Original Research

AGENTS AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CELEBRATION OF PARALLEL MARRIAGE CEREMONIES IN WINNEBA TOWNSHIP IN THE EFUTU MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the various agents that influence the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies and their associated challenges in Winneba Township in the Efutu Municipality of Ghana. The interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative approach was employed for the study. The research design used for the study was a case study. The targeted population for the study were married people who performed parallel marriage ceremonies, adults who have reached their marital age but are not married, parents, opinion leaders (pastors) and marriage counsellors. In all, fifteen individuals were involved in the study. This consists of five (5) married individuals who performed parallel marriage ceremonies, four (4) unmarried individuals who have reached their marital age but are not married, two (2) opinion leaders, two (2) parents and two (2) marriage counsellors. The purposive sampling technique was used to select all the participants. The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. It was revealed that the challenges associated with the parallel marriage ceremonies were linked to three key agents. The agents are the church, the family, and the society. It was also revealed that almost all the participants alluded to the huge financial burden on couples who perform parallel marriage ceremonies. It is therefore recommended that the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) collaborate with the National Christian Council to sensitise the church, the family and the general society through the media to understand the dangers they pose to the would-be couples when they indirectly force them to perform parallel ceremonies.

Keywords: Celebration, Challenges, Marriage, Parallel Marriage, Marriage Ceremonies

INTRODUCTION

It is highly believed that "The survival of society depends on the process of biological reproduction" (Cabej, 2019). Population is the foundation of all social structures. "Marriage has several benefits for society. For example, it is seen as a legitimate source of procreation

and populates communities for social interaction and cohesion" (Ameyaw, Dankwa, & Eshun, 2023, p. 37). The marriage institution can primarily facilitate it. Marriage is a universally used word which means the joining together of two or more individuals. Marriage is any union in which the couple has gone through all the procedures recognised in society for sexual intercourse, the raising of a family, or companionship (Nukunya, 2003). Also, "marriage is a state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as a husband or a wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognised by law" (Nagpal, 2011). In this same wavelength, Encyclopedia Britannica (2020), sees marriage "as a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, laws and rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes regulate that." Nukunya (2003) states, "Marriage is the recognised institution for the establishment and maintenance of family life all over the world." "Marriage is a fundamental element of society and a source of life for the family, as well as a means for society to spread and maintain itself" (Ankrah, 2017; Sheikh, Rehman, & Naz., 2013). Also, "marriage is one of the universal social institutions established to control and regulate the life of mankind" (Sheikh et al., 2013). Sheikh et al. (2013) emphasised that aside from the other reasons influencing people to marry, the institution is biologically based on family formation. This has been the greatest wish of most young adults (men and women) who have reached puberty.

The history of marriage is as complex and varied as the history of the emergence of societies and cultures, with its meaning having changed and morphed as generations go by. According to Onuorah (2013), marriage is an essential aspect of human life because it is the foundation of society. To Marripedia (2006), "all other relationships in society stem from the father-mother relationship, and these other relationships thrive most if that father-mother relationship is simultaneously a close and closed husband-wife relationship. Marriage is the bedrock of every society." Hahn (2020) asserted that marriage and the family are seen as the building blocks of a society. Marriage is, therefore, very significant in the build-up or development of every society (Belcher, Claus, Davel, & Joneset, 2021). Marriage is an institution established by God. According to Munroe (2004), God did not initiate the human race by putting a parent and child in the Garden of Eden. He put Adam and Eve there as husband and wife. That shows that the primary human relationship, the family, is between husband and wife, and they are the key to every other relationship.

More so, marriage is regarded as any union in which the couple has gone through all the procedures recognised in society for sexual intercourse, the raising of a family or companionship (Nukunya, 2003). Again, the author stressed that in the cultural setting of our society, marriage union is only recognised when the two individuals (a man and a woman) have successfully gone through all the rules or customs sanctioned by the society. Cultural ideals continue to shape the conception of marriage. The distinctiveness of the marriage as an institution has brought on board several legal notions in the contracting process.

According to Owurasah (2015), "Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in an adult's life. These ceremonies have gotten much attention in various societies because of how the societies cherish marriage. This is because marriage occurs in all eras of history. In all cultures," Every culture seems to have its theories about the origin of marriage and how it is celebrated. For instance, China Travel Discovery (2005) stated that "in China, the story about the origin of marriage is centred on the marriage of Nuwa and Fu Xi, who were once sisters and brothers respectively. The story tells about how

they invented marriage procedures to guide subsequent marriage celebrations after they have gotten married. It was said that the use of fans by the women in China during their marriage ceremony was done by the Nuwa to cover her blushing face to hide her shyness." Every cultural set may have several mythical stories concerning their marriage ceremonies, which the people of Africa cannot be exempted from.

Iles and Roberts (2012) asserted that despite the historical existence of Christianity among this race, marriage ethics in many African societies can be traced back to Christianity. The world view or perspective of many cultures, ethnic groups or individuals concerning marriage and its celebration or contraction differ from one to another (Owurasah, 2015). In Ghana, the customs involved in contracting or celebrating marriage differ from one ethnic group to another (Nukunya, 2003). The Akans, Ga-Adangbes, Gonjas and Ewes have differences in how their marriages are contracted or celebrated (Nukunya, 2003). This makes contracting marriage ethnic or culturally based (Nukunya, 2003). What makes marriage valid may also differ from tribe to tribe (Kuenyehia, 1986). "Although different cultures have different marriage customs, many of these traditions symbolise the same thing: the couple starting a new life together" (Agboka, 2008).

Marriages in African nations were severely touched and moulded by the West's colonialism of Africa, and hence exist as an institution distorted by Western beliefs and concepts (Omotoso, 1998). More so, "globalisation, modernisation, Europeanism, and notably foreign religions have added some dynamics to how Africans celebrate or contract marriages, particularly among Ghanaian Christians." (Ritzer, 2011). Accordingly, this influenced the changing trends in marriage laws and the different cultural beliefs funnelling marriage's contraction and roles in marriage over time. (Ajiboye, Atere, & Olufunmi, 2012).

It has become a commonplace that "At marriage, every African Christian couple, especially in mission-founded churches, is confronted with three 'worlds' the world of the traditional culture to which most parents of marrying age adults belong; the world of the civil or legal system under which the couple, like other citizens, live; and the world of the predominantly westernised culture that prevails in the church" (Ngundu, 2011). This has untold effects on the institution of marriage. "The non-recognition of customary marriages has sometimes led to the regard of wives and children of customary marriage as illegitimate and not accorded the same status as wives and children from civil marriage in terms of succession (Herbst & Plessis, 2008). In the words of Hastongs (1975),

> "This perplexing situation has confronted many African Christian couples in the wake of church marriage rules and discipline. The lack of recognition of customary marriage by the mission churches for church and government purposes has resulted in numerous Christian dilemmas over marriage. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that at marriage, African Christian couples end up with a particular sense of being torn at the three corners of a triangle: the claims of African tradition, the claims of a new-found faith, Christianity, and the claims of the state" (Hastongs, 1975, p. 45, cited in Dankwa Odoom & Eshun, 2022, p. 19).

