed gender during the cocktail event. But since all had been standing, it was difficult to state with absolute certainty that the men were not standing away from my sight. However, in this setting where I had managed to sit in a conducive position to observe all, I could ascertain without an iota of doubt that there were more females than males.

The event proceeded without mishap with the male MC effortlessly steering the events, perched on a hover board (see Fig. 7.4). That was the first time I saw him, and I would later make his acquaintance after the event. In the course of the event, I would notice the photographers traipsing with their heavy looking cameras, trying to be inconspicuous as they captured the events. I noticed they were all male. The DJ was also male.

The selection of music went from low tempo cool- jazz to high tempo and upbeat Ghanaian highlife and hip life. The stylist would be seen from time to time walking around, checking on the way things were going. The coordinators did not appear to rest, continually walking back

and forth, and in and out ensuring that everything proceeded smoothly. All the wedding professionals at the event wore tags with “vendor” boldly inscribed.

When it was time for dinner, it was announced that there were a variety of food stations serving varied intercontinental and local dishes. At the two stations set up for intercontinental dishes, there were varied dishes of chicken, rice, yam, mushroom, among others all served in stainless steel chafing dishes. At the West African dishes station, the foods were chicken groundnut soup with *omo tuo*, *moi moi*, goat pepper soup, *waakye*, fish stew, and *kelewele*. These, in contrast, were all presented as per the customary culture, in clay pots set on coal pots. There was also a dessert station with an assortment of local and continental desserts such as *nkate* cake biscuits, tiger nut milk pudding, tiramisu, and mandarin sorbet.

After the event, I got to introduce myself to the professionals who were actively involved in the event and had been busy during the initial cocktail interaction session. Considering that some were still busy, meeting them was in part made possible by one of the coordinators who would act as the gate keeper of my research. I sought their consent to use materials from the event and also from their social media pages for my research. A number of them gave me their cards for follow up interviews.

### **The Interviews**

Getting the professionals to grant me permission for an interview was not a problem. The real problem was for them to actually find time to meet me. Over the next few months, I would have to schedule and reschedule interviews, with some of them asking to postpone at the eleventh hour. It was a bit frustrating and, in the beginning, I could not help but wonder how clients got to meet with them. But I was also aware that they had been informed that this was clearly for research, and not exactly a client booking or an interview for publicity purposes, and so they were more likely to prioritise paying clients over me. This presented a bit of an ethical conundrum as it appeared easier to get an interview if I just told them I was a potential

client, or it was for publicity. But adhering strictly to research ethics, they had the right to informed consent free of deception. In the end, I had only four interviews I could work with.

My first interview was with a wedding photographer, Ekow, whose page I had come across on Instagram advertising him as a creative wedding photographer. The “creative” description got me piqued. He was open to the idea of an interview. However, since he had a busy schedule working a nine to five on the weekdays, he had to squeeze me either in his lunch break, or after work hours. I decided to meet him after work hours since there would be less pressure on him to get back to work. But I had to meet him early enough so he would not be in a rush to go home. We therefore agreed to meet right after his office hours, near his work place. I informed him again, what the purpose of the research was and asked for his permission to audio record which he willingly consented to.

The subsequent interviews I had went much the same way. All were open to the idea of me audio recording and were quite fascinated by my research and open to being quoted. I also expressly informed them they could let me know if they wanted to be anonymous in my work, or wanted anything they said off the record. All of them were just as busy and had to chip me in their busy schedules. My meeting with Abokuma, the wedding coordinator, was in part facilitated by my pre-existing relationship with her Personal Assistant, Phyllis. I had to meet her at a hotel while she was working. She was very pleasant and had no qualms about anonymity or confidentiality. On the same day I had an interview with Abokuma, Kabutey the MC had scheduled to meet and indicated that that was the only time he could make it within the ensuing weeks as he would be very busy. Initially, I was worried about scheduling with him since I had already scheduled with Abokuma and wanted to leave room for the event of any delays with the first interview. But seeing that the first interview went well within time schedule, and becoming increasingly aware of how difficult it was to reach many of these professionals, I quickly called him right after the interview to inquire whether it was still

possible to meet. He said it was. But he had an event in the next few hours and so it was prudent for me to meet him at the event venue.

