

# Decolonising Mind and Being Associated with Marriage: Perspectives from Ghana

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## Abstract

Colonialism was not only a political imposition but also a cultural one that both affected and infected institutions and ways of knowing and being of colonised societies. The vestiges of colonial power that originated during the colonial period of European global domination persistently influence minds and behaviours associated with the institution of marriage through the axes of meta-colonialism, and represent forms of epistemic violence against indigenous people. The depiction of modern/colonial mentalities about marriage (e.g., the so-called White wedding) as an optimal expression of human nature and love—and thus a key to personal happiness—have become part of the Ghanaian/African cultural experience. For example, Eurocentric practice of White wedding has been systematically naturalised and pushed down on Ghanaian/African people as the most enlightened, valid and standard form of marriage, supplanting the indigenous and ancestral forms of knowledge and being associated with marriage. Drawing insights from cultural psychology,

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we discuss the coloniality of mind and being associated with marriage, particularly the popular practice of White wedding, and examine how marriage practices in Ghana have become associated with Western social, cultural and economic interests propagated by colonial discourses of modernity, social change and development. We argue that the valorisation of European White wedding and the inferiorisation of African traditional marriage practices are corollary of colonial and meta-colonial narratives that promote(d) White normativity. We posit that psychological knowledge and practice, informed by Western ontologies and epistemologies, provided ideological support for colonisation and the perpetration and perpetuation of scientific racism. We thus contend that, given its complicity, the present discipline of scientific psychology cannot be an effective tool to dismantle the ill-effects of past and present unequal power relationships that result(ed) from colonisation. A decolonial psychological science that enables critical consciousness and serves as a necessary catalyst for liberating minds and being is thus required.

### **Keywords**

Coloniality, culture, decolonising knowledge, marriage, psychology, Africa

It is no longer debatable that colonisation has had negative influences on the minds and behaviours of colonised people in developing societies. There is much evidence to show that colonialism robbed Africans of their power (Cheeseman & Fisher, 2020), people (Lovejoy, 1989), land (Zambakari, 2017) and traditions (Pwiti & Ngoro, 1999), and left many in a cultural abyss struggling to recompose their fragmented identities (Utsey et al., 2015). Although the relationship between psychology and colonialism tends to be glossed over (Bulhan, 2015), historical records suggest that the past and the current discipline of psychology have provided ideological support to colonisation, slavery and institutional and cultural racism. For example, psychological science and practice have been used to support segregated education, promote White normativity and human hierarchy and normalise White supremacy (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021). In 1916, G. O. Ferguson published 'The Psychology of the Negro' in the journal *Annals of Psychology*, in which Ferguson associated intelligence, reasoning and memory capabilities with skin colour and articulated the view that Black

people lack emotional stability and are less capable of abstract thought. Ferguson (1916) also claimed, with the famous ‘mulatto hypothesis’, that the mental abilities of Black people were only greater among those with higher proportion of ‘White blood’. Series of many culturally biased psychological studies on psychological assessments, intelligence tests and racial differences were conducted to produce racially biased results that supported the idea of White supremacy and justified colonisation, slavery and race-based discrimination.

In Africa, Western psychological knowledge and practice have been used to promote colonisation, slavery and apartheid. For example, Cooper (2014) has observed that psychologists drew upon psychological knowledge and praxis in the design and legitimisation of the South African system of racial apartheid. Epistemic violence and *scientific racism*—the deliberate deployment of scientific methods and authority to promote racist ideas about African inferiority, and to celebrate and legitimise Euro-American ways of being as natural and normal (Adams et al., 2020)—have been a pervasive feature of psychology in African contexts (Adams et al., 2020; Bulhan, 2015; Fanon, 1965). Colonial psychologists often explained African experience in pathological and deficit terms, including equating the mental functioning of African adults with that of children, people with mental disorders, or lobotomised people in European settings (e.g., Carothers, 1953). Apparently, during the colonial occupation of African land and mind, the African cosmos and culture became a victim of extraneous Eurocentric ideology, with which Africans continue to grapple without success (see Igboin, 2011). As Fanon (2008, p. 90) aptly and perceptively stated in 1952:

The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the White man. From one day to the next, the Blacks have had to deal with two systems of reference. Their metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished because they were in contradiction with a new civilisation that imposed its own.