The would-be couple at marriage has the family (which is considered to be very instrumental in the marital process), the church (which has been the new family of the Christian) and the state, which, according to Crawford (2013), has become the third party in

the marriage contraction process to satisfy. All these and other factors have prompted the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies by would-be couples in our societies.

"The problem stemmed from the fact that there are compelling moral and legal reasons to affirm and recognise the cultures and knowledge systems of peoples who were previously colonised, particularly African customary law, which is widely regarded as the bedrock of African culture and values" (Coleman, 2021). According to Dankwa, Odoom and Eshun (2022, p. 19). "With the advent of modernisation, globalisation and Europeanism, many Africans and, for that matter, Ghanaians still cherish these customary laws. It is these customary laws that have been used to manage most of the institutions in our societies. For instance, the marriage institution and the chieftaincy institution are all enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana." It is out of the customary laws most societies set out rules or procedures for contracting marriage which is the bedrock of every society. Bogya (2014) declared that "customary marriage rite until recently, was a complete marriage ceremony after which a man and woman were recognised as husband and wife."

Globalisation, modernisation, and religion have all influenced how marriage is contracted. (Owurasah, 2015). Though a key element in the marriage process, the marriage ceremony has become a very fashionable event in many societies, especially among Christians (Onuorah, 2013). This has influenced would-be couples who are poorly prepared to take marital roles compared to how they prepare for the marriage ceremony (Thiombiano, 2017). In our current societies, the church wedding ceremonies have been seen as one of the complex transitions into marriage that would-be couples must go through (Erlank, 2014).

With the advent of globalisation, modernisation and religion, many young people have been brainwashed about the customs involved in traditional marriage rites (Onyima, 2003). In 1753, Lord Hardwicke of Great Britain incorporated the Marriage Act, which stated that all marriages must occur in the Church to be valid (Rudd, 2003). This raises the question, 'is customary marriage rite idolatry and not valid when organised outside the church (Onyima, 2003). However, African traditional marriage constituted a genuine marriage contract according to their custom (Ngundu, 2011). Mariam Obeng Mintah vrs. Francis Ampanyin Civil Appeal No. J4/18/2013 Judgment of the Supreme Court of Ghana delivered on 25th March 2015, cited in (Ankrah, 2017) asserted that many would-be couples and most Ghanaians have been made to agree that the customary marriage rite is the 'engagement'. Many people are finding answers to the question, "Is the customary marriage truly the engagement?" According to Gesinde (2010) and Boomie (2010), cited in Owurasah (2015), although customary marriage is usually referred to as "engagement", it remains vital in the wedding ceremony. Also, which one of the marriage ceremonies (customary or church/civil marriage) is essential (Onyima, 2003).

The debate on which one of these practices (customary or church/civil marriage) is acceptable and recognised by law is ongoing. There was a news report on some of these confusions, and the question posed was 'Traditional and/or customary marriage, white wedding. Are they the same?' (Joy News, 11.1.2019). The question is, "Which of the two sanctioned marriages (Customary and church/ordinance marriage) is acceptable?" Obudho (1985), argues that the church does not recognise the customary marriage as a complete ceremony. This has led to the church indirectly forcing new convents to follow the Christian system of marriage and discard the customary marriage ceremonies, which they see as unclean. (Obudho, 1985).

Society is also acculturated to think that people who perform only the traditional or customary marriage rite are poor, not civilised, unchristian, or unfashionable. (Obudho, 1985). As a result, would-be young couples are indirectly forced to undertake both the customary and the ordinance or church marriage (parallel marriage ceremonies) to avoid ridicule (Onyima, 2003). Eshun, Odoom, and Dankwa (2024) termed this practice a "Parallel Marriage

Ceremony," in which only one marriage ceremony performed would suffice for the Christian would-be couples to be pronounced as married.

At what point can a young would-be couple who has agreed to marry be socially described as married? Should it be after the performance of the customary marriage rite or after the church wedding ceremony (Onyima, 2003)? "Do today's youth understand the dynamics of parallel marriage ceremonies and their effects on marriage? Which of these ceremonies validates a marital union or both (Onyima, 2003)? What effects do the parallel ceremonies have on the couple and the marriage as an institution? Is it true that the parallel marriage ceremonies bring honour and/or respect to the couple, the parents, and the family? Some of these issues have led to the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies among would-be couples, especially Christians. Unfortunately, the marriage process has become an uphill task for many, especially the youth, to climb (Mensah, 2013).

Upon reading about parallel marriage ceremonies, it has been agreed with Smith (1997) that modern-day family sociologists concentrate more on marriage than the marriage ceremony. However, it has been realised that many have written about marriage ceremonies. For instance, Obudho (1985) wrote "The Impact of Christianity on the Luo Traditional Marriage". Onyima (2003) also saw the ceremonies as a clash in his work "Marriage: The Clash between Traditional Marriage Rites and Western Marriage." In addition, Agboka (2008) in his work "Is Marriage Becoming Too Expensive?" talked about how expensive the marriage ceremonies have become, but did not address the issue of parallel nature of the marriage ceremonies. Finally, Mensah (2013), in his work "Confusing Engagement and Wedding in Ghana", argued that he sees confusion between the church and the family in the marriage contraction process.

All the authorities mentioned above wrote on the marriage ceremonies as separate ceremonies with little or no consent from the other institutions involved in the marriage process. None of them talked about the ceremonies as a unit. Thus, they did not see the ceremonies to be parallel. This research seeks to fill the gap in the literature concerning the parallel nature of marriage ceremonies. This is because parallel marriage ceremonies seem to have become a norm in many societies; however, the dynamics and their effects on the institution of marriage are unknown. This has influenced the exploratory study on parallel marriage ceremonies in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality.

This study explored parallel marriage ceremonies, the agents involved and the challenges to the marriage institution in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What are the agents that contribute to the challenges of performing parallel marriage ceremonies in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality? and (2) What are the challenges associated with the celebration of parallel marriage ceremonies in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality?

