



Chasing the Light

Imagining and Representing Social Mobility
in Pre-Wedding and Wedding Photography via Instagram

MASTER THESIS SUBMITTED TO

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DISCLAIMER ON PSEUDONYMS

Some names within this thesis have been changed for reasons of anonymity of the participants, following common anthropological usage. However, there are indeed several important exceptions. For example, I regard it to be of importance to not use pseudonyms for the family members of the household I live in. First and foremost, I do not believe that anonymizing their names would be of any value, since my relation to them can be traced back very easily. Secondly, I do not regard the information given in this thesis to be harmful to them, and do not think it will have a negative feedback on them. To make sure on this, I have presented them the final copy of my thesis and made sure to highlight all parts that concern them as a family. I have also conferred with all other respondents that occur in the following, and have in some cases agreed with them on certain pseudonyms. In other cases, I do not use any names at all to protect those informants.

Since my thesis has a strong focus on the visual, simply refraining from using photos as visual elicitation to shield informants is to my mind not a sufficient anonymizing strategy. It is considerably more helpful, to not showcase photos of my direct informants whose sensitive issues are discussed, but to show photos of couples whom I did not talk to or whose details and statements are not harmful to them if published. Pre-wedding and wedding photography is a nation-wide practice and so it was easy to find appropriate photos which highlight the topics which I am talking about. I propose the anonymization to be ethically rightful, since it does not lessen the thesis' outcome or value of analysis for the reader, but only function to spare informants from a possible negative echo within their social scope.

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1. Introduction

Technology enables the imagining of social mobility

(Lieu 2014: 136)

Portraying one's family has never merely been about visually capturing its chronology and historic trajectory. Much more, photographic practices enable the people photographed to convey a self-constructed image of themselves. Even before the invention of the camera, this has been evident in paintings and portraits of families whose economic possibilities allowed them to do so. After the invention of the camera and its growing accessibility to the bigger public, the practice of photographing one's family soon became extremely popular. Today, especially when it comes to weddings, the ultimate family making ritual, the "imaginative, intellectual, and social resources" put into the documentation of the process of the ceremonies are generally unmatched, thus placing a high (social) importance on this *rite de passage* (Grimes 2000b: 153). Bridal photos are not exception to that. Bridal photography here include pre-wedding photos, which are taken by the bridal couple *before* the wedding for the purpose of showcasing them at the formal reception; and wedding portraits, which are taken during the ceremonies and the concluding reception, have become part of the standard Indonesian wedding ritual repertoire. Indeed, they are an essential component of what renders a wedding ceremony 'successful' (cf. Strassler 2010).

A practice that common should be paid attention to by scholars. Especially in regard to pre-wedding in Indonesia, little has been done to conceptualize and theorize it more thoroughly. This thesis, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Makassar over the course of four months in 2015, will give substantial insights into this new photographic practice in Indonesia. After all, the reasons why people choose to put an extraordinary amount of effort into photographic representations of weddings yield a broad richness of anthropological knowledge. Inherently, this topic raises several questions: What are the motivations for young couples to take both pre-wedding photos and wedding photos? What are the local interpretations of marriage and consumption, essential features of this type of photography, which constitute the fertile ground on which this new kind of visual practice prospers? In this thesis, I argue that both pre-wedding and wedding photography yield the opportunity for young bridal couples to publically position themselves within identity-establishing communities, by offering participation in shared visual idioms, trends, fashions and styles, before getting married. These communities can be based on, but are not limited to, kin relations, global religious affiliations, social classes, or the Indonesian nation. In line with this,

Strassler argues in her monograph *Refracted Visions*, that “participation in shared visual idioms and practices [...] constitutes a crucial means by which people come to belong to the community that calls itself – however tenuously and uneasily – Indonesia” (Strassler 2010: 5). Consumption of visual culture, then, is the double-ended mechanism, through which individuals are enabled and actively enable themselves to imagine, negotiate, and visualize their position within smaller and bigger frameworks. Additionally, and very importantly, I argue that (pre-) wedding photography not only offers the chance to position oneself within those frameworks, but also enables a projection of the self within these up the social ladder. I propound that bridal photography, spread through the digital channels of social media such as Instagram, thus comprise the possibility to a) imagine different communities and what it means to be a part of them, and b) demarcate and represent one’s belonging to them.¹

Visual consumption thus enfolds monetary assets and very often involves conspicuous behavior in spending these assets. Couples hire professionals like photographers and make-up artists to create the visual imagery they are striving for in their pre-wedding and wedding photos. But consumption *also* entails consuming visual culture as an audience by *seeing*, which generates inspirations and aspirations through observation. Both domains of consuming entail different assets of accessibility, but are two sides of the same coin. The first involves pecuniary mobility and spending power, the latter implies technological and nowadays mostly digital access and a certain digital literacy to photographic practices, since the biggest, and most ready-available platforms for sharing the photos are digitally based. In this study, particularly Instagram as the social media hub channeling both aesthetic visual idioms, as well as profit oriented business ventures, will be analyzed.

The following chapters will collectively prove my argument, also by giving explicit visual examples on “photo pages”, which can be read on their own as well illustrations of the chapters within which they appear.² To make my argument, it is crucial to illuminate the local implications and meanings of marriage and weddings first. In the chapter “Getting Married in Makassar”, local interpretations of status oriented behavior, and social mobility in relation to getting married, are discussed in depth. In these paragraphs, it becomes especially clear why Makassar was the ideal field site for my conducted research: Because social mobility has traditionally been possible in the Buginese and Makassarese ethnic groups. From this, they developed materialistically oriented

1 “gengsi”, is described in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Big Dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia) as both prestige and self-esteem, as well as familial descent.

2 These “photo pages” are separate from the next, but indeed highlight the content and arguments further, by giving visual examples.

strategies for status mobility, also through strategic marriages.

Considering, then, that status oriented behavior concerning marriage is crucially connected to consumption and consumptive practices, the chapter “Lifestyle, Consumption, and Class” theorizes this further. Here, lifestyling as a strategy to consume up is discussed in more depth. Especially, the intricate relation between consumption patterns, the Indonesian middle-class and new rich, as well as religion is addressed in these paragraphs. Both of these chapters are substantial to contextualizing my research findings in two ways. Firstly, they describe and theorize the social circumstances in which my informants lived. Secondly, these chapters outline the main themes through which pre-wedding and wedding photography must be understood. Indeed, they must be understood as a consumptive visual lifestyling practice. (Pre-) wedding photography echoes the wish and possibility for social mobility, especially in the context of weddings in Makassar.

Hereafter, bridal photography must be described in depth. Particularly, the technologies and strategies of photographing weddings is part of this analysis. How do visual trends come into being? How are they visible in pre-wedding and wedding photos? Also, the digital channels through which these portraits are read and spread, will be paid attention to. Though the first three chapters mentioned are mainly theoretical, they already incorporate anecdotes of and short insights into my fieldwork, to continuously weave them together. With chapter 4 though, the two preceding ones will be bound together even more intricately, while at the same time tying the knot between the theoretical framework, and the ethnographic observations I offer the reader.

The three following case studies describe my observations in the field – both online, and in Makassar. The perspective widens from chapter to chapter, starting with an individual’s angle upon my topic, over a couple’s insights into the theme, and lastly a polyvocal collection of views. Highlighting different themes and concepts discussed in the foregoing theories, these paragraphs will illustrate my hypothesis that social mobility within frames of varying degree and scale can be imagined and articulated in and through consumption practices, such as pre-wedding and wedding photography.

With this thesis, I aim at providing the academic field with new insights into the current state of the Indonesian, and especially Makassarese, new rich and their consumption patterns. I understand the visual practices of (pre-) wedding photography to be highly resourceful for the analysis of contemporary consumption practices in respect to the new rich and middle-class of Indonesia. Socially relevant is the finding that visual practices channel and express imaginations of social mobility: Especially, they show how agents can take charge of their own identity and self-expression by employing new digital technologies, such as Instagram. With my work, photography and social media platforms are shown to enclose the chance for young middle-class and new rich Indonesians, to enact their identities and social belongings. And following from that, photographic

practices are never politically neutral, because they play into intersecting discourses, which “unveil the complex nature of identity, race, gender, class, and nation” (Lieu 2014: 143). The photos are both linked to an imagined 'whole' or community, as well as a representable and represented self that needs to articulate and negotiate its place within these. These communities can in this case be religions, families, or even nations.