The psychological and material ill-effects of unequal power relationships that resulted from colonisation in Ghana still linger on many years after the formal abolition of colonial rule. Today, the depiction of modern/colonial mentalities about the institution of marriage (e.g., the so-called White wedding) as an optimal expression of human nature and

love—and thus a key to personal happiness—have become part of the Ghanaian cultural and psychological experience. We use White wedding to mean a form of European marriage ceremony in which the bride wears a white flowing dress and a veil, and the groom wears a suit, couples make oral promises (oath) before a priest and congregation, and the union is sealed with a ring and/or a bible (Howard, 2006).

There is a growing body of literature on the psychological effects of colonialism on personality and behaviours of Ghanaians (Opoku & Akorli, 2009; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021), and some elements of the Ghanaian culture such as language, religion and food (Boafo et al., 2021; Edu-Buandoh, 2016; Jedwab et al., 2022). Yet, little is known about how the vestiges of colonialism affected and continue to affect minds and behaviours associated with marriage practices in colonised ecologies such as Ghana. Based on insights from cultural psychology, we examine the hidden and known influences of colonisation and colonial power relations on the minds and behaviours associated with marriage in Ghana and show the need to decolonise minds and being associated with the values, preferences and practices of marriage in Ghana. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: First, we discuss how mainstream Western psychology has influenced the approach to the study and application of psychological knowledge and praxis, and show how this has also affected minds, values, preferences and behaviours associated with marriage in Ghana. Second, we examine the institution of marriage in Ghana as a relevant site for understanding the coloniality of knowledge and being and highlight the need for a decolonial perspective to help denaturalise and disrupt White normativity and create ontological and epistemological spaces that enable ancestral ways of knowing and being to thrive. The third section explores the inferiorisation of African traditional marriage by Western colonial and meta-colonial institutions as a form of coloniality of mind and being, while the fourth section discusses White wedding as a material form of coloniality and shows how the vestiges of colonial power and modernity affect African aesthetics and material identity. We further discuss, in the fifth section, how the preference for and the valorisation of White wedding reflect a form of meta-colonialism and epistemic violence. Finally, the sixth section offers a decolonial cultural psychological perspective as a necessary catalyst for fostering the needed critical consciousness for liberating minds and being, and for repairing the ills of colonisation.

### *Decolonising Psychological Knowledge and Praxis in Ghana*

Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) became a British colony in the late nineteenth century (Gocking, 2005) and gained independence on March 6, 1957. Colonialism in Ghana, as the case in many colonised societies in Africa and elsewhere, was not only a political imposition but also a cultural one which both affected and infected institutions and ways of knowing, thinking and being of people. While colonialism, which refers to a formal relation of direct political, economic, social and cultural system of domination by the Europeans over many conquered continents within a given historical period (Quijano, 2007), has ended, coloniality, which describes ways of thinking and being associated with Eurocentric global domination, still persists long after the end of formal colonial rule (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). In colonised spaces (such as Ghana), coloniality is preserved alive in so many areas of people's quotidian experiences such as in the books they read at school, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, and in the self-image of people and their cultural institutions (see Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Western control of knowledge production, validation and dissemination in Ghana is still noticeable as 'curricular and pedagogical practices are still structured to affirm Western worldviews, culture, values and language, while the local ways of knowing have been invalidated and deprived' (Adjei & Dei, 2008, p. 140).

The current approach to the study and application of psychological knowledge in Ghana is heavily influenced by the Euro-American ontological and epistemological framework (Adjei, 2019a; Opong Asante & Opong, 2012) which fails to fully explain psychological phenomena such as marriage, from the cultural and contextual perspectives of Ghana. Consequently, the values, preferences, and ways of being and knowing explained from a Eurocentric theoretical lens limit their applicability and cultural fit (see Opong, 2016). The Ghanaian has become accustomed to Western psychological theories and practices to the extent that psychology students unreflectively question the relevance and need to include Ghanaian/African-related psychological concepts in university psychology curricula (Mate-Kole, 2013). Western psychological concepts, ideologies and practices have been applied to the Ghanaian with little attempts to understand its context-fit and cultural appropriateness. The continuous dominance of Euro-American psychology in Ghana precludes the voices and values of colonised people from being incorporated in shaping the science and practice of

psychology, dismantling scientific racism and in influencing minds and behaviours associated with marriage in post-colonial Ghana. As indicated earlier, the goal of this paper is to appropriate the values and practices of marriage as one instance to show how the colonial past and power continue to influence people's minds and behaviours in formerly colonised settings and further demonstrate the need to decolonise minds, preferences, values and behaviours associated with marriage in Ghana.