The relevance associated with this study includes the following: (1) Marriage, although an essential institution in our society, the perception of people about marriage contraction or celebration is not encouraging; (2) This work is to add to the existing knowledge about the concept of parallel marriage ceremonies; (3) Also, another significance of this work is that it will contribute to the understanding of the dynamics involved in the marriage process. The performance of parallel marriage ceremonies is widespread in our society; the goal of this work is to help people understand the parallel ceremonies and the existing dynamics involved in the process of contracting marriage in society; and (4) The findings of this study inform and also call for the attention of stakeholders and opinion leaders to educate populates on marriage contraction and or ceremonies. Although marriage celebration is significant in the marriage process, few individuals or leaders of the society take the time to educate their members. Marriage is an integral part of society; hence, it demands a wide range of research into it. Therefore, this work is a reference for further research on this topic.

The study was limited in content to the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. It was also limited in setting to Winneba in the Efutu Municipality and to the Christian community only. This research focused on Christian marriage as a religious institution.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review: The study of parallel marriage ceremonies can best be understood from a theoretical point of view. Although many theories can be used to examine the issue under consideration, the researcher based this discussion on one of them. This topic can best be understood when a sociological theory is used. The structural functionalism theory was considered.

Structural Functionalism Theory

The structural functionalism theory, also known as functionalism, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism is the brainchild of Hebert Spencer (1820–1903) (Weinstein, 2019), who saw similarities between society and the human body. He argued that just as the various body organs work together to keep the body functioning, in the same vein, various parts of society work together to keep the society functioning.

Spencer referred to the parts of society as the social institutions or patterns of beliefs and behaviours focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy. The state's responsibility is to protect the citizens and punish evil-doers. In its corporate capacity, society must exercise rigorous control over its members to prevent trespasses from one another (Offer, 2019). This makes the institutions develop means to address the changing trends in society. Although Comte and Spencer shared some differences in the way the term "social organism" was used, according to Park (1921), society exists for the benefit of its members, not its members for the benefit of society. The institutions in the society function for the benefit of the members of the society.

Institutions are orderly relationships that maintain society (Goldschmidt, 1996). Durkheim's concern with how certain societies maintain internal stability and survive over time made him apply Spencer's theory to explain how societies change and survive. According to Durkheim, society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Merton, 1994; Radcliff-Brown, 1933). According to Merton (1994) and Mallard (2011), society is held together by shared values, language and standard symbols, of which marriage is one.

The argument above makes it clear that society is managed through the set institutions within it. The institutions are there to govern the activities of the individuals in the society. These institutions are there to bring about equilibrium or balance in the system. The availability of social, religious, and civic structures helps bring societal balance. Marriage has recently been considered a social, cultural, religious, and even legal institution. For marriage to be valid, it must meet the modalities set by society's social, religious, and/or civil laws. That is why functionalism addresses society as a whole regarding the function of its constituent elements, namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. A common analogy, popularised by Herbert Spencer and Comte, presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole (Urry, 2000).

Relevance of the theory

Society, though seen as a unit, comprises different parts. According to Park (1921), society comprises parts with the power of independent locomotion. The society has been seen to be with parts for over centuries now. According to Simon (1960), the idea of society as an organism is centuries old. The institutions in society operate separately but are interrelated to

make society function effectively. This theory is still relevant because society is continuously becoming complex and needs the effective functioning of its institutions. The institutions are to work for the benefit of the members of the society, and because society has not ceased to exist, so are the organs or institutions in it. Some are just changing as the years go by.

Application of the Theory

Marriage is a social institution that needs societal structure for effective administration (Gallagher, 2002). Also, marriage to Gallagher (2002) is a social institution based on a public legal act and not just on a private romantic vibe or one's religious rites. This means that society is vital to marriage matters. The structural functionalist theory applies to the study of marriage in general. Marriage cuts across many societal institutions and affects many other institutions. For this reason, marriage ceremonies cannot be studied as a unit. With parallel marriage ceremonies, there are a lot of agents or actors who play essential roles in the marriage contraction process. This has informed the use of the structural functionalist theory to underpin this study. This is to help us understand how society, the church, the family, and others influence the marriage contraction processes and contribute to understanding the dynamics involved in the marriage process.

The conceptual review was done under the following themes: (1) the agents contributing to the challenges of performing parallel marriage ceremonies and (2) the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies.

Parallel Marriage Ceremonies

In Ghana, the Marriage Act 1884-1985, Cap. 127 has made provision for the celebration and registration of three kinds of marriages (Dankwa et al., 2022). The Marriage Act, 1884-1985 Cap. 127 is to regulate the registration of marriages in the State. Based on the Marriage Act, 1884-1985, all marriages in Ghana can only be registered under these three forms: the Customary Marriage, the Marriage of Mohammedans and the Christian and Other Marriages. According to Ghana Statistical Service (2015) Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System in Ghana's Comprehensive Assessment Report, the Marriage Act 1884-1985 (Caps 127, 129) primarily focuses on guiding the management of the marriage process with some requirements for marriage registration.

Although, according to Crawford (2013), the three kinds of marriage are mutually exclusive, almost all would-be couples, especially those in the Christian religion, celebrate more than one marriage ceremony most times. This is what has been termed "parallel marriage ceremonies", which stem from parallel culture. According to the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD, 2007), as stated in the Syllabus for Junior High School Social Studies, parallel culture occurs when two culturally different ways of doing the same thing are adopted while only one way can suffice.

"Parallel marriage ceremony" refers to a situation in which more than one marriage ceremony is performed, usually by Christian would-be couples. In contrast, any ceremonies suffice to pronounce the couple married (Eshun, Odoom, & Dankwa, 2024). This practice is seen often in our societies because of the shape the marriage institution has now taken. The marriage institution, according to Nukunya (2003), used to have only the family as a third party when it comes to its contraction, but now the emergence of the church and the state as the third party in addition to the family has contributed to the would-be couple having many group interests to satisfy in the marriage contraction processes. These processes come with several challenges to the would-be couples.

The Agents that Contribute to the Challenges of Performing Parallel Marriage Ceremonies

Like any other institution, the marriage institution is not immune to challenges. The challenges in marriage can be seen at all levels of the marriage process. That is from the selection of a partner through to the divorce or demise of a partner. According to Onyima (2003), the definition of marriage implies that every marriage union is to be socially approved. This was emphasised in the definition of marriage by Nukunya (2003) and many others. It then implies that any marital union must and should be socially approved. However, the acceptable process and medium of social approval have become a source of recent contentions, conflicts and disagreements. In the same way, the parallel marriage celebration has been bedevilled with some challenges.

This work session looks at the agents contributing to the challenges of parallel marriage ceremonies. An agent is an active element that has the power to produce an effect. The challenges that have bedevilled the performance of marriage ceremonies can be said to have been facilitated or fuelled by some agents or factors. These agents, in one way or another, contribute to the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. These agents are the family, the church, and society.