To begin with though, I will give the reader a feeling of the living circumstances I encountered during my fieldwork in Makassar. It is vital to my argument to give a clear view of what contemporary life in Makassar, the regional capital of the province of South-Sulawesi, looks like – especially for the people I talked to for my research. Similarly, I will try to give an impression of how the fieldwork I conducted was shaped by these local living conditions in a Buginese-Makassarese household.

1.1. *The Field, Methods and Ethics*

I had stayed in Makassar before, when I was fifteen.³ I had struggled at first with being restricted in many ways and to be forbidden to go out on my own, but I had gotten used to it. While friends of mine, who had decided to do their exchange year in other tropical countries with less restrictive norms for young girls, were out partying from Thursday to Sunday I sat at home watching television, reading, stitching, or learning how to sew and cook. The Rasulong family I lived with, a mixed Makassarese and Buginese family, soon adopted me as one of their own, asking me to call them 'mom' and 'dad' on my very first night there.⁴ Before long, their five children, including one protégé son, introduced me to their friends as their 'sister from Germany', and I came back to visit them after my exchange almost every year. Planning my research, I hoped to be able to stay with them again, which they happily agreed with. After all these years, my host-sister's wedding, and the subsequent, happy result (a healthy baby boy) – nothing seemed to have changed between us. But exactly *this* haunted me in my first weeks in the field. Nothing had changed. Instead of being recognized as the independent young woman I had hoped to have become meanwhile, to them I was still the confused, fifteen year old, whose favorite activity was going to the mall. Again, I could not leave the house without permission, and my curfew was set at 10 pm.

3 Unfortunately, in comparison to the bandwidth of accounts on Javanese culture, there are very few ethnographies about Makassar, bearing the notion that the city has been neglected not only politically, due to its peripheric position, but also academically. Though important for the Indonesian economy and historically quite significant with respect to riots against the Dutch colonialism, South-Sulawesi holds, from a world-system-theoretical perspective, a quite peripheric position, just as the whole country of Indonesia generally can be argued to inhabit (cf. Antweiler 2006, *ibid.* 2013: 1).

4 Bugis and Makassar are the two largest ethnic groups in South Sulawesi, followed by the Mandar and Toraja, the latter being of mainly Christian confession.

The people I had planned on talking to for my research rapidly slipped away from me into unreachable distances – the next block, a ten minute drive from the house, or the café around the corner. Forbidden to leave the house without permission or with people not approved of by my host-father, I – again! – started to refocus my activities to the restrictions of the household. I mostly sat with the housekeeper in the back of the house, chatted, and sew. I read, or watched television with my equally restricted unmarried host-sister. Or skimmed through family albums and wedding videos, because taking a taxi to the next café in walking distance could have ended up with me being abducted by one of the local middle-school boys' motor-cycle gangs, which had been rampaging the city for some time now – at least according to the newspapers which my host-father read copiously every morning.

The Rasulongs are well-known within their circles. Their colossal house stands centrally located in Makassar's area of *Panakkukang*. They have well-educated, demure and devout daughters, and young sons, who study hard and want to go abroad. Young rowdy boys, still, but within reason, and always obedient to their parents' will. Ibu Rasulong is a strong woman figure, handling a sewing business from the back of her house, attending all *arisan* and Al Qur'an-reading circles a woman of her status would attend to, and she is devoted to caring for her children and grandchildren.⁵ In a way, she perfected the role of the stay at home mother with societal obligations, an indirect result of her husband's career in high office. Indeed, she is busier than many full-time working women I have met so far. Bapak Rasulong, the family's patriarch, holds a high position in a governmental office. His unchallenged, strict parenting-methods are, to this day, still legendary among his offspring's friends: He is admired and feared by all of them. "He is really Indonesian, Sophie. You are lucky to live in a family this Indonesian!" many told me. His and his wife's origins would not be regarded as originating from the regional high class, although they seem to have always belonged to highly respected families in their *kampung*.⁶ But they have put a lot of effort into earning more money than their parents and have mainly prevailed in this effort.

Although the field of my research was established around the Makassarese bridal and pre-wedding photography scene, I spent many hours within the household with this warmhearted family. It took some time until I understood this spatial fixation to be a substantial part of my research. Essentially, I lived not only like, but as an unmarried young woman in an Indonesian family from South-Sulawesi. Their contacts and acquaintances became mine, and they tried bringing me to all events and festivities relevant to my research, even though they struggled to deem its content

5 Interestingly, according to Beng-Huat, sewing machines used to be the first sign of middle-classness in Indonesia (Beng-Huat 2002: 23). Very fittingly, Ibu Rasulong does not merely own one, but indeed a whole brigade of sewing machines, which are operated by hired seamstresses.

6 A *kampung* is a small village, typically situated in rural Indonesia and associated with less modern features (cf. <http://kbbi.web.id/kampung>).

relevant or interesting. With their help, I visited many weddings, photoshoots and talked to photographers, young soon-to-be-married couples, their friends and their families. To live in the confines with 'my' family was also an advantage – for it offered the entrance to dozens of weddings, engagement parties and other festivities, but it thus also had its downsides, which I had not anticipated to impact my research quite so drastically. The curfews and restrictions set by my host-family and restrictions on my physical mobility and indeed also on my social contacts had an indisputable impact on the data I acquired. My family, who was concerned with my welfare, consented to informants cautiously. Thus, my informants mainly proved to be connected or related to the family in one way or the other: The group of participants I ended up having most contact with all were situated within the same social sphere as my host-family did. Still, I consider the information I obtained in and from this circle of informants to be highly interesting and also in many ways paradigmatic of what I am arguing in my thesis.

All informants I talked to had a background that was regionally quite bound to Makassar as they came from families whose social and economic status did not differ widely from my own family. The young people I came into contact with had all gotten the chance to study at the University, and held positions in small governmental offices, or were in the process of becoming doctors at hospitals in the area of South-Sulawesi. All couples I talked to had at some point or the other had long-distance relationships with their partner. In fact, in all cases, one of the partners had relocated to Java temporarily for at least a year to study or work. Indeed, most people I listened to for my research were often eager to make clear to not only relate themselves to Makassar, but also to other, more prestigious cities in Indonesia. Most often, this was Jakarta, the capital city on Java. One even noticed to me once, “well, we used to find it really exciting to go to Jakarta. Now we go there like it’s the mall!”. This reflects upon what this thesis underlines, too. That is, the conspicuous orientation towards reference points – such as the capital, a fashion trend, or a celebrity – understood and interpreted as more prestigious than one’s actual living conditions. After giving a very personal portrayal of the population I studied, the next chapters will thus give a more theoretical account of my field. Especially the themes most relevant to my argument will be outlined.

2. Getting Married in Makassar: Love, Marriage, Money and Prestige

“[...] weddings do not belong only to brides and grooms but to all who attend, watch and fantasize”

(Grimes 2000: 161)

While driving through Makassar with Jauhary, one of the photographers I talked to a lot and whom I met frequently, we usually chatted for hours.⁷ Jauhary himself was part of the circle of friends of my host-sister, and one of the very last of this group to be single, without any indication of changing this situation soon. Almost every time we met he expressed the distress of being 'the odd one out' who had not married yet, and at the same time his hesitations and worries about actually getting married. One time, when I was puzzled about the quite high bride prices, three in number, he explained to me

See, Soph. When a football club buys a good player like Ronaldo from another football club, the buying club is expected to pay a lot of money, because he pays the former club for the work they put into training the player. The better the player, the more they have to pay. And when the player transfers to the other football club, they will pay him his monthly salary, too. It's just like that.⁸
(Jauhary 2015)

Obviously, what Jauhary expresses here is not merely about transferring money for a provided service. The analogy he came up with indeed expresses several themes that connect to my topic. Firstly, he mentions the highly economic side of getting married. Bride prices are usually semi-publicly known and talked about. The same goes for pre-wedding photographers and their salary. Therefore, it is not only about spending money on weddings, but also about people knowing about it: That is, conspicuous consumption. Secondly, he expresses a vague interpretation of what marriage is to him – and in his eyes to many others. It is not necessarily romantically or monetarily appealing to get married for the husband, but it is indeed something that is expected from one to maintain or build an image for one's family – or in this analogy, the football club. A desirable addition to the family, just as for a football club, is a player that is not only well trained, but also

7 Often, these conversations were aimless, but amusing chit chats between two friends, but we both enjoyed these times and they have actually helped me understand and reconsider a lot of my findings in the aftermath.