### *The Institution of Marriage in Ghana as a Site for Understanding the Coloniality of Mind and Being*

Marriage is a cultural, economic, legal and spiritual construct, the meaning of which varies across cultures and contexts. The institution of marriage reflects the historical and existential experiences and forms of knowledge and being of people in a specific cultural location. For example, contrary to the Western view of marriage as a contract between two people (Falana, 2018), which reflects the independent mentality and individualist self-ways of the West, marriage in Ghana is a union between two families represented by the groom and the bride (Adjei & Mpiani, 2018), which reflects the communitarian ethos of Africans. As in many aspects of indigenous life, there have been profound and enduring impacts of colonialism on marriage practices in Ghana. Before colonisation, marriage practices in the Gold Coast were governed by customary laws and customs (Adinkrah, 1980). Marriage rituals usually involved the gathering of the extended families of the couples and the payment of the bride price by the groom and his family to the bride's family (Adjei & Mpiani, 2018; Kyei, 1992; Nukunya, 2003). With the advent of colonisation, several indigenous customary laws and customs, including those related to marriage practices, were indiscriminately subjected to validity tests, resulting in their abolition or restraint (Adinkrah, 1980) and the supplantation by European marriage systems and culture. For example, polygyny that was a distinctive feature of Ghanaian<sup>1</sup> marriages was deemed as an obstacle to missionisation and therefore discouraged.

In line with their 'civilising' mission, European Missionaries in the Gold Coast encouraged new converts to practise monogamy as it was claimed to be sanctioned by God. Payment of bride price, which represents a material form of appreciation and love from the groom to the bride and her family (Adjei, 2019b), was also misconstrued as a

purchase of brides and subsequently discouraged (Kyei, 1992). Based on Western ways of being and knowing, the British imperialists imposed a form of marriage on the natives of the Gold Coast that reflected Euro-American ideals and psychology. For instance, the British imperial power enacted and promulgated the Marriage Ordinance Law in 1884 in the Gold Coast to alter its indigenous marriage system. This colonial imposition was meant to enable 'natives of the Gold Coast to contract marriages of the type prevailing in Western societies, although not debarring them from contracting customary law, traditional marriages' (Adinkrah, 1980, p. 1). The Marriage Ordinance Act, which has been retained in force since the independence of Ghana, was meant to change the social behaviour of Ghanaians (Adinkrah, 1980) and supplant it with Eurocentric marriage system that reflects individualist ways of being and knowing.

The Marriages Act provides three avenues through which marriage can be contracted legally: customary or traditional marriage, ordinance marriage and marriage of Mohammedan ordinance (Marriages Act, 1884–1985). Under customary and Mohammedan marriages, a man may have as many customary wives as he can, and there is no limit to the number of such marriages that can be legally registered under the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law of 1985 (PNDCL 112). However, polygyny is strictly prohibited with ordinance marriage<sup>2</sup>, which has become synonymous with White weddings or Christian marriage in contemporary Ghana. If a man in ordinance marriage goes contrary to the law and marries another woman, he commits bigamy, a misdemeanour under the Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29) of Ghana. Although customary marriage is predominant in Ghana because it is the culturally approved means of getting recognition for being married, some Ghanaians, especially Christians (being remnants of colonial missionaries) and the educated elites, prefer ordinance marriage/White wedding because of its relationship with modernity, spirituality, status and class. Most Orthodox and Pentecostal churches in Ghana, as 'appendages of colonialism', draw on biblical doctrines to reject traditional marriage practices such as polygyny while endorsing monogamy and privileging White wedding. For these churches, ordinance marriage/White wedding and monogamy are requirements for leadership positions, participation in Christian rituals (such as the holy communion or Lord's supper), and accordance with Christian burial rites (Amoo, 1946).

For Ghanaian Christians, a White wedding is no longer an option for young couples planning to share their love and lives together in holy

matrimony because it has become associated with social status and religious or spiritual significance. Some of these churches insist that couples are not fully married until the embellishments and enchantments of a White wedding take place, to the extent that these meta-colonial institutions (i.e., the churches) sometimes insist that couples who contract marriage under the customary law should hold on with consummation until after the White wedding, obviously positioning African traditional marriage and ways of being as subordinate to Euro-American ways of being and loving. Consequently, this religious injunction compels members of the church to contract both customary and ordinance marriage/White wedding, leading to what we call *double marriage*—where a customarily contracted marriage by a couple is subsequently legalised by a wedding ceremony of the same couple either at a registry office or in a church. Double marriages are expensive as couples have to contend with the expenses of two separate ceremonies: one customary and the other statutory. Given the lavish spending associated with a White wedding, some young unmarried Christians postpone marrying or decide to remain single. Apparently, marriage practices in Ghana are not nearly as homogeneous as before as some of its traditional features have either disappeared completely or been modernised/colonised, and thus becomes a relevant site for investigating the coloniality of mind and being.