The Family

The family is an essential agent in the marriage process in this part of our world. The family is considered an integral partner in planning the marriage ceremony (Thiombiano, 2017; Ganusah, 2004). Although the family seems to be losing its essence due to modernisation and urbanisation, with marriage, the family still stands tall in our part of the world. The family may not arrange a partner for its members as it used to, but it still has the power to decide or influence whom its members get married to (Nukunya, 2003). This somewhat influences the kind of marriage ceremony the would-be couples may decide to perform. In the Ghanaian context, the family plays a vital role in the marriage contraction process (Nukunya, 2003). This is why customary marriage is celebrated based on the customary laws of the tribe of the would-be couple, especially the bride. Based on these powers given to them by the constitution, many brides' families demand some items from the groom's family. These demands by the bride's family mostly put a financial burden on the would-be couples, especially the men.

Also, some families decide on the type of ceremony they want for the would-be couples, especially if they are Christians and the woman happens to be the first to get married. In the situation where any of the couples happens to be a pastor or leader of a church, then the would-be couple is encouraged by the family to perform the Christian marriage in addition to the customary marriage rites. These demands directly or indirectly put much pressure on the would-be couples to perform parallel marriage ceremonies.

The Church

The church has always played an essential role in celebrating marriage, especially in the twentieth century. The State is governed based on its constitution, as is the church. According to Falen (2008), Christian missions did not operate in a vacuum. Colonial governments frequently worked with missions to create legal laws governing civil marriage and inheritance, which greatly encouraged or enforced monogamous Christian marriage (Falen, 2008). This has influenced how marriage is contracted in almost every church. The Methodist Church Ghana, for instance, has it in her constitution and Standing Orders (SOs) that every leader should have his/her marriage performed under the ordinance either in Church or seek the blessing of the marriage in church shortly after customary marriage (The Methodist Church, 2001). This should be done to the church in consonance with the Marriage Act 1884-1984, Cap. 127. Although the church accepts all the marriage ceremonies (SO., 742) (2), it also makes it mandatory for pastors and leaders to have their marriages strictly under the ordinance. Also,

the Church of Pentecost encourages the registration and solemnisation of customary marriage (Church of Pentecost, 2016). This implies that every church member can be directly or indirectly influenced to perform the parallel marriage ceremony.

In addition to the above, the Catholic Church has always been strict on its marital laws (Falen, 2008). According to Falen (2008), any Catholic who wants his or her marriage to be recognised by the Catholic Church is to have one valid Church marriage. This practice by the Catholic Church has it that customary marriages and the children born of them are all illegitimate. (Falen, 2008). This practice by the church directly or indirectly demands that couples perform parallel marriage ceremonies if they want their marriages and children born out of customary marriage to be recognised by the church. This stresses and even puts a financial burden on the would-be couples in their quest to satisfy all the parties during marriage. Many would-be couples who wish to follow the order have to go the extra mile financially to get their marriage celebrated per the demands of their religion. Some of these practices of the churches have propelled many couples to perform parallel marriage ceremonies. The problem is that the churches or religious institutions that are expected to ease the fears of the youth about this procedure are not making things as easy as they are supposed to be (Agboka, 2008).

Although churches encourage and others push their members to perform parallel marriage ceremonies, most are just church blessings. Thus, parallel ceremonies are done, but such marriages are still not under any state laws. According to the 2021 population census reports, more than 80% of marriages contracted in Ghana are not registered under the Marriage ACT, Cap 127. According to the report, four out of five marriages in Ghana are not registered (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022).

The Society
According to the following authorities: Nukunya (2003) and Kertzer Gallagher (2002), marriage is a social institution that operates effectively through societal structures. Twene (2019), avers that Africans are noted to be communitarians. The Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of Africa and Madagascar reported that marriage is more communitarian in Africa (Cardinal, 1981). Twene (2019) asserted that this makes most of their practices collectively motivated. This has influenced the establishment of institutions that function effectively and ensure the stability of society. The work of these institutions is to maintain society as a system (Goldschmidt, 1996).

The argument above shows that society is critical in how marriage is contracted within its confines. According to Smith (1997), every society has rituals, ensuring the marriage ceremony follows a particular pattern. Smith (1997) attests that the various rituals enacted by society work effectively to show the uniqueness of the group and preserve the identity of the group. According to Smith (1997), individuals who directly or indirectly deviate from the social norms, which are seen as the elements of rituals, are mostly subjected to some kind of punishment.

The members of society, especially the would-be couple and their relations, would like to keep the societal rituals to avoid being considered deviant by society. Hence, the encouragement by the relations for the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. According to Smith (1997), the performance of the marriage ceremony enhances the emotional energy and confidence of the individuals who partake in the marital rituals. This means that society has a significant influence on marriage and its celebration. That is, the proposal of marriage to divorce could be influenced by society.

This societal influence on marriage has affected how marriage is celebrated in every society in Ghana, especially Christian-dominated societies. Finnell (2018) added that the societal expectation for would-be couples places a financial burden on the couple. This is because many would-be couples prefer to incur considerable costs in celebrating their marriage than to lose their emotional energy and confidence. In conclusion, Smith (1997) asserted that

the wall between the family and the community is permeable, leading to the community's control over the activities of the individuals. Nevertheless, he also attests that the community, in one way or another, no longer plays an important role, and its ability to control societal members keeps decreasing. This simply means that though society or the community greatly influences its members, the decision as to which kind of marriage ceremony to choose depends on the would-be couple.

Challenges Couples Face in the Performance of Parallel Marriage Ceremonies
The parallel marriage ceremony performed by Christians can be said to be financially demanding (Agboka, 2008). The financial cost of a marriage ceremony can be looked at in three different ways, depending on the preference of the would-be couples as to which ceremony they would perform. These are the costs involved in the customary marriage, the court registration and/or marriage, and the church wedding.

The customary marriage celebration is one of the financially demanding marriage ceremonies in the marriage process. According to Nukunya (2003), the items on the list given by the bride's family are influenced by many factors. The cost involved in the customary marriage ceremonies is culturally accepted and demanded by the groom's family (Nukunya, 2003; Rattray, 1929). Some families see it as normal and even expect more than what is stated in the list given. According to Finnell (2018), cultural expectations can cause a huge financial burden on families as many people do not want to be looked down upon by not having elaborate celebrations. This mindset has caused many would-be couples to incur huge costs to please the masses.

Also, would-be couples who wish to register their marriage under the Marriage Act (Christian marriage and others) have to incur additional costs because such marriages can only be done after the customary requirements have been met by the couples (Arnaldo, 2004). Also, according to Arnaldo (2004), the performance of civil marriage is expensive. Having parallel marriage ceremonies has become very expensive, especially in African Christian societies (Agboka, 2008).