My fourth and final interview was a bit more awkward as I had to meet Chef Rudy in the market place where he was making purchases. Although it gave me some insight into his pre-work work, it was difficult finding a place conducive enough to conduct the interview. In the end, we had to conduct it by the street which was problematic for the audio recording which picked up a lot of automobile sound and interfered with the quality of the work.

For a few other professionals, I did not get responses on interview schedules. Some promised to let me know when they could make time and after constantly checking in, responses stopped coming. With others, however, I found that the information on their social media profiles was enough to go by. Maukeni of KeniKojo Vows for instance was very enthused about the interview, but I found an interview of her that answered all the questions I wanted to ask and so we agreed I would use that. With Frimpomaa of SweetCakesByFrimpsey, however, the captions on her posts on Instagram was enough content to go by.

Frimpomaa's cakes were of particular interest. Although many other cake artists had posts of erotic themed cakes, Frimpomaa appeared to surpass all the others with a specialisation she termed as "naughty cakes". Her works, as well as the captions that she gave them bared a whole new discourse on sexuality, and so I scoured through several of her posts, tracing the storyline of her works.

### **Ethnographic Challenges**

In my cyberethnographic research, one of the major limitations I encountered was disappearing posts. Posts I would bookmark for retrospective analysis would sometimes get deleted. This posed a problem of reliability when posts seen in real time analysis were no longer present post analysis. As a counter measure, I began taking screenshots of posts I wished to use.

Another problem appeared to be plagiarism. Although many professionals have adapted the use of watermarks to claim ownership over their pictures, some pictures still circulate on the internet without any such watermarks and so with time, ownership becomes difficult to trace. More alarmingly, people tend to post pictures with either overt or subtle hints of the work being theirs. I found one such picture on the page of a cake artist, with a caption expressly claiming ownership of the cake in the picture. The cyber community of followers of the original work soon called out the poster for deceiving potential clients.

One challenge to the research is posed by myself as a researcher. I had to be aware of my own bias as a researcher given the interpretive nature of the research, and although I have sought to be as objective as I can, I have to point out that my own personal background and values could very much have influenced the entire research. My academic background in the field of gender studies in particular, led me to look for nuances of gender where perhaps another may have overlooked it. My social positioning also largely dictated the calibre of professionals I focused on. Internet algorithms and search results are based on a number of factors including my previous search results and the search results of people in my own cyber community. Results may therefore have been skewed towards my existing personal experiences. In addition, my interpretation of data, particularly of visual data in my qualitative content analysis is based largely on my personal experiences, even if those experiences are with the texts. Even as I tried to be cautious of ethnographic fallacy, search phrases I used are based largely on my understanding of texts and how I coded the data.

By the end of the research, I had attended three wedding events namely a wedding show at the National Theatre, the second edition of the Bliss Wedding Event, and the Radiance Wedding Fair held at the Kempinski Hotel on the 13th and 14th of August, 2016. Although free, the Radiance Wedding Fair required an online reservation. I also had the opportunity to attend a bachelorette, and at least a dozen weddings. In addition, I watched a number of television

wedding shows and wedding centred programmes including “Top Weddings” and “A Walk down the Aisle”.