Historically, the discipline of psychology has promoted and failed to challenge research and practice ‘rooted in White normativity that support the continued belief in White superiority’ (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021, p. 3). The past and present science and practice of psychology have had strong ties with Western hegemonic values and practices that accept Whiteness as a standard or norm (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021), and thus celebrate and privilege Euro-American ways of knowing, being and doing as natural, normative and progressive (Adams et al., 2012) while presenting other modes of being and knowing as marginal, unnatural and deviant (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021). One of the sites that reflects White normativity and celebrates Euro-American ways of knowing and being is marriage and loving relationships. For example, decolonial psychological perspectives from Ghana suggest that Western constructions of love prioritise companionate forms of mating and dating relationships that are ‘based on individual choice, neolocal residence and [the] preference for the company of one’s spouse or partner over family or friends’ (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021, p. 3), or the view of dating and mating relationships as the most relevant avenue for achieving adult

emotional satisfaction (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). Another manifestation of coloniality that is rooted in White normativity of intimate relationships is the psychologisation of love as a romantic or self-expression of 'feelings' and emotional intimacy rather than a 'doing' and a form of material support (Adams et al., 2012; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). Epistemic perspectives of many West African cultural ecologies promote the *materiality of love* that emphasise a conception of love as a 'doing' (Osei-Tutu et al., 2018) and a dutiful performance of caring obligations associated with relational connections and broader kinship ties (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021; Salter & Adams, 2012).

There are hidden and known influences of colonisation and colonial power relations in the generation and application of psychological knowledge because colonialism did not only inhabit territories of the colonised, but it also inhabited and continues to inhabit the minds and being of people in colonised societies. Post-colonial discourses and institutions continue to chip away at the indigenous sovereignty of colonised societies by way of their cultural practices, values and knowledge systems. Given that marriage is an institution of intimate relationship and represents the identities and ways of being of specific people in a given cultural milieu, it remains one of the relevant sites for understanding how colonialism inhabited and continues to inhabit minds and being in colonised societies. For example, in apartheid South Africa, Black families, particularly those considered as 'modern' elite, experienced and established their own social status in White-dominated spaces/settlements via wedding ceremonies (Erlank, 2014). Thus, the marriage institution and the Ghanaian preference for White wedding offers an important lens for understanding the privileging of Whiteness, and the application of psychological knowledge and practice that maintain unequal power relations and historical system(s) of domination in post-colonial settings.

### *The Inferiorisation of Ghanaian Traditional Marriage as Coloniality of Mind and Being*

Although human civilisation has been shaped and continues to be shaped by the collective history and ideas of all cultures, and the history of ideas are composed of many streams of knowledge from diverse contexts, a significant amount of historical 'perspectives from other cultures, particularly from Africa were [and continue to be] dismissed, appropriated

without acknowledgement or simply held in contempt' (Chimuka, 2012, p. 1). For far too long, Eurocentric forms of knowledge and being have been consistently portrayed as the focal point around which human civilisation revolves and paraded as a 'cultural universal towards which the other cultures of the world were supposed to develop' (Chimuka, 2012, p. 1). Through the axes of coloniality of power and the celebratory narratives associated with Euro-American forms of knowledge and being, the African traditional ways of being and indigenous knowledge systems, such as those associated with marriage, are inferiorised. The mode of contracting marriages, the rituals, practices and the customs that are performed during marriage ceremonies significantly reflect the identities, values and ways of being of the people of the cultural setting within which the practices are held. The African traditional marriage practices, which define the African identity and way of being, have been systematically threatened since the introduction of Eurocentric forms of marriage such as White wedding, and continue to suffer from the vestiges of colonial occupation of mind.

