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# Exploring Ideological Constructions in Contemporary Ghanaian Weddings: A Critical Theory Perspective

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## Abstract

Traditionally, Ghanaian weddings functioned as modest, communal rites of passage that reinforced kinship solidarity, spirituality, and collective responsibility. In the past two decades, however, they have been reconfigured into elaborate, highly commercialisesed spectacles. This study critically examines this transformation through a Marxist theory of ideology, with particular attention to commodity fetishism, the culture industry, and Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). The study's primary objective is to explore how dominant capitalist ideologies are constructed, performed, and legitimisesed in contemporary Ghanaian weddings. Specific objectives are (1) to investigate how class distinctions and social status are performed and reproduced through wedding practices. The study adopts a qualitative critical inquiry grounded in systematic non-participant observation of contemporary wedding ceremonies in urban Ghana, complemented by critical discourse analysis of wedding-related media representations and secondary literature. The Marxist Ideological Critique was used to analyse the data thematically. Findings show that combining traditional symbols (such as kente, knocking rites, and bride price) with modern luxury aesthetics (designer branding, professionalisesed planning, and curated social media performance) facilitates the commodification of culture. Wedding consumption operates as conspicuous display and sign-value, masking labour relations and naturalizing economic inequality. In this way, the contemporary Ghanaian wedding functions as an ideological apparatus that reproduces class hegemony, legitimiseses elite status, and engenders a form of false consciousness that equates material expenditure with moral and social legitimacy. The study contributes to critical cultural studies in postcolonial Africa by moving beyond descriptive anthropology to theorisese weddings as sites of ideological labour and capitalist reproduction.

**Keywords:** Ghanaian Weddings, Ideology, Marxist Theory, Commodification, Class Distinction, Commodity Fetishism, Ideological State Apparatus, Culture Industry

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## INTRODUCTION

Marriage ceremonies occupy a central place in Ghanaian socio-cultural life, symbolizing not only the union of individuals but also the integration of families, kinship groups, and communities. Traditionally, Ghanaian weddings were modest communal affairs grounded in custom, spirituality, and social responsibility. However, contemporary Ghanaian weddings have undergone significant transformation, becoming increasingly elaborate, commercialisesed, and performative.

In the last two decades, the wedding industry in Ghana has undergone a radical transformation. What was once a kinship-based ceremony (the Awadie) has morphed into a high-stakes performance of wealth and social status. This shift occurs within a broader neoliberal context where personal milestones are increasingly mediated by market forces. As noted by Alhassan and Kwakwa (2023), African marital practices are negotiating a convergence toward shared global practices influenced by digital culture and postmodernism.

The rise of luxury weddings, destination ceremonies, expensive bridal fashion, professional photography, themed décor, and extensive social media coverage reflects broader socio-economic and ideological shifts in Ghanaian society. Weddings have become highly visible public spectacles through which wealth, status, taste, and modernity are displayed and contested.

While many scholars have examined weddings from anthropological, cultural, and gender perspectives, limited attention has been paid to weddings as ideological sites that reproduce dominant capitalist and class structures. This paper addresses this gap by critically examining contemporary Ghanaian weddings through Marxist theory of ideology, arguing that weddings function as cultural apparatuses through which capitalist ideology, class distinction, and hegemonic social values normalisesed and reproduced.

### Rationale for the study

Contemporary Ghanaian weddings have become increasingly expensive and socially competitive, often imposing financial strain on couples and families. Despite this, extravagant wedding performances continue to be normalisesed and celebrated. This paradox raises critical questions regarding the ideological functions of weddings in contemporary Ghanaian society.

The study is significant because it:

- Contributes to the growing literature on African cultural practices from a critical theory perspective.
- Offers insight into how capitalist ideology permeates cultural institutions in postcolonial African societies.
- Examines weddings as mechanisms for reproducing social inequalities and hegemonic values.
- Provides a critical lens for understanding the commodification of intimate cultural rituals.

There remains a significant dearth of critical scholarly interrogation on the economic power dynamics and ideological labor inherent in these ceremonies.