8 To check the validity of this statement, I repeated it to other informants of mine. All of them confirmed to me that they found this analogy perfectly fitting.

prestigious.⁹

In the following, several themes linked to this will be discussed, namely romantic love, weddings and marriage in Makassar, as well as status, prestige and money.¹⁰ Especially, these concepts are important, because together they build the frame within which weddings can be placed and interpreted as not only rites of passages, but indeed also as consumptive practices, which require an enormous efforts and literacy in conspicuous behavioral patterns. Understanding all of these topics to be part of a 'wedding economy', with its own expressive visuality, is indispensable for this thesis.¹¹

2.1. Social Mobility in Makassar and the Theatrical Value of Weddings

Not only has the population of Makassar struggled, and continuously re-negotiated its position within the nation; but even within the city and its surrounding areas, especially in Buginese and Makassarese territories, social stratification and structures are often contested and tested by its members. As Antweiler states, societies of South-Sulawesi, the province of which Makassar is the regional capital, are structured and layered quite rigidly, but there are possibilities, options, and strategies of individual social mobility (Antweiler 2000: 118). Accordingly, he argues:

Jede (!) Person befindet sich innerhalb eines Kontinuums (!) von unterschiedlicher Prestige. Innerhalb eines Kontinuums der Ränge besteht aber eine Mobilität nach oben und unten, die jegliche Position nur als zeitweilig erscheinen lässt [...] Statusorientierte Handlungen, Symbole und Interpretationen, in denen es um soziale Positionen und persönliches Ansehen geht, spielen eine zentrale Rolle im täglichen Leben eines jeden Einzelnen. (Antweiler 2000: 175, emphasis original)

This capability of social mobility within a quite strictly layered social surrounding is of immeasurable importance to this thesis. So is the fact that status-oriented actions and behavior play an immense role in the everyday life of people from Makassar. Accordingly, social mobility has been oriented on families or parts of the own family positioned higher on the social 'scale' for a long time. Often, this orientation up the social ladder was established through marriages with families or prestigious individuals (Antweiler 2000: 175, 179). Weddings are definitely the most public and

9 The concept of prestige, and especially gengsi, will be discussed later on page 15 pp.

10 These are all themes with which the couples play in their pre-wedding photos. However, we will go further into detail at a later stage, in chapter 4 and the case studies.

11 By "wedding economy" I mean all practices and conventions that circumambulate the act of getting married. To this, I especially count efforts and practices related to monetary expenses and transfers, which link to conventions and common customs.

open events during which such status-oriented behavior and symbolism can be displayed and in turn observed. Accordingly, I agree with Grimes who states, “we *undergo* passages, but we *enact* rites” (Grimes 2000: 5, emphasis in original). Indeed, weddings ceremonies are rites of passages not only undergone, but also enacted and highly theatrically laden. Directly related to this, Alimi states, “[in] South Sulawesi, efforts to display identity, social status and Islam are best reflected in wedding rites, rituals to which Bugis Makassar Muslims give high theatrical value” (Alimi 2014: 265). Quite clearly, weddings are performative events (Grimes 2000: 158). In Makassar, this theatrical value most often included hints and allusions to status and monetary affluence or religious affiliation, rather than stressing the romantic value of the event (cf. Antweiler 2000: 177 pp.).¹² Contrary to what Beigel states about romantic love having been, at least in “the West”, the “most important prerequisite to marriage” since the end of the nineteenth century, what can be observed in Makassar is quite different (Beigel 1951: 330).

Surely, it does not always happen that marriages are only formed for monetary reasons. But indeed, getting married is not only an individual's personal choice by love, but also needs the family's collective consent, since it is a decision with an effect on the whole family. Truly, “[...] our belief that weddings are necessarily personal and private rather than public and political not only ignores the realities of married life but is also cross-culturally deviant and historically inaccurate” (Grimes 2000: 172). Much more, weddings in Makassar also display a bond between two families, not only two individuals. Usually, weddings do hence not occur between two socially extremely divergently positioned young people. Thus, although social stratifications are, as Antweiler states, to a certain extent permeable, there are indeed limits to what is possible and socially accepted. Antweiler also proposes that

Die allgemeine Statusorientiertheit hat Konsequenzen für das alltägliche Verhalten, die Rollen und die Motive der Akteure [...] Die Akteure stehe im Spannungsfeld eines ständigen Wettbewerbs, der auch immer potentiellen Mißerfolg beinhaltet. Sie bringt Beschämung – individuell, aber auch für die Familie und die Verwandtschaftsgruppe. (Antweiler 2000: 176 pp.)

The status-oriented behavior and -motives in everyday life of my informants had consequences. As Antweiler argues, the possibility of social mobility is not only an elevating experience, but can indeed also mean the social downfall of individuals – and with them, their families. Consumption practices that negotiate upward mobility are thus also always aimed at demarcating the departure and distancing from the lower social stratum (Pinches 1999a: 32).¹³

¹² For a crosscultural analysis of the concept of “romantic love”, please refer to Jankowiak et.al. 1992, and Lindholm 2006.

¹³ Or, as one might call this practice, borrowing from Bourdieu – distinction.



Figure 1: Athir, my host-sister's newlywed husband (in green), and Bapak Rasulong, her father (in yellow), during the *akad nikah*, the legally binding wedding ceremony, which weds the couple under national and religious law. In the front, the *mahar* (Islamic bride price) was presented by his family to hers. In this photo, to my mind the most serious moment in the wedding is depicted. Here, the legalities of the wedding are formally and theatrically recited: Whose hand is given to whom, and for what price – though only one of the three, the *mahar*, is publically pronounced. Firstly, the father of the bride gives the groom an offer for his daughter's hand, and secondly, the groom has to recite his words exactly as spoken. Until he has not declaimed the offer correctly, he is not wed to the bride.

During this ceremony, the bride (accompanied by the oldest women of her family) awaited her husband in her room, which is decorated extensively. She knows whether the marriage is legally binding when outside of her room all guests begin cheering, whistling and frantically applauding.

As mentioned above, clearly this procedure is very theatrical. High importance, even on the photo, is put on the seriousness of the situation, as well as on the offered bride price for the young woman, which is positioned centrally for the audience to see and witness. This, however, is only the Islamic bride price paid by the groom's family. Before the *akad nikah* starts, all other gifts and offerings are cordially escorted into the house by young family members dressed in a uniform traditional costume (for example the *baju bodo*). The second bride price, the *uang pannai*, entails a pecuniary bank transfer for the wedding reception expenses. The second one, the *erang-erang* courtship gifts which are reciprocated by the wife's family, too, will be explained more closely in figure 8.

2.2. Spending Money to Be Richer

Awareness for the prestige that comes from the association with money can be found in many practices I observed during my fieldwork. Not only bride prices and the ability to pay them can demonstrate these aspirations for social and economic mobility, but also other customs and conventions, which I was able to witness during my research. Notably, weddings and customs related to weddings, i.e. practices circulating around the 'wedding economy', often stand at the center of this. As Gerke notes, “prestige and status became negotiable values, depending mainly on a person’s lifestyle and consumption patterns, and no longer based on traditional established values and hierarchies” (Gerke 2002: 153). Though I would disagree with her on the simplicity of the matter of lifestyle and consumption patterns directly overruling traditional values and hierarchies, I do agree with her that consumption and especially conspicuous consumption do to a certain extent permeate scales of social stratification with loopholes.