The vitiation of African knowledge and value systems and the veneration of Eurocentric values are programmatically achieved through established (post)colonial institutions such as the media, the church, and other missionary ventures. The church as a vector of modern colonialism has been effectively used to perpetuate meta-colonial narratives of civilisation, salvation and progress, which have altered the meaning of marriage and love among its followers in Ghana/Africa. For example, results of ample studies in West Africa have shown that Pentecostal Charismatic Churches encourage modern/colonial individualist self-ways such as investment in one's nuclear family at the expense of the extended family (Freeman, 2012; Van Dijk, 2013). Similarly, psychological studies in Ghana have revealed that people who attend Pentecostal Charismatic Churches tend to have a Western and individualistic view of love as a *feeling* or means to personal fulfilment rather than the African understanding of love as an act (a *doing*) shown by material care for the other (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). In the sight of the church, marriage partners are one to the exclusion of all other parties, including the exclusion of the *abusua* (extended family), and the couples take each other for better and for worse till death do them part, because no man is to put asunder what God has put together. Such proscriptive narratives of divorce by the church have been found to have negative implications for marriage, including the entrapment of women in abusive relationships (Adjei & Mpiani, 2022).

In the midst of the ever-increasing globalising society, the powerful media of the West employ mainstream psychological knowledge to systematically spread exotic values into the interior of people's bedrooms, parading them as tickets to enlightenment and the 'good life'. Africans have been cheaply acculturated and sold strange 'contentless' and 'contextless' colonial values through foreign media outlets, the result of which is the systematic erosion of traditional African values (Igboin, 2011) and ways of being. The present-day influential social media spaces and meta-colonial intellectual sites are replete with mainstream psychological narratives that glorify Western forms and practices of marriage (e.g., White wedding, individualised marriage and non-polygamous marriage) while vilifying and eroding ancestral forms of knowledge, customs and practices associated with the sacred institution of marriage in Ghanaian settings, as well as the interpretation of the African/Ghanaian social ways of being and making sense as inferior and backward. Traditional marriage has lost its true place and value in most African settings through its consistent but subtle association with a sense of inferiority by cultural imperialists' mainstream and social media platforms and sometimes supported by Africans without any conscious awareness. It is commonplace to see African couples, who go through traditional marriages, being stigmatised in some societies as such marriages are regarded as incomplete without the accompaniments of Western White wedding rituals (Krah, 2020).

Also, the contempt for African traditional marriage and the worshipful reverence for and glorification of colonial White weddings are perpetuated by colonial institutions that constantly perpetrate cultural violence for economic and social gains. For instance, most Euro-American immigration laws do not recognise African traditional marriage because it is polygamous in nature. People who apply for family visas to join their partners in Euro-American countries may be denied because the immigration laws may not recognise African traditional marriage. Unfortunately, this forces many to either opt for the European White wedding or add the embellishments of the White wedding after the traditional marriage ceremony at a high cost to the couple. These institutionalised practices that privilege Western ways of being and loving and position Western forms of marriage as acceptable 'modern' ways of loving (re)produce and reinforce a marginalising effect that perpetuates the repudiation and subordination of African value systems and ways of being and highlight the existing and enduring hierarchies of global power. The contemptuous practices of colonial and

meta-colonial institutions reflect the enduring and insidious present and past unequal power relationships that find expression in the minds of colonised subjects, and further find reflection in their ways of being and knowing by operating outside of their conscious awareness, and yet represent the long and negatively impactful history of racialised harm to persons, identities, practices and cultures of colonised settings. Thus, the inferiorisation of traditional Ghanaian marriage and its related practices by colonisers and their institutions is deeply and cleverly tied to the domination and transformation of the African way of knowing and being—the African cultural identity—and the exploitation of its resources. However, it should be noted that the inferiorisation of African traditional marriage is not entirely committed against Africans by colonisers and their institutions but is also committed by Africans against Africans due to psychological misorientation, internalisation and meta-colonialism, which we shall turn to shortly. As has been argued, Africans are themselves complicit in their denial from the intellectual space within psychology because of their lack of epistemic willpower (agency) to create a systematic body of knowledge for their needs, and thus continue to internalise and pass on their inferior sense of self-worth and state of mind to the next generation of Africans (Oppong, 2019).

### *White Wedding as a Material Form of Coloniality*

White wedding, which are originally held in churches, is primarily a Western traditional culture and marriage ritual (way of being and loving), which is believed to have its roots in the Roman Empire. It dates back to more than 2000 years when brides in the Roman Republic wore a White woven tunic to represent a woman's purity, chastity and her transition to a married Roman matron (Schoeny, 2020). The practice of White marriage dress fell out of fashion after the fall of the Roman Empire, and (re)gained popularity among Victorian-era elites after Queen Victoria wore a White lace gown (instead of traditional coronation robes) to her royal wedding with Prince Albert on February 10, 1840 (Schoeny, 2020). The wearing of White wedding attire, after Queen Victoria's marriage, became a symbol of wealth and status rather than virginity and purity as it used to represent during the Roman Empire. The Victorian/Western way of being, of marriage and loving, was largely adopted by wealthy brides across continents as women aspired to look like the young attractive queen. By the 1930s, the White wedding dress had become