The necessity of this study is based in three primary observations:

**The Institutionalization of Class**

As marriage increasingly shifts from a universal social expectation to a "middle-class institution" (Hunter, 2010), the wedding ceremony functions as a gatekeeper of social status. In Ghana, the "inflation" of the bride price and the professionalization of wedding planning suggest that the ability to marry is now inextricably linked to one's access to capital. This study seeks to understand how weddings serve as a "theatre of class" (Ethnology, 2026), where participants do not merely celebrate a union but actively negotiate their position within the national class hierarchy**.**

**Commodification of the Tradition**

There is a paradoxical trend where Traditional Rites are being rebranded as Luxury Commodities. By applying a Marxist lens, this research investigates how the commodity fetishism of indigenous symbols - such as handcrafted Kente or customisesed "knocking" gifts (Eti nsa) - serves to mask the underlying economic exploitation within the wedding industry. This research addresses the gap in "class-based transformations" of African weddings, moving beyond descriptive anthropology toward a critical analysis of how neoliberal ideologies infiltrate cultural identity (Alhassan & Kwakwa, 2023).

**Ideological Reproduction**

Weddings in Ghana today often function as Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1971), socialisesed environments where the necessity of wealth and the naturalization of social stratification are taught to the masses through spectacle. Without a critical investigation, these ceremonies risk being viewed as merely celebratory, ignoring their role in reproducing the hegemony of the Ghanaian elite. This study is therefore essential to deconstruct how the Modern Ghanaian Wedding creates a false consciousness that equates material expenditure with moral and social blessing.

**Objectives of the Study**

**Main Objective**

To explore the ideological constructions embedded in contemporary Ghanaian weddings using Marxist theory of ideology.

Specific Objectives.

1. To investigate how class distinctions and social status are performed and reproduced through wedding ceremonies.

2. To analysese the ideological meanings attached to gender roles in Ghanaian weddings.

**Research Questions**

1. In what ways do wedding practices reproduce social class distinctions and status performance?

2. How are gendered ideological expectations constructed and reinforced in Ghanaian weddings?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher review literature in three Thematic Framework

### *The Culture Industry and the Standardization of Joy*

The primary theoretical foundation rests on Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944) concept of the Culture Industry. They argued that, mass produced culture creates standardisesed experiences that pass as authentic while serving commercial interest. In addition, they asserted that in capitalist society, culture is no longer an expression of the people but a product designed for their consumption. In the Ghanaian context, this is evident in the "standardization" of weddings. Whether in Cape Coast, Accra or Kumasi, the "menu" of a wedding from the drone photography to the cocktail hour follows a rigid, Westernisesed template. Hesmondhalgh (2013) emphasiseses that culture industries do not erase local meaning but reconfigure it through professionalization and aesthetic norms.

Anthropological work on Ghanaian marriages show wedding has long been public, perfomative event that shows status, kinship tie and modernity (Clark, 1994: van der Geest, 2000). Nukunya (2003) added that traditionally, engagement or knocking ceremonies were community centered with localisesed variations by ethnic group. Ethnographic work cautions against a totalizing Adorno-style reading (Greverus, 2007). Coe (2014) shows couples actively remix industry scripts with lineage-specific customs to assert "Abusuapanyin's" authority and Christian modernity simultaneously. Similarly, Shipley (2013) argues that Ghanaian hiplife culture creates space for playful subversion of formal wedding aesthetics. Scholars suggests that this standardization serves to make the masses more predictable and easier to market to (Marcuse, 1964).

Joy is standardised and contested. The industry supplies the template, but families negotiate which elements to buy, omit, re-indigenise, or reshaped. Budget constraints also fragment the standard such as platinum package in "East Legon", verse "DIY remix" in Madina, both reference the same ideal. The researcher observed that most studies focused on Accra/ Kumasi elites or media representations.

### *Commodity Fetishism and the "Sign-Value" of Kente*

Marx (1867/1990) famously described Commodity Fetishism as the process where the social character of labor is disguised as an inherent quality of a product. The theory again argues that, under capitalism, social relations between people take on the illusory form of relations between things. The commodity conceals the labor process and exploitation behind it, appearing instead as an autonomous object with intrinsic value. Baudrillard (1981) builds on Marx too argue that in the late capitalism, commodities operate less through use-value and more through sign-value, the cultural meanings and statues attached to objects. Consumption becomes a system of sign where goods communicate identity, class and taste.