These are considered financial burdens because most young people in sub-Saharan Africa are unemployed. The unemployment situation has caused most of the youth to live in poverty. This situation puts a financial burden on young people who have reached their marital age but have not found well-paid jobs (Agboka, 2008). Also, those employed have to take years to save huge sums of money to prepare for their marriage ceremonies. According to Arnaldo (2004), some young men in some communities even migrate to cities to work and save money for their marriage ceremonies. This results from society's demand for the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies.

One other challenge many would-be couples go through before their marriage is stress. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007), stress is the continuous feeling of worry about your work or personal life that prevents you from relaxing. Preparation towards occasions is stressful, but preparing for two or more occasions within the same period can be more stressful. The marriage ceremonies these days stress many would-be couples more than the marriage life itself.

Would-be couples get stressed about which ceremony to choose, the venue for the programme, the distance to the district and/or the court, the amount that will be involved in the wedding ceremony, the number of best men and maids of honour to choose, and the societal expectations. (Finnell, 2018). For instance, some would-be couples face challenges in choosing venues for their marriage. This happens when the bride and her family live in different places. In such situations, the would-be couple are made to have marriage ceremonies in different places. That custom demands that the customary marriage should usually be organised at the woman's father's house. So, in a situation where the bride is living separately from her parents

and the father has divorced the mother, the would-be couples would have to choose different venues for the marriage ceremonies. This results from the bride's respect for her parents (father) and their customs.

In addition, a bride who wants to have a church marriage at all costs but is not staying together with her parents or family would have to choose different venues for their church wedding. Also, marriage registration is stressful; would-be couples who convert their customary marriage to ordinance marriage go through. According to Amato (2010), due to the bureaucratic procedures would-be couples are to go through to get a licence for the celebration of their marriage, would-be couples who live in remote areas or far from the registration centre go through difficulties or stress to get the licence for their marriage celebrations. This results from inadequate registration offices within a reasonable distance to some extent.

Another challenge a couple can face is disagreement between the parties involved in the marriage process, especially the church and the family. According to Obudho (1985), some churches see some of the lists the brides' families give to the groom as demanding, preventing the young men in their churches from marrying. Also, some churches consider some customary marriage practices to impede their members' growth of the Christian faith. (Obudho, 1985). Although some churches like the Methodist Church, Ghana (2014) and the Church of Pentecost (COP) (2016) accept customary marriages, according to Agboka (2008), they always encourage their members, especially leaders, to have their customary marriages converted to ordinance marriages (Church of Pentecost, 2016; The Methodist Church, Ghana, 2001) hence leading to the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. With converted marriage, according to Crawford (2013), customary law marriage and Marriage under the Ordinance are mutually exclusive. This simply means that the two cannot exist at the same time. To him, customary marriage is potentially polygamous, while ordinance marriage is monogamous. (Kamanabi, 1983). When a couple celebrates their customary marriage and is required to contract a marriage under the ordinance, the customary law marriage ceases to exist. According to Graphic Online (2020), marriage under such circumstances converts into marriage under ordinance, changing it from a polygamous nature into a monogamous marriage.

Finally, ignorance is one of the key challenges many would-be couples battle in their preparation towards marriage. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007), ignorance is a lack of knowledge or information about something. Many would-be couples who wish to go into marriage mostly have no or adequate information about the concept and or the processes involved in getting married. According to Arnaldo (2004), marriage is difficult in African communities. As a complex concept, the ignorance level of many young people about it is alarming because many would-be couples see marriage as an event rather than a process involving rituals and negotiations that can take place over some time (Arnaldo, 2004).

Also, due to the religious nature of Africans (Mbiti, 1999), many refuse to find answers to most of the religious questions on marriage and its celebration. Many young would-be couples prefer and are comfortable taking their marriages to the altar. This exercise is a privilege for them to take their marriage to God for His blessings. The Methodist Church, Ghana (2014, p.172), in Section C of the Methodist liturgy and book of worship for the Methodist church Ghana, assert that the church also accepts marriage under the customary law of Ghana. "The Minister whose responsibility it is to prepare the couple for Christian Blessing must first satisfy himself/herself that the people have been customarily married." Although the churches accept customary marriage, her members have directly or indirectly been influenced to perform the parallel marriage ceremonies without questioning the process.

In addition, the legalities involved in getting one's marriage registered are opaque to many young adults who have reached their marital ages and even those who are in marriages already. Many would-be couples go through thick and thin lines to perform parallel marriages

because they do not know or know little about what the state's laws say about the legitimacy of the marriage ceremonies. Even though the state and the religious authorities have been given the authority to officiate marriages, there are still doubts over what constitutes a legal marriage (Thornton, Axinn., & Xieet, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the epistemological branch known as interpretivism. The interpretivist research paradigm states that reality is multi-layered and complex. Interpretivism believes that people are creative and actively construct their social reality. The interpretivist further notes that the social world should be studied in the natural world through the eyes of the participants, without the intervention of the researcher (Dammak, 2013). Interpretivists believe that understanding the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of data gathered (Willis, 2007). According to Willis (2007), interpretivism usually seeks to understand a particular context, and the core belief of the interpretivism paradigm is that reality is socially constructed.

According to interpretivists, qualitative methods are approachable means for examining reality. Hence, qualitative methods are the best to use considering the concept of marriage and the issues concerning parallel marriage ceremonies. In the interpretive paradigm, the crucial purpose of researchers is to get 'insight' and 'in-depth' information based on the understandings and experiences of people through a series of interviews. The topic under study falls within human science, and to understand the concept, the choice of this philosophy was in the right direction. This study seeks to understand people's experiences in their natural phenomena. Considering the issues of marriage ceremonies as one that has different perceptions by society and the legalities and validity misunderstood and seen by people in different ways, it is reasonable to position this study as an exploratory study of parallel marriage ceremonies in the interpretivism paradigm.

A qualitative approach was used to conduct the research. Qualitative researchers use various methods to deeply understand how people perceive their social realities and how they act within the social world (McLeod, 2017). "In qualitative research, the researcher has several methods for collecting empirical materials, ranging from the interview to direct observation, to the analysis of artefacts, documents and cultural records, to the use of visual materials or personal experience" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.14).

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. This is because it is a research approach that describes, interprets, and explores the parallel marriage ceremonies in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality. The qualitative approach used in this study helped the researchers hear the people of Winneba's opinions and understand their feelings and experiences about the parallel marriage ceremonies, using their town as a reference.

A case study design was employed. Case study research, through reports of past studies, allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues by helping to explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997). Case study designs are of different categories; the descriptive category of a case study was adopted. Descriptive case studies describe the natural phenomena within the data in question as they occur (Zainal, 2007). This research design is to help the researchers get the participants' views on parallel marriage ceremonies as they have experienced it in their community. The design is consistent and flexible when dealing with the topic that occurs in its natural phenomena like marriage.