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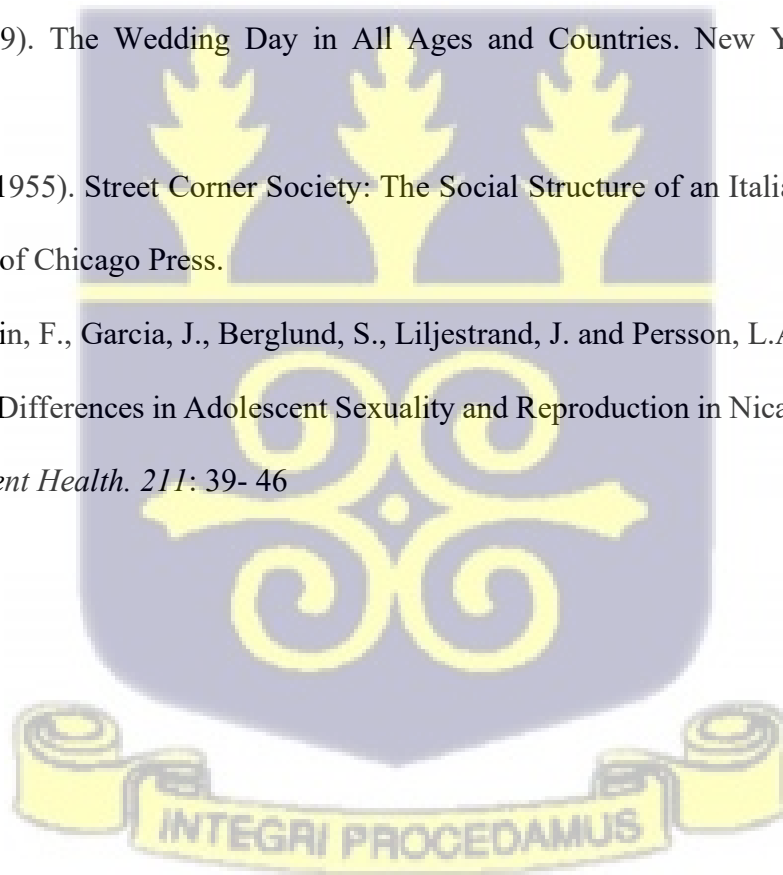
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## APPENDIX I

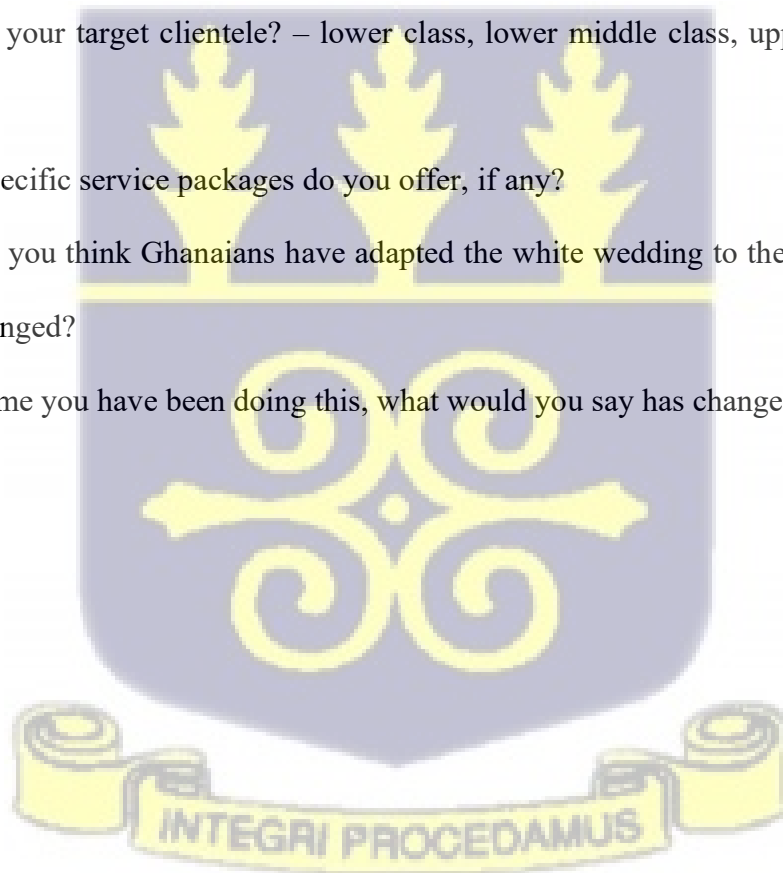
### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