In traditional Ghanaian society, kente cloth was a medium of communication, with specific patterns representing proverbs or royal lineages (Anyidoho, 2014). Kente cloth, historically widen by Asante and Ewe artisans, were embedded in chieftaincy and ritual economies where it value derived from symbolism, lineage and labor time (Ross, 1998). Each pattern carried proverbial meanings, and cloth circulation reinforced kinship obligation and political authority (Nukunya, 2003). However, modern literature notes a shift: the value of the cloth is now tied to its brand or designer. As Veblen (1899) noted in his theory of Conspicuous Consumption,

the elite use these commodities not for their utility, but to signal their distance from manual labor and the working class. Boateng (2011) works looks at the modifications that kente has gone through; from machine-printed kente sold in "Makola Market" and diaspora shops detaches the textile from weaver labor and ritual context. Within Ghana's wedding industries, kente accrues heightened sign-value. It is deployed as a mandatory aesthetic in engagement ceremonies, bridal photo-shoots, media posts to signal authenticity, heritage and upward mobility (Coe, 2014: Shipley, 2013).

The culture industry packages kente as tradition but the tradition itself becomes a standardised commodity that must be purchased to perform legitimate Ghanaian identity. Ideology operate by making this market mediation seem natural: real wedding must have kente. The fetish conceal both the weaver's labor and the commercial apparatus of planners, decorators, and influencers who profit from standardizing joy (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002). Ethnographic work shows this fetishism is not total. Hand-woven kente retains prestige among elites precisely because of its labor content, creating a two-tier market (Ross, 1998). Some couples and weavers actively contest mass-produced prints by invoking narratives of authenticity and supporting Bonwire cooperatives (Kraamer, 2006).

The researcher notes that, kente embodies a dual fetishism: it masks labor and it functions as a sign in an ideological system that equates cultural belonging with consumption. The standardization of joy in weddings depends on this dual move, commodifying both the object and its meaning.

***The Digital Panopticon and Hegemonic Masculinity/Femininity***

Gramsci's (1971) theory of Hegemony explains how the ruling class maintains power through consent rather than force. Marxist theory of ideology posits that the ruling ideas of an epoch are the ideas of it ruling class (Marx & Engels, 1970). Ideology operates not merely through false consciousness but through material practices that organise everyday life (Althusser, 1971). Foucault's (1977) panopticon extends this: that power works through self-surveillance rather than direct coercion. The panoptic schema induces subjects to internalise norms because they might be watched. In digital contexts, this becomes the "digital panopticon" - social media, data tracking, and algorithmic visibility create a condition of permanent potential observation (Lyon, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Hegemonic masculinity is culturally ascendant, requiring men to embody dominance, competitiveness, and emotional control, while emphasised femininity centers compliance, desirability, and nurturing (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These are not static traits but relational, historically specific ideals maintained through institutional and cultural consent.

Studies of Ghanaian and global digital cultures show how platforms reward hegemonic masculine scripts - *financial bravado, sexual conquest, and entrepreneurial hustle* - through visibility and monetization (Dery, 2021; Light, 2013). Fitness influencers, "alpha male" podcasts, and wedding MCs perform dominance for the camera, knowing metrics penalise vulnerability. The panoptic gase of followers and algorithms compels continuous self-optimization, framing masculine worth as metricised productivity (Gill, 2017).

Emphasised femininity is similarly intensified. On Instagram and TikTok, Ghanaian brides, beauty influencers, and lifestyle creators are pressured to perform docility, beauty labor, and aspirational consumption - what Banet-Weiser (2018) calls "popular feminism" that is safe for capitalism. The digital panopticon demands perpetual aesthetic readiness: ring-light intimacy, curated "wifey" aesthetics, and affective displays of joy at weddings (Dosekun, 2015).

Deviations risk trolling or algorithmic invisibility, enforcing consent to patriarchal codes (Marwick, 2013).

In the 21st century, this consent is manufactured on social media. Platforms like Instagram act as a digital panopticon where couples are constantly watched and judged. Recent African communication scholarship (e.g., Boateng, 2020) suggests that "Viral Weddings" create a "hegemonic ideal." This ideal dictates that a "good" man is one who can provide a luxury spectacle, and a "virtuous" woman is one who can curate a perfect aesthetic, further entrenching gender roles within the capitalist framework.