The setting for this research work was Winneba, known traditionally as Simpa. It is a fishing community in southern Ghana on the south coast, 140 kilometres (90 mi) east of Cape Coast and 56km (35 mi) of Accra. It coordinates 5˙ 21'00" N 0˙ 37'30" W/5.35000˙N 0.62500˙W. Winneba is the capital of the Efutu Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana.

According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC), Efutu Municipality's population was 68,592, 49% males and 51% females. The population of the Municipality constitutes 3.1% of the total population of the Central Region. The figures also show that 93.3 percent of the Municipality's population resides in urban localities, considered the highest in the region (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). According to the 2010 PHC report, 36.9% of the population were married, and 12.4% were in consensual unions. Also, a higher proportion of the males, 47.0%, have never been married as compared to 31.7% of females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014)

The target population for this study was all married individuals who have performed parallel marriage ceremonies, all adults who have reached their marital age but are not married, all parents, opinion leaders (pastors, leaders of family and/or clan), and professional marriage counsellors in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality. Out of the huge populates of Winneba, my sampled population for this study was twenty (20). In all, fifteen (15) individuals were involved in the work. The 15 participants were involved hinging on the assertion of Creswell and Poth (2016) in their book titled "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches," the authors deliberate on sample sizes between 10-15 participants for case studies and phenomenological research, indicating that this size can yield rich, meaningful data. It all came to that because some individuals refused to participate in the research work. One of the reasons for their non-participation was that they were not available for the interviews. Some finally confessed that they could not make time for the 30-minute interviews. These fifteen (15) participants consist of five (5) married individuals who performed parallel marriage ceremonies, four (4) unmarried adults who have reached their marital age, two (2) professional marriage counsellors, two (2) parents, two (2) opinion leaders (Reverend Ministers/Pastors of any well-recognized church). Dawson (2002) explained a sample as a smaller and manageable number of people, places, events, etc., chosen by the researcher to be part of his or her research. Also, according to Webster (1985), the sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole. This simply shows that the samples involved in research work are to be chosen carefully. Researchers make sampling decisions when planning research based on some factors. Some of these are expense, time, and accessibility. (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison , 2011).

A purposive sampling technique was used to carry out this research. The purposive sampling technique was used to select all the participants, and the critical case sampling technique was considered when sampling the marriage counsellors involved in the research work. Critical case sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique where sampled individuals are most likely to give the researcher the information needed for the study (Glen, 2015). "This sampling technique was considered because professional marriage counsellors can professionally speak to the issue. This type of sampling is beneficial if a small number of cases can be sampled" (Strewig & Stead, 2001). "They are the ones most likely to provide the wealth of information needed for this work in a professional way" (Glen, 2015).

A semi-structured interview guide was used for the data collection. According to Johnson, Patton, Scott, Daar, Petric, Smith and Burter (2004), "the importance of using an interview in qualitative research is that participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivation and feelings are better obtained.' They added, "With this, the researcher gets the opportunity to engage the individual participants to create an understanding of the concept under study jointly." A semi-structured interview guide was used, and the items were structured based on the various themes under the literature review that directly linked with the research questions.

This study adopted the qualitative thematic analysis to analyse data from the interviews. Warren (2020) asserted that "thematic analysis is useful for discovering people's experiences, views, and opinions." Braun and Clarke (2006) state, "Thematic analysis is a method for

analysing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns." It is a method for describing data but involves interpretation in selecting codes and constructing themes. Thematic analysis is an appropriate and powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this study, a range of qualitative data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview data was recorded and transcribed for direct coding. The codes from the interview were grouped into different categories and subsequently developed into themes. The themes were then used to present the research findings.

Ethically, enough protection was given to the participants to ensure that other individuals did not know them. This was done by giving them codes instead of names and addresses. Their consent was sought before they were interviewed. Seeking their consent was to help them decide whether to partake in the interview or not. According to Bhutter (2004), "Informed consent provides full and transparent information since it allows the participant to question the researcher. This greatly aided the researchers in removing all types of coercion and ensured that the participants had complete choice in their decision to participate." The confidentiality of information provided by participants was highly adhered to. The participants were also told that their identities would be kept private and that they could opt out of the study whenever they wished. In order to achieve confidentiality, the researchers decided to represent the participants with numbers on the interview protocol instead of their names, which made it difficult for outsiders to identify the participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents analyses, and discusses the study's findings. The first part focuses on the biographic characteristics of the participants, and the second section focuses on the data analysis and discussions. The data was gathered through a semi-structured interview guide. The interview data was collected through direct one-on-one interviews with 15 interviewees. In attributing the various quotations to the interviewees, numbers were given in order of participants, beginning from 1 to 15, and these numbers were used to represent them.

Biographic Characteristics of Participants

The biographic characteristics of the participants were as stated above. That is, 15 participants participated in the interview; these comprised eight (8) males and seven (7) females, representing 53% and 47%, respectively. Concerning the ages of the participants, the youngest participants were between the ages of 20 and 30, whilst the oldest were between 40 and 60 years. About their academic qualification, one (1) PhD holder, three (3) master's degree holders, six (6) graduates, and six (5) students.

The second section focuses on the presentation of data for the research questions, which is divided into two parts. The first part examined the agents contributing to the challenges in parallel marriage ceremonies. The second session considered the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. The data was presented, analysed and discussed in the various parts as stated above for easy understanding of the data as gathered from the field.

The Agents that Contribute to the Challenges of Performing Parallel Marriage Ceremonies

From the data gathered, three significant issues arose during the interviews to determine the contributing factors to the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. These factors were: the influence from the church, the family and the society at large. These three factors are powerful institutions one has to satisfy before he/she can be ascribed to as married. According to the structural-functionalist (Radcliff-Brown, 1933), this

is what, "the society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability." In the data gathered it seems these institutions are related and interdependent to the extent that one cannot avoid them while married to a Ghanaian Christian.

The Family

The family is one of the powerful institutions one cannot ignore as an African, especially when it comes to marriage and its contraction. This is because Africans see marriage to be between family and not only the individuals involved (Wimalasena, 2016; Obudho, 1985; Twene, 2019 & Agyekum, 2012). The family has a significant say in how an individual wishes to have his/her marriage celebrated. All these and many other African scholars have attested to this in their works. These are some of the responses the participants gave that align with the above statements.