rooted in the public consciousness, particularly across Europe, North America and Africa (Schoeny, 2020). It can thus be said that the ‘modern’ ways of being and practices associated with Western White wedding originated in the United Kingdom and passed down to colonised societies. In the 1890s, White weddings became more common, and by the 1930s, more Africans were married in the ‘White’ way than any other way (Erlank, 2014). In the mid-19th century, the commodification of weddings was a good income-generating business for merchants in Great Britain (Ehrman, 2011) and contributed substantially to the growing market economy, particularly to silverware merchants and jewellers in South Africa (Penner, 2004).

Marriages in Ghana, like elsewhere in Africa, are fast departing from their simple traditional focus rooted in indigenous knowledge systems and ancestral practices to more expensive Euro-American forms of White weddings, which reflect Western knowledge systems and the material culture of capitalism. Wedding in Ghana in recent times ranges in opulence—from the less elaborate ones for couples of lower socio-economic statuses to the more classic, elaborate and expensive ones for families of high social and economic status. Apparently, White wedding has become the cultural avenue for, and material forms of, colonial domination, and plunder. For example, the nuptial apparel, a White long gown, with its long loose trail sweeping the ground, for the bride, and a European suit and shirt usually with a bow tie for the groom—all of which are imported from Euro-American markets—are material forms and premise for imposing and extending colonial culture, identity and economic exploitations in formerly colonised societies. How the African contracts marriage, and the type or colour of the dress and other material forms of representation at marriage ceremonies, cannot be an insignificant matter of preference—they are reflections of one’s cultural identities and values, and ways of being and knowing. In very important ways, dress and clothing speak to identity and emphasise colonial and post-colonial power relations (Durham, 1999; Ross, 2008) and thus the preference for white dresses during White wedding represents a statement of White identity and normativity and further shows how vestiges of colonial power and modernity have affected African aesthetics and material identity. The opulence and Western material forms of representations that characterise White weddings celebrated by Ghanaians (re)create and sustain a new meta-colonial narrative of White aesthetic and thus encourage classed and racialised identities to be valorised, procured and maintained within the broader discursive practice of modernity, progress and enlightenment.

### *Valorisation of White Wedding as a Form of Meta-Colonialism and Epistemic Violence*

Until colonial domination and occupation of land and mind, and the accompanying forms of marriage, all the methods of customary marriages across African cultures were valid, complete, legitimate and not stereotyped (see Adinkrah, 1980). Colonialism and its attendant meta-colonial narratives of globalisation and modernity, and the resultant effects of assimilation, cultural imperialism, false indoctrination, and mass media manipulation threatened and continue to threaten the indigenous African knowledge systems, ways of being and practices associated with marriage. The vicious cycle of cultural and economic exploitation and epistemic violence, which started with the colonisation of African land, African being, and African mind (Oppong, 2019) by Europeans still lingers on, in a fashion described by Bulhan (2015) as *meta-colonialism*. Meta-colonialism is the constellation of socio-political, economic, cultural, and psychological systems and tendencies that come ‘*after, along with, or among* the earlier stages of colonialism’ and manifest itself and presented in ‘the more savoury euphemism of globalisation [modernity]’, but represent, reflect and even revive ‘an old system of colonial exploitation and oppression’ (Bulhan, 2015, p. 244). In another sense, meta-colonialism can be understood as the unconscious internalisation of imposed colonial values, cultural practices, and knowledge systems by the colonised, which come to form part of and define the cognitions, identities, and ways of being and doing of the colonised, long after the end of formal colonial domination. Meta-colonialism occupies and influences the self or being of the colonised in their psychological, cultural, and social existence. As Oppong (2019, p. 294) observes, ‘when the coloniser is long gone, the once colonised are maintaining the exploitative systems by their own attitudes, cognitions and actions, without realising it’.