***The Alienation of the Post-Colonial Subject***

Fanon (2004) argued that colonialism produces a "psycho-existential complex" in which the colonised are alienated from their bodies, language, and history. The colonised subject is forced to internalise the coloniser's gase, creating a split consciousness that is neither fully indigenous nor fully assimilated. Rodney (1972) framed underdevelopment as structural alienation: African societies were integrated into the world economy as suppliers of raw materials and labor, while control over production, pricing, and cultural value remained in Europe. After independence, colonial ideological apparatuses were often retained and indigenised. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) contends that language is the central vehicle of alienation: the imposition of English, French, or Portuguese in schools and bureaucracy disconnects Africans from their "mental universe." The child learns to see the world through a foreign epistemology, devaluing local knowledge systems. Education, law and media continue to query the post-colonial subject as "developing," "modernizing," or "globalizing" - terms that presuppose a deficit relative to the West (Mbembe, 2001).

The researcher looks at the Alienation of the Ghanaian subject. Fanon (1952) discussed the "Black Skin, White Masks" phenomenon, which can be applied to the White Wedding in Ghana. In Ghana, this appears in the wedding and creative industries. Kente, hiplife, and Ghana weddings aesthetics circulate globally as signs of African authenticity, yet the profits accrue to intermediaries and platforms (Boateng, 2011; Shipley, 2013). The subject is alienated from both the material product and the meaning of culture, which is repackaged as a standardised commodity for global consumption (Fair, 2018). Banet-Weiser (2018) calls this the economy of visibility, where empowerment is equated with being seen, even as the terms of visibility are set elsewhere. The insistence on Victorian-style gowns in 30°C heat is a classic example of ideological alienation. The bearer does not feel comfortable yet for the sake of public spectacle needs to bear the pain. The couple is alienated from their physical environment and their cultural roots in favor of an imported ideology of "modernity" that is inherently tied to Western capital.

Alienation is not absolute. Post-colonial subjects negotiate, re-appropriate, and indigenise imposed forms. Market Women Trading Networks (Clark, 1994), Bonwire Weaving Cooperatives (Kraamer, 2006), and Sankofa Cultural Movements all re-embed production in social relations that resist full commodification.

Yet Marxist critique maintains that without transforming ownership of the means of production that is land, factories, data centers, platforms, ideological resistance cannot abolish alienation (Amin, 1974).

Most studies focus on Accra elites or media representations. Less is known about:

1. How standardization travels to secondary cities and rural towns
2. How vendors themselves understand “joy” as a deliverable product
3. The role of digital content creators in setting temporal scripts for emotion

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the symbolic, ideological, and socio-cultural meanings embedded in contemporary Ghanaian wedding practices. The researcher uses qualitative design because it seeks interpretive understanding rather than statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The researcher adopts a Qualitative Research Design rooted in the Critical theory Paradigm. Unlike traditional ethnography, which seeks to describe culture, a critical qualitative approach aims to unmask the hegemony and the power imbalances inherent in social practices (Tyson, 2015). The researcher is using Structured Observation to be able to bypass the social desirability bias often found in interviews, where participants might downplay their economic motives on the material reality of the event.

### Site Selection and Sampling

Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected three wedding ceremonies (n=3) held between March to April 2026 in the Cape Coast and Winneba Metropolitan in the Central Region. These sites were chosen because they represent epicenters of the region’s wedding industries. To ensure a comparative analysis of class ideology, the ceremonies spanned a spectrum of economic scale: One High-Ranked wedding, Average-Ranked and Low-Rank wedding in Cape Coast and Winneba in Central Region, Ghana.

### Data Collection Instruments

The researcher’s primary instrument was a structured Observation Guide designed to capture Artifacts of Ideology. Observations were documented using thick description (Geertz, 1973), a method that moves beyond superficial reporting to capture the social semiotics of an action. Following the framework established by Kalmijn (2026), the observation focused on:

***Spatial Mapping***: The physical configuration of the venue (e.g., the distance between the bridal dais and the guests, and the segregation of VIP sections).

***Performative Labor***: The visibility and conduct of service workers (caterers, security, and ushers) whose labor is often "rendered invisible" to maintain the illusion of effortless luxury for the ruling class.