Respondent (5), a married counsellor, said,

> *"I will say the family is one. This is because, at times, you look at the couple and you can see that they cannot or are struggling to organise the wedding, but they still want to do it. As part of my counselling sessions, I met the couple's parents and realised they were the brains behind everything. You will try to explain to them, but they will tell you that they will get back to you, and you will not hear from them till you see their wedding invitation. A lady's family was in demand for a wedding, and because she was the firstborn, the whole family wanted her to set a good example. The families also did not contribute to it. Sorry to say, they do not have anything. However, they insisted, and the couple had to squeeze their resources and do it for them. It was the guy who suffered because the lady had just completed university by then." (56 years married female counsellor)*

Respondent 6 (unmarried) had this to say;

> *"The families because there are couples who are pressured to do the ceremony, especially with specifications; meanwhile, some do not even contribute anything towards the programme's organisation. This is due to the kind of family the partner might be coming from or the standards they have set for themselves. A friend's mother-in-law, before their marriage, demanded the wedding. This was because she is the market women's president in her area and has been attending people's weddings, so it is now her turn. She told my friend in our presence, "Asew, please do not fail me, oh!" It was as if they had had a contract. (32 years unmarried man)*

Another respondent (12) married said this;

> *I have always wished to have only the customary marriage and sign at the court because I wanted my things to be simple, but I was not allowed. My parents and family disagreed with my suggestion. My father was a Bishop by then, so my mum insisted that I have to go in for the wedding. She said, "You cannot disagree with the whole family about your simplicity." She did the same to my senior sister, but I was dad's girl, so I thought daddy would come in, but he kept*

> *quiet. So, we did it for them. Even that, they left before we closed from church all because we decided not to do the part two but to cut the cake in church." (44 years married female)*

The data gathered reveals how the family is and has become powerful (Olaniyi, 2015) in customary marriage ceremonies and the ordinance marriage celebration. Most of the time, not for the interest of their daughter or son going into the marriage but for their interest and want to protect their reputation. This has led many young couples to suffer; some even have to sacrifice the joy they will get in their marriage for the wedding. The data also shows that some families are not interested in the ordinance part of the process; all they need to hear is that their daughter has been wedded. The appropriate institutions, like the judicial services, should see how some of these challenges can be corrected.

The Church

The church was also seen as one of the key factors influencing the parallel nature of the marriage ceremonies. Almost all the participants said something about the church's influence in one way or the other. The church has influenced almost everything about the marriage process. These are some of the responses from the interviewees.

Respondent 8, who is married, said this;

> *"I was a diocesan officer of my church, so I was told I could not perform only customary marriage because I was a leader, and the church's constitution demands I do the ordinance, too. Doing it will at least help me to continue my active service in the house of God and also to dine with my Lord Jesus Christ. The reason was that the church made it so that until you perform the parallel marriage ceremony, you cannot continue to be a leader. Although God has all called us to work in His vineyard in different capacities, one's refusal to perform the parallel marriage ceremony would make them deny you. Indirectly, the church forces young people to perform the parallel ceremony because you will not be actively involved in the church's activities if you refuse to do it. Roman Catholic, for instance, you will not be given communion. So, we had no option but to agree and do it for them." (47 years married male)*

One of the participants (10), a marriage counsellor, had this to say;

> *"The church is another agent influencing the youth to go into parallel marriage ceremonies. I cannot mention churches' names, but some are demanding too much. Also, the one-man churches are creating many problems but the public has not noticed it. Most of their pastors and places of worship are not gazetted, but they influence their members to have weddings in such churches. I even have to suggest to a couple to go to court to register because what was given to them by their church was not a state-recognized marriage certificate. The church is causing troubles in the marriage contraction process, but we are to counsel and not to decide for people." (60 years married male counsellor)*

From the data gathered, the church has been seen as one of the most influential institutions in society. The data has shown that almost every Christian's marriage cannot be performed without the involvement of the church. It has been revealed that most of the people who

perform the parallel marriage ceremony do that because of the church's demands. This is reflected in almost all the responses of the people interviewed. The church, which was to help the vulnerable, has now become a burden to most of the youth who would wish to have a simple marriage ceremony. This is to confirm what Agboka (2008) alluded to: the churches or religious institutions expected to ease the fears of the youth about this procedure are making things difficult.

The Society
The participants also asserted that society's involvement in these influences is very high. Society is key to affecting everything we do due to society's socialisation process. The data shows that the societal demand for weddings is on ascendency. People perform parallel ceremonies because of the fear of societal ridicule. Some even measure the success of a wedding ceremony with the number of people who came for the programme or by how stylish the ceremony was. Also, in some societies, people are looked down upon because they refuse to organise the kind of marriage ceremonies the society wants. One of the married participants (9) has this to say;

> *"Society is gradually coming in with many things that were not part of the ceremony at first. In one way or another, it puts pressure on the would-be couples. For example, society has it that the number of ladies of honour or best men you present at your wedding shows how well your marriage was organised and the pre-wedding photos, decorations, video coverage, and pictures. All these are coming in because of the demands of the society these days. If you cannot organise a world-class wedding, then your parents or family will be at the receiving end. In our community, for instance, if you organise a low-class wedding, then it means you, your brothers and sisters, your parents and even the entire family should be careful they do not offend anyone. They will ridicule you with it. One of the popular guys in our place organised a wedding, which to some was not a big wedding. Brother, the little thing then they will be like, "Upon all your too known, look at what you did as a wedding; you could not even organise a buffet." I think society is creating problems for the upcoming youth who will want to marry. They have to go the extra mile to make things work. Because some of these things put much pressure on the young would-be couple, sometimes making them go the extra mile to fulfil all righteousness. Hmmm, remember, all these come at a cost." (39 years married male)*

One of the unmarried participants (11) acknowledged that;
> *"At times, too, in the community, everyone is doing it, and a standard has been set, and it becomes difficult to do yours below that standard, so you try to follow suit. All your friends are doing that, so why would I choose a different thing? Sometimes it is like you are too difficult so do what you think can help you keep your friend." (27 years unmarried female)*

The data gathered shows that individuals want to live to please society's demands. According to Smith (1997), this is because every society has its rituals, which ensure that the marriage ceremony follows a particular pattern. However, the question is, "Are all the rituals healthy for the good of every member of society?" Some people also believe that marriage is a social institution that operates effectively through societal structures, which agrees with great scholars

like Gallagher (2002). Society has structures, but are they to help us get the best out of life, or are they to stress the individuals in the society? These societal expectations have burdened a lot of would-be couples financially. (Finnell, 2018).

The Challenges of Performing Parallel Marriage Ceremonies
The data gathered was to help examine the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. The data shows many challenges would-be couples face in their quest to perform parallel marriage ceremonies. The data gives an overview of some of the challenges individuals face. In examining the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriages, all fifteen (15) participants had one issue, which, through their responses, was the financial burden or problem. Some of them also talked about the stressful nature of the whole ceremony.

Financial Problems
One major challenge seen in all the responses from the participants was financial problems or challenges. From the data, most people now see marriage ceremonies as capital-intensive ventures. While people are taking loans to start businesses, youth that have reached their marriageable ages are also faced with deciding between a loan for their marriage ceremony or forgetting about marriage for something. Others have to save for an extended period to meet the demands of the family, church, society and, to some extent, their partners.