My host-father, for example, kept a neatly ruled notebook in which he meticulously noted down his spending on wedding gifts. This way, the marrying couples and their families know who attended the wedding, and how much each guest thought appropriate to give to them. In turn, this favor will be reciprocated in the future.¹⁴ As he commonly went to several wedding receptions per week with his wife, he wanted to keep track of the money he invested into the 'wedding cycle': When somebody gets married, it is common to use the envelope of the invitation addressed to one as the envelope in which the monetary wedding gift is later returned to the bride and groom at the reception. During my stay, the sum usually given to the wedded couples spanned between 200.000 and one million Rupiah.¹⁵ Indeed, it is more common to give more if the receiving couple is perceived as higher in stand than oneself. This indicates what I am arguing in favor of: With the reciprocal dynamic in mind, it can be understood as a sort of 'investment' which will later be returned at the wedding of one's own children. But importantly, it is a pecuniary investment with an effect on one's social stand.

By this I mean, that the giving party tries to indicate its *ability* to spend a certain sum on a wedding gift. Giving one million Rupiah is indeed, also for the families I talked to, quite an effort. But it is an effort worthwhile, when it is noted by the “higher ranking” families. It can, as I argue, articulate a spending power by the giving party, which elevates them into higher socio-economic ranks.¹⁶ Similarly, wedding photography and pre-wedding photography are an economic investment,

14 He took down the date of the weddings, the couples' and their parents' names, and the sum he had put into the envelope.

15 Throughout my stay in 2015, the Rupiah's course against the Euro's was around 15.000 Rp per one Euro.

16 The relation between money and prestige then is a complex one. Economic capital is turned into social capital, and social capital

which in many cases exceed the couples' spending power. Still, seemingly everyone has them. As Heryanto notes in relation to popular culture, “the significance of pop culture in contemporary Indonesia is never confined to the views and behaviour [sic] of the nation’s political elite” (Heryanto 2008: 5). This means, that everyone has access to pop culture: mostly passive as a recipient, but also actively, as a creator of similar images. Accordingly, not only the most affluent people in Indonesia have the ability to take part in the visual imagery of wedding photography, but that indeed, also less affluent people do so. As noted above, technology itself, and by this I mean photography, can be used by everybody to consume up.

This chapter dealt with the intricate relationship between social status, monetary affluence, marriage and wedding particularly in Makassar. In the above, I have pointed out the theatrical value weddings wield, and hence their inherent possibility for conspicuous consumption. By looking at Makassar’s wedding customs, this chapter has opened the room for the upcoming discussion of consumer culture in Indonesia – namely lifestyle choices in relation to class structures. “[Modern] weddings evoke romance, allure, fashion, style, and glamour”, states Lieu about Asian-American weddings (Lieu 2014: 133). Her observations are valid in Makassar, too. It is, however, not only the visual evocation of fashion, style, glamour, and pecuniary affluence, but the allusion to and illusion of it, which are integral to weddings in Makassar. The capability to consume in a way that imagines and articulates social mobility is visible in the practices surrounding weddings.¹⁷ As Grimes so fittingly put it: “It is important to consider the relation of the spiritual and artistic to the commercial and political” (Grimes 2000: 154). This means for example, that it is important to consider the relation between wedding rituals, marriages, and consumption in Makassar. Before taking an in depth look at wedding and pre-wedding photography, we thus need to theorize consumption and the class stratifications in Indonesia, which constitute the second major key to understanding pre-wedding photography. Having looked at how the theatricality of wedding rituals in Makassar also plays with notions of consumption and consuming up, a broader conceptualization of consumption and lifestyle choices is essential. In the following chapter, I will hence take a closer look at consumption and lifestyle choices especially in regards to the Indonesian middle-class and new rich, to theorize the second major feature of pre-wedding and wedding photography.

indicates the proximity of the subject to economic capital.

17 For example, pre-wedding and wedding-photography, as the visual documentation of the event

3. Lifestyle, Consumption, and Class

*“[Consumption] has almost always just as much to do with constraint,
as with choice, with lack of power, as with creativity”*

(Miller 2009: 12)

Consumption, this seems clear, is never neutral. We see this in the example of clothing: Indeed, whichever fashion style we adhere to, we make a choice – not necessarily conscious or unconscious – but definitely never neutral. Even the decision not to concern oneself with fashion or stylistic choices is a decision in itself. Not to wear any clothes at all, even more so.

Since consumption, lifestyle, and social class are inextricably intertwined, I will give an overview of the terms, in relation to the Indonesian middle- and upper-middle-class to which my research was mainly tied. In other words, the upcoming paragraphs will function to sort out the intricate relationship between lifestyle choices, and the population I studied to carve out the imaginary elevating capacity of consumptive practices, such as pre-wedding photography.

3.1. Lifestyle Choices: Tasting Luxury, Transgressing Social Stratification

Lifestyles, in a broad sense, take shape not only in accordance with the economic possibilities of the agents, but also in adherence to political, religious, and cultural settings. This means, that factors such as age, gender, and education have a decisive influence on how a lifestyle is shaped and lived (Tomlinson 2003: 1).¹⁸ Bourdieu was mainly interested in how different lifestyles and *habiti* were generated from underlying societal structures, in relation to individuals.¹⁹ Consequently, people with similar societal backgrounds, i.e. education, class, profession, etc., were to him more likely to have similar lifestyles.²⁰ However, consumption – which is always intricately connected to

18 One can argue, that there are different “standards” that can be subsumed under this, which are sometimes called “class cultures” (e.g. Pinches or Robison 2006). For example, the standard lifestyle of a family of lower-income in comparison to an upper-middle-class kin-group will differ in various components, starting from living arrangements and food supply, until the diverging holiday-habits they might have.

19 Distinguishing between different kinds of capital – economic, cultural, symbolic, etc. – was a main theoretical milestone of Bourdieu's work. Here, lifestyles that individuals live catalyze social structures, by referencing the structure within their symbolic capital.

20 Bourdieu is one of the most famous academics who attempted to theorize this. He summarized it mainly under the complex term *habitus*, and was prevalently interested in structuralist approaches to the topic. Still, though the strictly structuralist view has been

lifestyle choices – can neither simply be reduced to structural conditions, nor to the free will. To some extent, I assent to Bourdieu's theory that there is indeed an opposition between “the taste of luxury”, which he considers to signify economic freedom, and “the taste of necessity”, corresponding to living under conditions almost on the border of extinction (Bourdieu 1996: 177). Although Bourdieu's approach to lifestyle is foundational to contemporary debates on the concept, we must go beyond the structuralist paradigm that was his, to put emphasis on the agency of the actors. So to a certain degree, I also have to accede to Slater who puts forth that lifestyle groups are “elective communities” to which we freely choose membership (Slater 1997:88, emphasis original) regardless of class or economic standing. In the end, I most strongly agree with Daniel Miller. To Miller, people

[...] have an endless creative capacity to explore the propensities of various genres of objects to create their understanding of themselves in the world, though they are constantly constrained and often frustrated both by the limits of these media and by the authority of others. (Miller 2009: 20)

Lifestyles are then not only a symbol of structural facts, but are much more bound to the individual's awareness of certain limiting structures (cf. Miller 2009: 20).²¹ Thus, styles also allow the actors to interpret different and even contradictory signifying allusions to different communities, which “need not map neatly onto an underlying cultural orientation or even [...] habitus” (Ferguson 1999: 97, cf. 221 pp., 227). As already mentioned, consumption and lifestyle choices can be understood to be both, a mechanism to signify coherence and belonging to a certain part of the stratum, and at the same time to symbolize a *divergence* from another part of the stratum. Not without good reason has Heryanto stated about lifestyle and consumer culture that they have taken a big part in the changing dynamics of social stratification and hierarchies within the Indonesian nation and with this, “[lifestyle] has become a crucial site for the construction, negotiation and contestation of identity in Indonesia” (Heryanto 1999: 179). Furthermore, Heryanto argues that the new rich exercise their economic power within the social space of lifestyle (Heryanto 1999: 164). This 'exercising' of economic power enfold the consumption of certain goods, or the exertion of different practices, such as wedding-photography.²² However, marking one's departure from groups perceived as lower in the social stratification and indicating the arrival within higher ranks of society by lifestyling or consuming certain goods, does not necessarily coincide with one's actual

reviewed extensively and rejected by now, his terminology can be made useful in this context.