***Commodity Displays***: The branding of the dowry (engagement gifts) and the presence of corporate sponsors or luxury brand logos.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through direct observation of three contemporary Ghanaian weddings held in Cape Coast and Winneba between March and April 2026. Weddings were purposively

selected based on visibility, scale, and accessibility. The researcher occupied the role of a "Participant-as-Observer." While attending as an invited or permitted guest to maintain the naturalism of the setting, the researcher maintained a Reflexive Journal to document personal biases and the emotional labor of the participants. Data was recorded through jotted field notes during the event, which were expanded into full narrative transcripts within 24 hours to ensure evaluative rigor (Ethnology, 2026).

**Observation focused on:**

- Venue selection and decoration
- Bridal and groom attire
- Gift exchange practices
- Bridal entourage performance
- Wedding procession and ritual sequencing
- Food and hospitality arrangements
- Media documentation/social media performance
- Guest behavior and class markers

Field notes were recorded during and immediately after each ceremony. Supplementary observational data were obtained from publicly available wedding videos and photographs shared on social media platforms. The researcher summaries the wedding process into location, vignette, aesthetic, ritual and vibe that each observed ceremony comes with it.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using thematic analysis informed by critical discourse and ideological critique. Emerging themes were coded and interpreted through Marxist ideological concepts such as: commodification, false consciousness hegemony, and ideological reproduction.

**Ethical Consideration**

Observation relied primarily on publicly accessible ceremonies and publicly shared wedding media. Confidentiality and anonymity of observed participants were maintained by excluding identifying information. All identifying details of the couples were anonymised to adhere to ethical standards regarding the privacy of private social functions.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARXIST THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

### *Commodity fetishism and Exchange Value*

The study utilises Karl Marx's (1867/1990) theory of commodity Fetishism. In a capital framework, social relationships between people are often obscured and replaced by relationship between things. In the Ghanaian wedding industries,the "fetishisation" of wedding artifacts such as customised/designer kente cloth, classified décor, expensive luxury cars and tiered cake, bestow these objects with a mystical social power.

This transformation shifts the focus of the wedding from its **use value** (the creation of social and kinship bond) to exchange value (the social status and market price of event). When human relationships are gauged by the quality of the engagement list or the cost of the reception buffet, the ceremony becomes a collection of commodities. This fetishism masks the underlying economic reality: that these displays are often funded through debt or exploitative wealth, yet they appear to the public as symbols of inherent social grace or favor (Bourdieu, 1984).

***Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Interpellation***

Louis Althusser's (1971) concept of Ideological State apparatuses (ISA) is the center of this study. Althusser argues that power is maintained not only through force (the use of the police or military) but through cultural institutions like the family, the church and the social rituals. Contemporary Ghanaian weddings function as a potent ISA by interpellation or hailing the participants into specific roles. Through the spectacle of the ceremony, individuals are questioned as consumer –subjects. The ritual convinces the couple and the guest that their social value is directly proportional to their ability to participate in high-end consumption weddings. Tyson (2015) asserted that ideology is most effective when it is masked as common sense or tradition; that is by framing extravagant spending as honor or blessing; the ISA of the wedding ensures the reproduction of capitalist relations of production under the guise of cultural heritage.

***False Consciousness and social hegemony***

Ultimately, these ideological constructions produce what Engels called false Consciousness: a condition where the oppressed (the working and aspiring middle classes) adopt the ideologies of the ruling class to their own detriment. By aspiring to celebrity-style weddings, the Ghanaian proletariat and the middle class participate in a system that reinforces their economic subjugation, as they prioritise capital-intensive displays over sustainable wealth accumulation (Marx, 1990).

This researcher used these theories to deconstruct how the glamour of the Ghanaian wedding serves the interest of the local and global bourgeoisie.

This framework deconstructs how Ghanaian weddings serve as ideological performances that legitimise capitalist consumerism and class inequality. The following ethnographic vignettes capture the distinct material and social textures of weddings in Ghana's Central Region, specifically focusing on the intersection of class, location, and tradition.

**The High-Ranked Wedding: The Royal Standard (The Theater of Prestige)**

**Location:** Ridge, Cape Coast (Private Oceanfront Estate)

**The Vignette/Scene**: The air is thick with the scent of imported lilies and the rhythmic crash of the Atlantic. Here, the wedding functions as a high-stakes performance of wealth. The bride emerges in a gown that exemplifies ideological alienation a heavy, Victorian-style lace ensemble worn in 30°C heat. Despite the physical discomfort, the public spectacle takes precedence. Her Kente is not merely fabric; it is a luxury commodity, hand-woven with silken threads to signal a distance from manual labor. Every movement is choreographed for the "digital panopticon". A team of five professional photographers and drone pilots ensures the ceremony is ready for viral status, reinforcing the hegemonic ideal that a good man is a provider of luxury spectacles. The guest list, a curated collection of the Ghanaian elite, participates in

this Ideological State Apparatus, naturalizing economic inequality through a display of sheer material excess.