Respondent 7 (a parent) had this to say;

> *"Performing both marriage ceremonies is costly. Some would-be couples who go for loans to perform the parallel ceremonies suffer afterwards. Some couples were financially stressed during and after the marriage. My husband and I have to help some of them calm their nerves and plan how to get out of the financial burden they are going through. The youth are burdened when it comes to marriage celebrations. One of them I was talking to recently is struggling with finances, but they are still planning for the wedding. He told me all the money they had saved for the four years they started work had gone into the preparation. They are still on it because they are not done yet. Until they finish the programme, they cannot say that they are through with their expenditure." (56 years married female reverend minister)*

Participant 4 (married) said this;
> *"Financial burden is one major challenge couples face in their quest to marry. The expensive costumes and other expenditures pressured the would-be couples before and after the marriage ceremonies. The cost involved is too much. The "engagement" has its costumes; they are also to plan for the wedding and reception. Much money goes into marriage ceremonies these days. Although I prepared well for ours, it was not easy "Koraa." I have to clear all my little investments just to make the programme happen. Certain things we did not plan for came up, and we had to put some money in there to make the programme successful. Sir, the financial burden was too much. I sometimes pity young people who have not settled and are made to organise weddings. It is not easy, oh. (60 years married male parent)*

One of the unmarried participants (14) also added;

> *"Financial challenge is one of the challenges most would-be couples face. Many people, because of the demands of the family, the church and the society, go for huge loans for their marriage ceremonies. Our friend is still paying for the loans he took for his wedding three years ago. How can they enjoy their marriage?" (30 years unmarried male)*

A respondent (6) unmarried had this to add;

> *"To me, the key to it all is financial problems. I and my beloved were ready. We have gotten everything on the list, but the money for the wedding is what we are still fighting for. My elder sister says the wedding is what she wants because all the sisters had it. So, we are still on it. Oh, she is also trying "paa" to get things done. I would not go for a loan. My brother has suffered enough for that mistake. I would not try at all. My mother was the one who was sending my brother money at the time. My mother would not even allow me to commit the same mistake." (27 years unmarried female)*

The data gathered gave a great revelation about the challenges some couples and even unmarried individuals face in their quest to get married. All the participants, in one way or another, talked about how people spend vast sums of money for the performance of the parallel marriage ceremonies. These vast sums of money are used for the marriage process rather than the marriage life itself. All the responses showed that the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies drains the would-be couples' account. This confirms what Calves (2016) alluded to: the cost of the customary marriage ceremony is relatively low. This means that if young people are encouraged to perform only the customary marriage ceremony and are advised to register their marriages at the law court or blessed at church, many can save much money for other equally profitable ventures.

Stress

According to the data gathered, most participants showed their worries regarding the challenges they or others face in performing parallel marriage ceremonies. One of them, which was running through the data, was stress. According to data, many go through stressful moments due to the parallel nature of our marriage ceremonies. The data revealed that the family and the church mainly cause the stress the would-be couples go through before their marriage ceremonies. These are some of the responses. One of the married participants (9) had this to say;

> *"It was so stressful. For almost a week, I could not get enough sleep. I used two venues for the engagement (customary marriage ceremony) and the wedding. Brother, my parents demanded that the engagement (customary marriage rite) be held in our hometown. Also, I have been a church leader here for some time, so the church also demanded that I do the wedding here if I want most of them to be around. So, upon deliberation, we have to use the two venues to satisfy all of them. We suffered papa. If my family had agreed on the venue, we would not have spent that much on transportation and the stress we went through organising the programme. Thus, we move from one place to another to organise the engagement and the wedding ceremonies. We performed the two at two separate venues within three days."*

Also, one of the marriage counsellors said,

> *"The performance of the two ceremonies stresses the couple, mostly the woman. One of the issues I had in one of the counselling sessions was disturbing. The two were all staying at two different places. The man was working in, for instance, Accra and the lady was reading a course at, say, the University of Cape Coast, and the lady's parents had divorced, so she was with the mother in, say, Winneba, where they would have the wedding but the father insisted that they should come to his house for the engagement (customary marriage ceremony) which was in say Assin Fosu. I hope you have gotten the Map I am trying to draw. So, at a point, I had to encourage the man because he had given up. The stress was too much for them. Coming from Accra for counselling every weekend. I also suffered small because of the stress. So, dear, the stress of parallel marriage is too much for young would-be couples. The church and the family sometimes stress the would-be couples too much."*

From all the data, it was realised that stress has also become one of the critical challenges that individuals who wish to marry through parallel marriage ceremonies face. The stress is indirectly created by the social institutions one has to satisfy. The family and the church have created an impression that the individual has to suffer before he/she marries. That is with the notion that marriage is for mature persons. Instead of the church and the family coming together to help the youth who have reached their marital age to have a smooth transition, the marriage process has been complicated by these institutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges associated with the parallel marriage ceremonies were linked to three key agents. The customary marriage ceremony is centred on the demands of the family (tribe-based), and at times, some families demand the performance of the ordinance marriage ceremony (wedding). The church has been the pivot on which the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies evolves. Individuals who are leaders or wish to be leaders are made to perform parallel ceremonies to align with the church's doctrines. Society is seen to be one of the agents pushing for the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. Many young couples perform parallel marriage ceremonies because of the fear of society ridiculing them and their families. The agents mostly decide for the would-be couple the kind of marriage ceremonies to choose from.

The enormous financial burden on couples who perform parallel marriage ceremonies was alluded to by almost all the participants. The performance of parallel marriage ceremonies puts a financial burden on the would-be couple, especially the man. Some couples pay huge debts years after the organisation of the parallel marriage ceremonies. Also, most would-be couples stress organising and preparing for the ceremonies rather than the marriage life. Most would-be couples use their long-time savings and investments to organise parallel marriage ceremonies. Many couples get financially drained after marriage, especially those who perform parallel ceremonies.

It is recommended that the family should be educated, especially by the churches, the NCCE, and the media, to know some of the dangers they pose to the would-be couples when they are forced to perform parallel ceremonies indirectly. Also, the church's leadership should streamline their regulations regarding marriage celebrations to encourage the youth to marry quickly. In addition, massive public education should be carried out by the NCCE to sensitise the populace about the rudiments of a valid marriage ceremony and the dangers involved in organising elaborate marriage ceremonies.

Also, the state should establish more counselling centres (especially marriage counselling centres) in various towns (if possible, all district capitals and more prominent communities) so that young people who prefer to register their marriages in court would not be denied premarital counselling, especially by the church. The State should also make premarital counselling a requirement for marriage registration. This would help the would-be couples either reduce or deal with the challenges associated with the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies.

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