21 In the volume *Anthropology and the Individual*, which Miller edited, he states to “[...] give full acknowledgement to an individual's sense of order, which may be partly derived from parents and other social relationships, from their sense of place, and from their alignment with, opposition to, or compromise with the authority of the state. This order may represent a socialized habitus, their own personal habitus, or most often habitus” (Miller 2009: 20).

22 Pre-wedding and wedding photography, to me, are indeed visual consumptive practices as such.

economic conditions. Often, people tend to consume up, towards more luxurious and lavish lifestyles. But still, this is not to indicate a virtuality or hollowness of the consumptive patterns or lifestyling.²³ Rather I want to get at the diversity and flexibility of consumptive practices through which people position themselves. To my mind, lifestyling and consuming bear an imaginative capacity which allow their agents – to a certain degree – to place *themselves* within societal frameworks.²⁴ I thus argue that lifestyles are a crucial mechanism through which the self is imagined to be socially mobile – not only by the people who are able to afford it. Almost everyone can take one way or the other, part in this lifestyling.²⁵

Another example is the way in which Islam has been said to have developed in Indonesia within the past decades. In this sense, too, as Miller quoted above mentions, people actively construct their understanding of themselves within this world (Miller 2009: 20). Noteworthy, is the necessity to also see the connections between the Indonesian middle-class, their lifestyle behavior, as well as Indonesian Islam. As Barendregt argues, “the newly rich are in many respects more orthodox and religious” (Barendregt 2008: 161). Indonesia especially stands out in this respect, since its Islamic revival in the 1980s. Since then, Islam in Indonesia has been interwoven with interpretations and constructions of lifestyle, fashion, and even elitism, as well as with a middle-class narrative (cf. Barendregt 2008: 161, Hasan 2014: 182). In this regard, Hasan notes that “Islamic symbols reflect middle-class attempts to construct new narratives of themselves and their place in the world through practices of distinction” (Hasan 2014: 181). Signifying the departure from the lower stratum on the social scale, being distinct from it, is according to Hasan also evident in lifestyling practices involving religion.²⁶

Aside from that, the interest in social status mobility is even inherent in the Indonesian concept of *gengsi*. The term *gengsi*, which can be loosely translated as “prestigious”, plays an important role in the mutual perception and interpretation of lifestyle choices and aspirations for Indonesians. Michiel de Lange very fittingly states about the term “*gengsi*” in Indonesia:

23 Solvay Gerke, for example, pejoratively states about her hopes for Indonesian consumerism exactly that “consumption pattern[s] will, hopefully, be more substantively real than imaginary and hollow” in the future (Gerke 2002: 155). Needless to say, I am not arguing in favor of her view on this matter, but oppose it by concentrating on the imaginative possibilities consumption practices can bear for the actors.

24 Frameworks, as in Benedict Anderson’s famous monograph *Imagined Communities* are imagined entities, but nevertheless have a real effect on the behavioral patterns of people. He states that “It [the community] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (2006: 6). However, rather than focusing on imagined communities as national entities, I use the terms frameworks or frames of reference in regard to imagining communities per se. Those communities could indeed entail a nation, but are not confined to it. For example, a religious community, an online or generally Southeast Asian community.

25 One instance is the way in which cellphones are used to demarcate “modern” and middle-class lifestyles, as Bart Barendregt analyzed in his article *Sex, Cannibals, and the Language of Cool* (2008).

26 For more on Islam and fashion in connection to identity construction, see chapter 4.2. on visual trends and Muslim fashion.

Gengsi, which means “prestige” or “status display”, originally connoted family standing and class. With Soeharto’s [sic] New Order (1966-1998) economic boom, the notion has shifted from an interior “innate” property to an image achieved by outward appearances. Appearing prestigious involves the possession and display of material goods that symbolically convey progress and cosmopolitanism (de Lange 2013: 102, emphasis original)

Since the moral attitude towards the term *gengsi* is quite ambiguous and often yields a negative connotation of “consumptive materialistic hedonism” it is seldom used as a self-defining term, but is rather ascribed to other people (de Lange 2013: 102). I wholeheartedly agree with de Lange on the fact that many Indonesians also use *gengsi* “to indicate the general Indonesian obsession with conveying impressions through status symbols” (de Lange 2013: 102). Materialistic properties are crucial to the demarcation of lifestyles, and hence also symbolic status indicators.

Indeed, I see bridal photography do the same: they also incorporate and display status symbols and materialistic properties. Thus, pre-wedding photography and wedding photography can both be understood as examples of *gengsi* consumer behavior. Choices made in pre-wedding and wedding photography are to a large extent dependent on trends and tastes, which relate to certain (life) styles. Thus, lifestyle and taste are here not analyzed as a choice by destiny and “produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary” (Bourdieu 1996: 178).²⁷ But these patterns can also be broken, aspired membership to certain lifestyle groups can be visually alluded to or made visible by making use of certain imageries or technologies. As I have observed during my fieldwork, photography can be made useful as a self-empowering tool, placing oneself in the frameworks one imagines to be a nation-state, or a global Muslim community.²⁸ As hinted at above though, I am aware that economic possibilities can be a restraining factor in and of consumption behavior. So it is important to know that the informants I personally worked with also had limited possibilities when ordering pre-wedding photos. Instead of being able to fly off to Iceland, Tasmania, or Las Vegas, they were mostly bound to vacation destinations nearby, in Indonesia – or Southeast Asia at best. Notably though, the couples at least had the funds to pay for the more popular, high-end photographers of Makassar.²⁹

27 Although, as Bourdieu argues, there are also people whose choices of style are indeed limited, though arguably never entirely diminished, by their capital.

28 That is, conspicuously consuming certain lifestyles in pre-wedding and wedding photos.

29 I noticed that there were three to five photographers in Makassar who catered to my informant group's wishes and needs. Arguably, there might be more popular photographers in Makassar, but I regard the ones I talked to, to be the most representative choice of photographer for the couples I worked with.

3.2. Identifying Indonesia's New Rich and Middle Class

Arguably, the social group my research focused on enjoyed the circumstance of not living on the poverty threshold, but rather comfortably, if not relatively luxuriously. Their economic and social positions were mainly identifiable as middle-class and upper-middle-class.³⁰ However, and I must strongly stress this point, classifying my informants as belonging to a certain social status does not quite suffice in giving insights into their social environment. Obviously, there were rarely informants whose whole family or circle of friends had a throughout consistent lifestyle or living standard. Notably, it is far more common for the people I talked to, to have friends of lower-income, and very rurally oriented family members, but also more affluent acquaintances or family branches. In most cases, my informants' parents were the ones who had decisively built their fortune up from scratch to newly rich, middle- and upper-middle-class standards. The upcoming part will theorize my research group in more detail, referring back to lifestyle theories in regard to conceptualizations of Indonesia's new rich and middle-class.

Defining these terms, Gerke states that both terms, "new rich" and "middle-class", delineate the new wealthy social groups that have especially developed from industrial shifts in Asia. Most often, they based their social power on either economic "capital and expertise or rent and/or position in the extensive state apparatus" (Gerke 2002: 135). It is that generation of my informants' parents, whose living standards and styles were first and foremost effected by the expansion of the civil servant sector: a "product of liberalized higher education in the late colonial period and, on the other hand, to the much older groups of Muslim and Chinese traders" (Dick 1985: 71).³¹ This growing civil sector generated the consumerist lifestyle industry.³² Following Pinches, class cultures after this change in Indonesia, were not traced to economic conditions, but via social connections through which people, divertingly located by these conditions, "constitute each other socially and culturally through the practices of daily life" (Pinches 1999a:8).