**(Coordinators, Photographers, Cake Artists, Makeup Artists, Photographers  
and Cinematographers)**

(Sex, Age, Ethnicity, Religion, Marital status)

1. How do you identify yourself (professional tag) (full time/ part time)?
2. How long have you been doing this?
3. What motivated you to go into this?
4. Do you think your gender or background has any correlation with the work you do?
5. What is your target clientele? – lower class, lower middle class, upper middle class, affluent.
6. What specific service packages do you offer, if any?
7. How do you think Ghanaians have adapted the white wedding to the environment, or nothing has changed?
8. In the time you have been doing this, what would you say has changed considerably?



## APPENDIX II

### PICTURES FROM RESEARCH



Fig 7. 1: Flier of Bliss Event



Fig 7. 2: Bliss Event registration



Fig 7. 3: Bliss Event decor

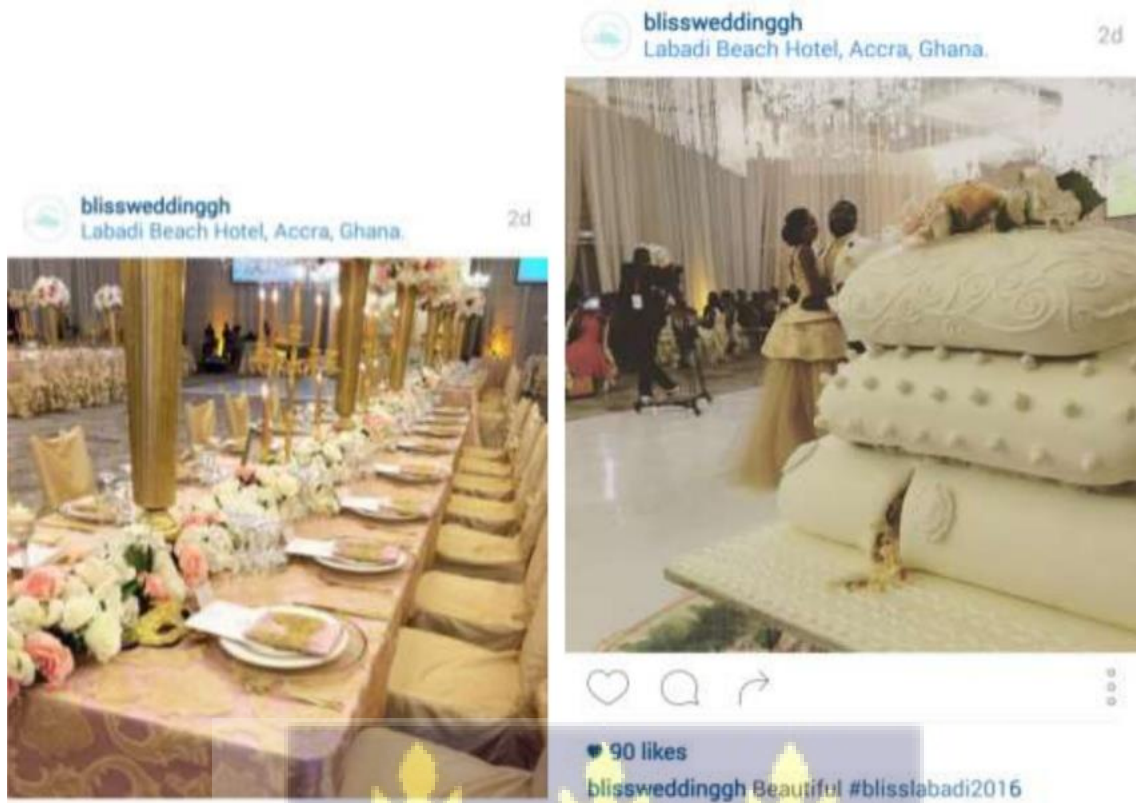


Fig 7. 4: Bliss Event décor and cake



Fig 7. 5: Bliss Event MC



Fig 7. 6: Researcher with gate-keeper