**The Aesthetics**: The decor is minimalist luxury. Instead of standard plastic chairs, there are velvet-cushioned ghost chairs. The couple wears hand-woven Kente of the highest grade (silken threads, intricate patterns like Adwinasa), tailored into contemporary silhouettes.

**The Ritual:** The Traditional Wedding is a choreographed performance. The Okyeame (linguist) for both sides speaks in high-flown Fante proverbs. The dowry is presented in leather trunks not just items, but luxury perfumes, high-end wax prints (Vlisco), and gold jewelry.

**The Vibe**: Reserved, punctual, and highly curated. Live jazz plays softly before the highlife band takes over.

**The Average-Ranked Wedding: The Standardised Celebration (The Community Celebration)**

**Location:** University of Cape Coast (UCC) North Campus / Senior Common Room

**The Vignette/Scene:** This ceremony represents the middle-class institution where marriage acts as a gatekeeper of social status. The decor follows a rigid, westernised template. While the couple cannot afford the beachfront estate, they employ a professionalised wedding planner to ensure their standardised joy mirrors the elite ideal. The "commodity fetishism" of the Eti nsa (knocking gifts) is evident; the items are branded and displayed not for their use-value, but for their sign-value - communicating taste and upward mobility to the gathered colleagues and kin. The couple experiences a split consciousness, negotiating between "Abusuapanyin's" authority and the demands of "Christian modernity". The reception is a theatre of class, where participants negotiate their position within the national hierarchy over takeaway packs of Jollof rice.

**The Aesthetics:** The color scheme is vibrant (often teal and gold or peach and cream). Satin fabrics drape the walls, and the Wedding Arch is the primary photo op. The couple wears a mix of high-quality Kente for the morning and a white gown/tuxedo for the afternoon church service.

**The Ritual:** This is the quintessential White Wedding transition. After a formal service at a Methodist or Catholic Church, the reception features a popular MC who keeps the crowd laughing with marriage advice jokes.

**The Vibe**: Joyfully chaotic. The guest list of 200 somehow becomes 350 as neighbors and distant cousins join. The food is the star jollof rice, fried fish, and tatale served in takeaway packs.

**The Low-Ranked Wedding: The Street Intersection**

**Location:** Winneba (Near the Masquerade Grounds / Low-income residential area)

**The Vignette/Scene:** This is a grassroots celebration. In a narrow street blocked off by rented blue-and-yellow canopies, the Culture Industry still makes its mark through a "Do-It-Yourself (DIY) remix". The couple wears Kente that is mixed-thread or high quality print a standardised commodity that masks the lack of access to authentic weaver labor. Although the setting is communal, the influence of neoliberal ideologies is present. The music is a high-volume

"Hiplife" mix, which Shipley (2013) notes allows for a playful subversion of formal aesthetics, yet the pressure of social media visibility remains. Even here, the “digital panopticon” persists as guests’ live-stream the dancing on TikTok, seeking metricised productivity through likes and views. This ceremony reflects a “false consciousness” where, despite financial strain, the family equates material expenditure with moral and social blessing.

**The Aesthetics**: The decor is functional. Ribbons are tied to the backs of chairs, and the couple’s throne is a pair of ornate, locally carved wooden chairs on a small platform. The Kente used here is often mixed or a high-quality print rather than the heavy silken hand-woven variety.

**The Ritual:** The focus is on participation. The knocking (introduction) and the wedding happen in quick succession. Family members are deeply involved in the cooking, stirring massive pots of banku and soup over charcoal fires behind the tents.

**The Vibe:** High energy and communal. There is no guest list if you can hear the music you are welcome. The dancing is competitive and spirited, often involving the famous Winneba Fancy Dress (Masquerade) influence if the wedding falls near festival season.

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

### Analysis

### Weddings as Commodification of Love and Intimacy

Observation reveals that contemporary Ghanaian weddings increasingly commodify intimate relationships through expensive material displays. Love is represented through the market value of wedding production—venue aesthetics, bridal couture, décor, catering, and videography.