Therefore, my informants neither belong to the national high society, nor to the highest or the lowest local class, they can be located on the threshold between middle-class and high-class, with

30 Please note though, that Barendregt urges the reader to caution, when trying to impose this term upon Southeast Asian circumstances. He states that, "[the] newly wealthy of Southeast Asia's metropolises do not necessarily display the features of the middle class in the West: e.g., rationality, democracy, individualization, and secularism" (Barendregt 2009: 161).

31 Dick also propounds that "[the] achievement of national independence in 1949 marked the first stage in the consolidation of this new class. After the hiatus of "Guided Democracy" (1959-65), the second stage began with the establishment of the "New Order" government in 1966. The restoration of political stability and the unprecedented prosperity of the oil boom of the 1970s has enabled this middle class to flourish" (Dick 1985: 71).

32 This consumerist industry was a "[...] phenomenon spawned not only by rapid economic growth in contemporary Asia but also by the global expansion of consumerism" (Chua 2002: 2).

essential connections to both directions.³³ Accordingly, it does not matter how we define a class, if we do not define the relational connections to other classes (White 2014: 47). Following Coutas, academic research must evidently stop identifying cultural patterns and practices in “binary logics” with mutually exclusive terms, and start acknowledging the shared, multifaceted frameworks and spaces that have emerged – connecting a person or family directly to other frames of reference: a kin group, a city, a region, a nation, and so on (Coutas 2008: 128). Much more, we need to understand that identifying with certain goods, practices, or communities, is not the same as an identity per se (cf. Antweiler 2013: 17). Rather, identities are multiples. In regards to Asia's and Indonesia's new rich/ middle-class, this means that we need to understand which frames of reference are important, but also how and with which consumption practices people placed themselves within these frames of varying scope. In line with this,

Identität ist nicht dasselbe wie Identifikation, Rolle, Position, Rang oder Status. Schon in sogenannten traditionellen Gesellschaften oder Gemeinschaften können Individuen gleichzeitig mehrere Rollen, Ränge, und Statuspositionen einnehmen. (Antweiler 2013: 17, emphasis added)

Articulating one's position in a framework like religion is then also about identifying with this framework *as such*. But the identification with *one* framework does not eliminate others. In line with this, Ferguson emphasizes peoples' competence to hold and draw upon a diverging and ambiguous repertoire of norms in compliance with the situation or the community in question (Ferguson 1999: 104). Cultural style, as he argues, enables the interpretation of practices denoting variations and nuances between social “categories” (Ferguson 1999: 95).³⁴ Variations in demeanor are thus not conscious situational discardings of learned behavior, but a performative signifying of different poles of categorization (Ferguson 1999: 95, 96). Correspondingly, social acts do not exist in social vacuums and are instead usually positioned within a wider setting of social and historic significance. Accordingly, consumption “[...] always operates within specific historical settings and embodies historically specific constructions of time, space and social relations” (Heryanto 1999: 160). Within this setting, lifestyling and consumerism, for instance, become cultural sides of contesting, constructing and negotiating identities, for example of the new rich (Heryanto 1999:

33 Necessity is for the population studied in this thesis not the primary purpose of consumption, but they have the assets to quite freely consume products and services for leisure. Indeed, their children also enjoy the possibilities of secondary and tertiary education, which has been named one characteristic of middle and higher classes frequently. Other than that, there is rarely any clear distinction made in social scientific texts. Education, income, and professions are just some distinctive factors, but this is by far not a complete list. Unfortunately, it is hence also quite difficult to make a distinction between middle-class, upper-middle class and newly rich Indonesians. Since the authors of the text I refer to use these terms interchangeably, and since this is in line with what I found to be the case during my ethnographic work, I will do so, too.

34 In his monograph, mainly between cosmopolitan and localist. Also, for Ferguson, this styling is a signifying practice that involves practical knowledge, which requires an (over time) internalized capability of a performative competence (1999: 96 pp., 104).

160).

Concluding this chapter, I have shown that in consuming there are limits of access for the actors, such as monetary obstacles. Still, lifestyling choices are an essential way in which my research group – which I understand to be part of the new rich or Indonesian middle-class – made social mobility visible, or rather: imaginable. Pinches notes that while social prestige is more and more mediated through the market, in turn, social identity is increasingly constructed around commodity consumption: Therefore, achievements and status are signified via consumer items (Pinches 1999a: 32). Especially lifestyle is a ground on which these signs of “belonging” and “identifying” are negotiated through consumption: As I argue, both by seeing, perceiving, and in turn imagining which signs belong to which end of the social scale, and by representing, visualizing, and acting out of these categories of belonging.

By now, we have theorized the local wedding customs in Makassar in relation to a more general conceptualization of “middle-classness” in Indonesia. To set my observations into a well-rounded framework, and tie the knot between the aforementioned themes and my case studies, it is now necessary to theorize the technological side of this topic. Hence, the following chapter is dedicated to analyzing the technical aspects of pre-wedding and wedding photography. Again, referring back to the visibility of weddings, lifestyle choices, and identity making – as discussed above – the upcoming paragraphs will set these topics into the context of photography, also considering digital distributional channels and visual trends.

4. Tying the Knot: Theorizing Pre-Wedding and Wedding Photography

“Encapsulated in a medium that is itself a transforming technology, bridal photography allows couples to indulge in choices of self-representation”

(Lieu 2014: 155)

During my fieldwork, a friend and assistant of a photographer I worked with uttered the following in regards to pre-wedding photos:

Actually, we could just take photos in front of a brick wall. If we said that brick wall is standing in Korea, certainly people would really like the photo. We pay that much money for just those two hours [of photoshooting]. For that money I could just go on honeymoon with my wife. Soph, this is all just done for the people at the reception! (Irfan 2015)

Intriguingly, in this quote my informant Irfan got to different points that need to be stressed: Firstly, he hints at the intricate relation between imagination and representation, between seeing and being seen, between watching and showing. Additionally, he emphasizes how much money people spend on pre-wedding photos. He hints at how redundant this expensive photoshoot actually is to him personally, but also how important and inevitable it is, because it is all done for the wedding reception to which hundreds (if not thousands) of people are invited. Furthermore, he jokingly mentions the possibility to merely state that a photo was taken at a certain place – for example Korea, which has become extremely well-liked in Indonesian popular culture – even though it might have been taken in a simple Indonesian backyard. With this, Irfan indicates how imagination is in different ways deployed by young to be married couples. For instance, the imagined audience of the photo, namely people at the reception, is recognized as people with imaginative prowess, whose quality in some cases can work deceptively – also, to the benefit of the couple. Similarly, the depicted couple can use the backdrop, for instance of a universal brick wall, to emulate scenarios which actually exceed their local radius, or pecuniary mobility. Obviously, the association with having had a pre-wedding photoshoot in a popular Asian country such as Korea would be a favorable one for a young couple. It suggests prosperity that allows traveling abroad, as well as being in line with popular trends in Indonesia. This quote emphasizes the intrinsic relation between viewing and showing, between imagining the back story of a photo and playing with this imaginative prowess in the practice of representation. Arguably, they are two sides of the same coin.



Figure 2: This photo, a screenshot from the popular *evermorephotography* Instagram account, mirrors the quote by my Indonesian informants above. Indeed, the photo alludes to the ability to travel abroad for pre-wedding photos. Similarly, to the Instagram consumer it is unknown whether the photo was actually shot in Japan or merely in a well landscaped backyard somewhere in Jakarta. The photography studio acquires its new customers not necessarily by actually offering trips to Japan included in special pre-wed packages, but by giving the option to take photos which can suggest this.