It is important to insist that meta-colonialism reflects years of psychological misorientation and cultural violence that resulted from colonisation and meta-colonial structures. Psychological misorientation manifests itself in varied ways, including individuals’ internalised lack of agency in knowing (epistemic agency) and the tendency for people to interpret and negotiate the reality of the world based on an understanding of their own African identity as inferior, and the denial of cognition, values and attitude to prioritise their own racial identity and ways of being (Azibo, 2014). Psychological misorientation further results in what has been

referred to as *negromarchy* among African (colonised) descents—a form of confusion and doubt of self-worth among Africans due to their dependency on or the appropriation of standards and definitions of culture rooted in White American normativity (Thomas, as cited in Azibo, 2014). Consequently, meta-colonialism, psychological misorientation and negromarchy further (re)produce *epistemic violence*—a practice in psychological science research in which theoretical interpretations of empirical data directly or indirectly construct the ‘Other’ as inferior or problematic, regardless of the availability of equally viable alternative explanations of the data (Teo, 2010). Epistemic(al) violence in this sense does not ‘refer to the misuse of research in general but it is specific to theoretical interpretations of empirical results that have negative connotations for the ‘Other’ in a given community’ (Teo, 2010, p. 298).

Apparently, psychological research and practice, as currently conceptualised, has been historically appropriated to influence colonised people of African descent to think and act solely in terms of White normativity and according to the cultural and economic interests of European colonisers. Today, due to meta-colonialism and psychological misorientation, the typical Ghanaian/African has been successfully socialised to believe and accept that traditional marriage is subordinate and inferior to European White wedding, to the extent that it is gradually becoming a taboo to hold a marriage in some African societies without the inclusion of White wedding. Euro-American forms of marriage appear naturalised and normalised among many prospective couples in Ghana, to the extent that it is now as though marriage is not marriage if it is not celebrated along the lines of a European White wedding. The meta-colonial discourses are carefully and purposefully structured to affirm Western ideals of marriage and love as representing modernity and progress and as a sign of enlightenment and global citizenship. The Euro-American mind, being and practices associated with marriage, which has gained a firm foothold in Africa and continues to be transmitted to the next generation of Africans, need to be decolonised.

### *Repairing the Ill-Effects of Colonisation Associated with Marriage in Ghana: A Decolonial Perspective*

After the occupation of land, the coloniser’s way of thinking and being was foisted on the people of occupied areas. The colonial ways of being

and knowing have persisted in many African societies, including Ghana. The internalisation and intergenerational transmission of colonial forms of knowledge and being, rooted in White normativity, impact the institution of marriage in colonised settings. One way to understand the ill effects of colonial occupation of mind and being is the glorification of White wedding and the inferiorisation of African traditional marriage practices. The validation and celebration of Euro-American ways of knowing and being is a result of mainstream Western psychological science, which knowledge and practice were used to overtly and covertly encourage scientific racism and colonisation. To repair these ills, restore human dignity and celebrate diversity in knowing and being, a decolonial psychological science informed by emic perspectives of culture is required to grant equal and/or fair participatory presence and space to indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in the generation and application of psychological knowledge.

A decolonial perspective will help bring unique value to indigenous forms of knowledge and being associated with marriage and address the vestiges of unequal power relations occasioned by colonisation. Decolonisation is a quest for cultural, psychological and economic freedom for indigenous people and their practices. It is a political and epistemological movement that envisions liberating former colonised people and societies from colonial power and control (Ramugondo, 2018). Thus, the basic aim of decolonisation is to achieve indigenous sovereignty—the right and ability of indigenous people to practice self-determination over their land, cultural identity, as well as political and economic systems (Belfi & Sandiford, 2021). Decolonial perspectives on indigenous knowledge and ways of being, and on the science of psychology have a significant role in repairing the ills of colonisation, and in the reclaiming of full humanness and epistemic agency of the colonised. Decolonial psychology should not only be concentrated on the pain and anguish of colonised people or cataloguing White privileges and racial power structures that colonisation occasioned, but also, and most importantly, it should start with liberating the minds of people in colonised settings. One way to ensure decolonisation of minds associated with traditional knowledge and practices is the facilitation of critical consciousness that would serve as a catalyst for liberation and revolutionary change. Decolonial perspectives will help Africans to undo, disinvest and divest their marriage and customs from all Whiteness and vestiges of European colonialism, and to free marriage from the psychic and epistemic violence of colonisation. Also, decolonial thinking

remains one of the important vehicles for Africans themselves to recognise the urgent need for (re)telling the African (his)stories and for recognising and validating context-specific and time-honoured practices about marriage that define the Ghanaian way of being and thinking. Collective storytelling about the lived experiences of people is a culturally grounded method of communicating their values, norms and their culture to naturalise their beliefs and existential experiences. It is a decolonising way of constructing meaning and transmitting community knowledge intergenerationally—a culturally meaningful method to shift the dominant culture of psychological science and contribute to decolonising the approach to the study and application of psychological knowledge (Samuel & Ortiz, 2021).