The "Traditional Wedding" (Awadie) has undergone a process of radical commodification. Once a private family meeting focused on the "use-value" of kinship and social bonding, it has been transformed into a branded luxury product. The professionalization of the dowry—often displayed in customised trunks with designer labels—demonstrates Commodity Fetishism (Marx, 1867/1990). The social acceptance of the union is no longer "inherited" through lineage or character but is increasingly "purchased" through the display of capital. This shift suggests that in contemporary Ghana, the legitimacy of a marriage is validated not by the community’s blessing, but by the market value of the ceremony’s execution (Alhassan & Kwakwa, 2023).

The commercialization of wedding planning transforms marriage into a commodified spectacle in which emotional value becomes inseparable from monetary expenditure. Couples often equate the success of a wedding with the scale of financial investment.

This reflects capitalist ideology by positioning consumption as the primary means of expressing affection, commitment, and social worth.

### Weddings as Performance of Class Distinction

Wedding ceremonies operate as sites for public performance of wealth and class status. Luxury venues, imported fashion, elite guest lists, and extravagant décor communicate socio-economic position.

Observation suggests that weddings have become competitive displays where families and couples seek symbolic prestige through conspicuous consumption. The data gathered from the three observed ceremonies reveals a consistent pattern of Spatial Stratification that transcends mere logistics. The physical layout of modern Ghanaian wedding venues - specifically the cordoning off of "VVIP" lounges equipped with premium catering and air-conditioning, separated from the "general" seating of ordinary guests - materialises a rigid class hierarchy. This physical segregation mirrors Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "Distinction", where the elite use refined taste and exclusive access to distance themselves from the masses. In a Marxist sense, this is the spatial representation of the Bourgeoisie asserting dominance over the Proletariat within a communal setting. By making the elite visible yet inaccessible, the wedding functions as a theater that naturalises the existence of a ruling class (Pauli 2011).

Borrowing from Marxist analysis, such performances reinforce class stratification by normalizing wealth-based social hierarchy and legitimizing inequality through celebration.

**Socio-Economic Effects on Prospective Future Couples**

The ideological construction of the perfect wedding creates a profound False Consciousness among prospective couples. As elite weddings are broadcast via digital platforms, they establish a hegemonic standard that working-class and middle-class couples feel compelled to mimic. This leads to several critical socio-economic consequences:

***Debt-Financed Social Status***: Future couples increasingly resort to high-interest loans to fund "performative" weddings, prioritizing exchange value over their own long-term economic stability (Kalmijn, 2026). This sometimes burdens the new couples after the wedding and other financial challenges. Families take loans to meet new norms of decent weddings, redirecting resources from education, health or business (Boateng, 2011). Debt isolates household, couples, families instead of binding them. Families that take loans to fund decent wedding mostly suffer when repayment starts during the fragile first seven years of marriage.

***The Postponement of Marriage:*** For those unable to meet the rising Capital Entry Requirements of a branded wedding, marriage is often delayed or avoided, leading to what Hunter (2010) identifies as the transformation of marriage into an exclusive middle-class institution. Some prospective couples who cannot finance contemporary wedding decides to do court marriage instead. So many are single not because they have not found suitors rather the capital intensity of wedding is what is holding them back.

***Erosion of Communal Solidarity***: As weddings become competitive displays of individual wealth, the traditional African value of communal support is replaced by a neoliberal ethos of "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1899). The erosion is not total. Many families still mobilise "silver-collections", church groups support, friends' committees etc. which help the couple to achieve the standards that society desires. In the absences of these supports, if couple are not able to meet the existing demand of a contemporary wedding, they become social spectacle of mockery among peers.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that contemporary Ghanaian weddings function as ideological institutions through which capitalist consumerism, class distinction, patriarchal gender norms, and hegemonic social expectations are reproduced and normalised.

Rather than merely serving as cultural rites of passage, weddings have become performative spectacles deeply embedded in capitalist and ideological structures. Through commodification, conspicuous consumption, and digital spectacle, contemporary Ghanaian weddings reproduce dominant socio-economic relations while masking these processes as tradition, celebration, and cultural authenticity.

The findings underscore the need for critical interrogation of seemingly celebratory cultural practices and their role in sustaining broader systems of inequality and ideological domination in contemporary Ghanaian society.

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