The hashtags deployed in contextualizing this photo on the social media platform Instagram underline this neatly. Whether it is *#preweddingmakassar* or *#preweddingaustralia*, or more fittingly *#preweddingjapan*, that were used under this photo, does not lessen the its value. On the contrary, by relating to specific localities, the photographers broaden their audience and thus their possible new customers. When couples browse the platform for inspirations for their own shoots, even if they cannot travel, they will evidently also find this photo. Whether they go directly to the photography studio which produced this shot, or take the demure poses of the bride, or the modern business attire of the groom as inspiration for their own photos, they will decide for themselves.

The following part is dedicated to the technology, which enables the production and distribution of bridal photography. To this, I not only count the photographic process, but also the social media channels, through which young people in Makassar consume pre-wedding and wedding photography in two ways: Firstly, by *actively* taking and posting their own wedding photos online; secondly, by *seeing* such photos by other young couples on Instagram, Facebook, and Path. As I already hinted at in the foregoing chapters, there are two ways of consuming pre-wedding photography for the young couples I talked to. An *active* one, entailing the production and distribution of photos, i.e. the representation of the self to others; and a *passive* one whose mechanism is the seeing of the posted content, and consequently imagining the referential frame within which this photo is to be interpreted.³⁵

I regard taking a closer look at the photographic technology and their social mechanisms, utilized by young couples as highly important to my thesis, since it is here where the representational and imaginative capacities of the informants I talked to take shape. To understand this, is to comprehend through which technological mechanisms young newlyweds interpret, understand, and then position themselves within referential frames important to them, and how they deploy lifestyling features to do so.

4.1. The Visualizing Technologies of Weddings

“[...] the couple is engaged in producing images of themselves in multiple contexts and settings before they are formally recognized as a married couple”

(Lieu 2014:145)

Indeed, no other ritual is as conditioned to an iconized visuality, as getting married is. Here, the visual documentation of the event and its chronology do not necessarily disrupt the event, but much more so validate it (Grimes 2006: 30). Hence, shooting photos becomes an integral part of the ceremony itself.³⁶ During weddings in Indonesia, I have witnessed this on all occasions. Here, in fact, the “photographic documentation highlights an event's repeatability and proper formality”, and

35 I cannot stress enough though, that I do not necessarily regard the act of “seeing” a passive one per se, since the interpretation and consequential imagination of the seen eventually results in active behavior again – such as posting photos for example. For the sake of the argument though, I am simplifying the two. Representing will be understood as active consumption, whereas imagining will be identified with passive consumption.

36 And thus, the “[...] ceremonial space is [a] photographic space” (Grimes 2000: 175).

thus renders it a proper event which was enacted “as it should be” (Strassler 2010: 174).³⁷ Still in accordance with the former political New Order regime which “elevated ritual stability to a social and political ideal”, both in the formal and in private sectors of everyday life, especially wedding photography's purpose is to capture the ritual's formality, expressed in its seamless chronology (Strassler 2010: 177). This idealized iconographic chronology of wedding ceremonies followed the same processes and procedures, in all cases I witnessed. Echoing the formal documentation of the ritual, as is required in Indonesian national events, the photographs gained their value in the perfect repetition of the ceremony (cf. Strassler 2010: 170).

Though the custom of taking extensive sums of wedding portraits from the actual ceremony and reception have been common for a long time, as Strassler also mentions in her 2010 monograph, pre-wedding photography is still quite a new genre in photography, which took off especially after digital single-lense reflex cameras (DSLR) became more affordable to the public in the 2000s. In comparison to wedding photography, which is a main mechanism of chronological documentation [*dokumentasi*] of the event (cf. Strassler 2010: 179), pre-wedding photography has a different documentative effect. Though it is also a way to “capture the moment before the wedding for all eternity”, as many of my informants told me, it is even more so a reflection of the couple's place in society. Or rather, the place in society they feel to be able – and *want* to be able – to take. In contrast to the usual wedding photography that features rows and rows of photo albums, which differ in only small details of the set up and costumes of the people depicted (cf. figure 4);³⁸ pre-wedding photos are “[...] photographs in which the subjects themselves choose how they appear [which allows] the subject much greater agency” (Alesich 2007: 323). Going even further, when considering Barthes' remark on the prophetic character of the photos, one could say that the young couples are taking charge of their own aspirational representations, indeed even: the image of their future together.

37 In her monograph *Refracted Visions on Indonesian, and especially Javanese photographic practices*, Strassler focuses on the way “people draw on widely circulating imageris (often tied to the state, the mass media, and other powerful and public institutions) to fashion their personal statements, [which] they redirect [...] into a more intimate register” (Strassler 2010: 23). By looking at how photographs mediate between personal life trajectories, and more public representational forms, i.e. by looking at the intersecting visual practices between the public and the personal, Strassler identifies *dokumentasi* as the most fruitful concept connecting both. In its focus on perfect, seamless, chronological, and almost ritual repeatability, *dokumentasi* echoes in private photo albums, as an political, ideological discourse of Indonesian society.

38 There are different parts of the usual wedding photography standard: Firstly, the meticulous documentation of the rituals, and secondly, a detailed, quite stiffly looking visual component in the wedding albums, which show the most important guests in an endlessly reoccurring full frontal static pose.



Figure 3: The photographer has become a necessary entity at all rituals leading up to the wedding. Rarely can one find cellphone shots not including the photography team. Even their own shots often feature a detail hinting at their presence at the event. Most prominently, the photographer and his team encircle the bride and groom closely to get the best shots of everything that is happening. Here, at the *mandi bunga* or *siraman*, the flower cleansing ritual deployed for several ritual occasions, including the wedding, the photographer is close by, too. His function is to document the ritual in chronological detail, as explained above.



Figure 4: This photo depicts a page in my oldest host-sister's, Nunu's, wedding album. The five thick and heavy albums all feature the same static, endlessly reoccurring poses.



Figure 5: The photographers' function is to document the ritual in chronological detail. Their work is reflected in the value of the event's perfect repetition. In this photo, we are made witness to Athir's and Niny's *akad nikah* ceremony. In this situational shot, of which one will find a similar one in every wedding album from Makassar, they are holding up their freshly signed legal marriage papers. Both this shot, and the obligatory "ring shot" (see figure 6), are an established standard of wedding photography.



Figure 6: The ring shot of Niny and Athir. Usually, the rings are put on in the bride's room. However, as further explained in chapter 6, the ceremony's proceedings were interrupted since the rings were still stashed in the master bedroom's safe downstairs. Still, nobody seemed at all bothered by this, except for the initial shock. Especially, because the ring shot as seen in this photo, is usually taken downstairs in front of the big audience anyway. This way, the guests were not only witnesses to the ring shot photo, as usually the case, but even of the moment when the couple put on the rings. This rupture in the ceremonial process was also underlined and pointed out by the professional moderator of the event. Quite calmly she explained to the guests that the ceremony would vary slightly from the usual chronology, and that the rings were going to be put on in the living room instead of the bedroom.

However varying in some respects, both practices – pre-wedding and wedding photography – function to engage in the imagination and in turn representation of what is comprehended, for example, as the Indonesian state: “By taking glamorous photographs of themselves, villagers engage their images in this idea of Indonesia, an Indonesia represented through sanitized, idealized, images of itself” (Alesich 2007: 329). Both photographic practices adhere to certain sets of standards, expectations, and also fashions, though pre-wedding photography as a relatively new field of photography wields a more open room for creativity and maybe even subversive rebellion for the couples.³⁹ Nevertheless, both depict ideal scenarios of iconographic quality: Wedding photos, in relation to the documentative formalization of ritual events as such, as meant by Strassler; or by relating the shown bridal couple to less ritually focused fashions, and popular idols.

After understanding the differences and analogies of pre-wedding and wedding photography, it is now important to continue to take a closer look at the fashion and trend dynamics, which majorly impact pre-wedding photography. This is majorly interesting, since fashion can be understood as a mediating flow between individuals and larger communities. After this, the technological aspects of the photos' distribution will be discussed, especially Instagram, to comprehend the main mechanism through which trends and fashions of pre-wedding and also wedding photography are distributed, consumed, and then again: produced.