A decolonial psychology and practice is a forward-looking path capable of creating a just, inclusive and equitable system for addressing the unequal power relationship resulting from colonisation. Decolonial perspectives on marriage in the Ghanaian cultural ecology help to illuminate how Eurocentric ‘modern’ mentalities about marriage both reflect and reproduce the racialised violence of colonial domination in marginalised communities. For example, emic and cultural psychological perspectives of Sub-Saharan African settings help illuminate how coloniality of power creates and produces coloniality of knowledge (Aiello et al., 2021), and further show how colonisers use false systems and authority of knowledge to disqualify ancestral forms of indigenous knowledge, being and practices associated with marriage in colonised societies (Poloma & Szelényi, 2019). We insist that mainstream scientific psychology is complicit in the perpetuation of the past and present unequal power relationships that resulted from colonisation, and therefore cannot be an appropriate device to dismantle the deleterious effects of cultural racism and epistemic violence. Mainstream psychological research and practice has failed to recognise that knowledge and being are contextual and culturally grounded processes shaped by the interaction of people within a given social location. A new decolonial form of psychology that is rooted in equity, diversity and inclusivity is needed to repair the ill effects of epistemic violence of colonisation and restore equal power relationships that find reflection in people’s mind and being. Decolonial perspectives on marriage and its practices help denaturalise and disrupt White normativity and Euro-American ways of knowing and being, engender epistemic agency and create ontological and epistemological spaces that enable ancestral ways of knowing and being, and validate the African indigenous knowledge systems associated with marriage.

## **Conclusion**

It is without a doubt that colonialism significantly altered the belief and cultural values of African societies. Despite the official end of colonisation and the physical absence of colonisers in colonised societies, the ways of knowing and being are still structured to affirm Western worldviews and values. In this paper, we have pulled apart and engaged in the critical examination of thoughts, preferences and values that derive from a colonial way of thinking, which is often presented as the norm and natural way of seeing and being. By psychological misorientation, internalisation and meta-colonialism, ancestral forms of knowledge and being, such as those practices associated with marriage, have been worryingly invalidated and deprived in many colonised African societies by both colonisers and Africans themselves. An epistemic perspective about the institution of marriage in Ghana helps denaturalise colonial mentalities and the Euro-American ways of being and knowing and normalises indigenous knowledge and being associated with ancestral forms of marriage and practices in colonised societies. Decolonial psychology enables, empowers and sustains emic voices and perspectives and interrogates the knowledge and praxis of culturally biased Euro-American psychology that celebrates and privileges Western values and culture. It holds mainstream Western psychology to account and calls for the reworking, reconstituting and rethinking of what counts as valid knowledge and ways of being.

Cultural psychological perspectives from Ghana contribute to the collective intellectual effort at ensuring that Sub-Sahara Africans make the conscious effort to unlearn and revoke all internalised sense of White normativity and Euro-American ways of knowing and being that are rooted in colonisation. The decolonial view empowers critical consciousness in colonised people in Africa and revives their collective strength to 'assert their right and power of self-definition—of categorising and classifying the world and the nature of their being in it ... in ways which make their minds and bodies humanitarian instruments of African power and liberation' (Wilson, 1993, p. 119). Consistent with the pursuit of decolonisation of mind and being, we suggest a form of marriage that reflects the customs, values, existential and psychological experiences of Ghanaians, as well as the African communitarian ethos and praxis, which view marriage as a site for establishing and expanding kinship ties with the members of the families of the bride and the groom. It is important for the science of psychology to embrace the conceptions, beliefs and

practices of marriage inherent in the local culture of Ghana as valid forms of knowing and being.

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### **Notes**

1. Though we are aware of the rich diversity of African cultural heritage and the observable variations in African values, customs and practices associated with marriage ceremonies, we use ‘Ghanaian’ and/or ‘African traditional marriage’ to decidedly emphasise those aspects of African cultures and marriage practices that share similar basic underlying assumptions and history.
2. Marriage under the ordinance is a civil union available to any Ghanaian, and therefore, it is supposed to be an entirely secular and non-religious (Christian) marriage. However, there are some confusion regarding its secular nature as many Ghanaians, particularly Christians, tend to regard ordinance marriages as Christian marriages celebrated by European White weddings. This confusion may be partly due to the fact that most ordinance marriages end up in Christian Churches and are often celebrated by and in the presence of a Marriage Officer who will usually be a minister of a Christian religious body who has been duly licenced and gazetted to perform marriages.

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