4.2. Visual Trends and Muslim Fashions

“Consumer fashions and aesthetic standards have become increasingly fluid in the Asian region and, to varying degrees, new, looser, status structures are being negotiated by and around the new rich”

(Pinches 1999a: 38)

Temporally bound and only trending for a certain amount of time, pre-wedding fashions – in general not much different from, but rather closely related to clothing, or other trends – demand a high involvement and visual literacy from its peers. To be fashionable, to demarcate one's belonging to these trends, is to outline a personal affiliation with the fashionable and fashion-making elite.

In fashion, consumers' desire to be different is a limited desire of individualizing within a trend [...] Fashion is necessarily a trend, which is constituted by mass participation. To be 'fashionable' is to be

³⁹ For example by subliminally rebelling against the limitations of their parents' generation concerning intimacy between the couple, or the interaction with alcohol at the pre-wedding photoshoots.

with the trend, with the crowd. (Beng-Huat 2002: 15, emphasis original)

The fashion-making and fashionable elite of Indonesian youths is mainly, as common all around the world, the prominent stars and popular public persons. Among these we find TV presenters and movie stars, musicians, and privileged children of political leaders. Though the actresses and stars depicted in the magazines stand outside the material and social confinements of middle-class life, their images circulate ubiquitously, promoting commodities for the broader audiences (Jones 2010b). The fiancé of one of my host-sisters commented upon this during a talk I had with him and his mother, when he said that especially photos of prominent people were those printed in magazines. Often, he would see pre-wedding photos or wedding photos, usually in combination with long interviews of these stars and public figures in print. To him, this is where pre-wedding photography originated from. As everywhere, young people look up to their stars, take their trends as personal poles of orientation, and often emulate the celebrities' lifestyles as depicted in magazines: their tastes and fashions, their lifestyle choices and consumption patterns trickle down to their peer and fan groups and thus become trends. It is no wonder then, that the interviews run with visual accompaniment, have become a fashion in themselves. The pre-wedding photos we see in Indonesia today mimic exactly this photographic style: unblemished, photoshopped, illustrating the prominent props, and beautiful backgrounds in front of which an opulently dressed couple poses flamboyantly. If seen without context, they could even be interpreted as perfume or high fashion ads in magazines.

Essentially, that is what fashion magazines do: from commissioning photography, to selling imagery to aspirational readers, to soliciting image-based advertising pages, imagery is central to the appeal of a fashion magazine. (Jones 2010b: 101)

Considering Jones' work here, especially middle-class Islamic lifestyles and fashions have come to be extremely visible when promoted by celebrities, in fashion magazines, television shows, as well as on the streets (Jones 2010a, 2010b). In turn, the fashion trends comprising Muslim morals such as piety and spirituality have influenced Indonesian visual culture extensively. Often, young, modern, urban Indonesians articulate their identities in the commodification of Islam (Beta 2014: 1). Especially middle-class Muslims were part of the "Islamic revival" of the 1980s and 90s, which expanded into the present (Jones 2010b: 93). Pious consumption then, whether in pre-wedding photos or other consumptive practices, implicates a religious nature of consumption, too: In global and transnational comparison, Indonesia holds a noteworthy position, since the extent of its Muslim population can never quite compensate its status in the global Islamic world (Jones 2010a: 632).

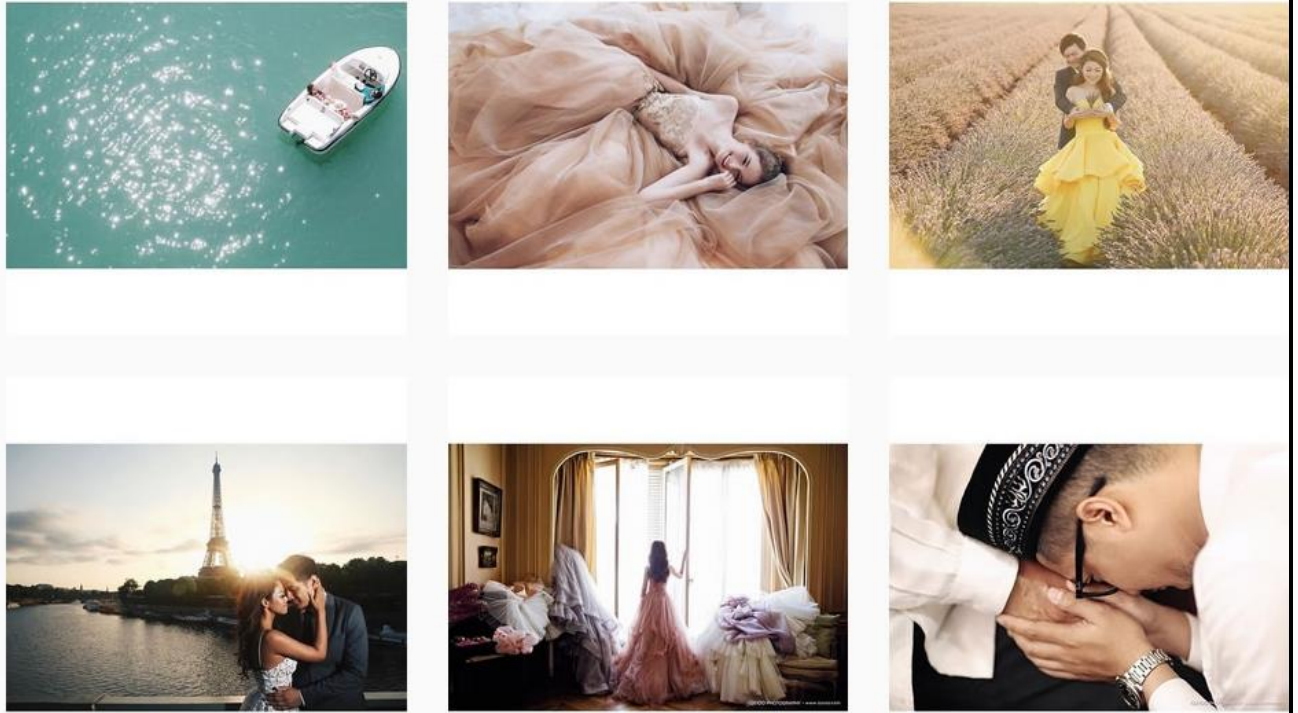


Figure 7: Clearly to be seen in this example of the online feed of *axioo* photography’s Instagram account, Muslim piety and belief stand in strong relation to fashion and lifestyle consumption. Here, the obviously devout gesture of the young, Muslim man kissing an elder’s hand on the bottom right stands in direct relation to the other photos: a couple holding each other intimately in front of the scenery of the Eiffel tower, the two people posing closely in the lavender fields, or the young lady in the nude tulle dress looking whimsically at the camera. What we see here, suggests grandeur (all those dresses!), affluence (the boat!), cosmopolitan chic (Paris!), romantic narratives (the flowers!), in connection – not contrast – to Muslim traditions. In this sense, the Muslim community is one of many identity-establishing points of orientation.

Being one of the most popular and trending wedding photography studios in all of Indonesia, with several hundred thousand followers on Instagram alone, *axioo* is a studio which sets trends and aesthetic fashions. Talking to my informants, many remarked about *axioo*, that they enjoyed how beautifully pastel their pictures were, how soft and magazine-like (*seperti di majalah*). One photographer stated that he had indeed recognized the growing interest in soft colored photos and had equipped himself accordingly with different lenses and camera filters, to fit his clients’ wishes. Most of my informants would never publish photos depicting them as intimately posing as on the above example, because of the local and social stipulations on such public bodily proximity. However, they still regarded the photos as “good”, aesthetically pleasing pre-wedding photos, that is.

By consuming piously, urban Indonesians allude to their belonging to this transnational Muslim community and demarcate the validity of their religiosity. Clearly though, consumptive practices in pre-wedding photography and elsewhere never *only* allude to Islam and to a Muslim identity, but also to other communities. In connection to distributing their photos on online platforms, van Dijk notes that “[...] users have various socio-discursive needs – expressive, communicative or promotional – reflecting the need for different personas and necessitating different addressees” (van Dijk 2013: 211).

Since mobile technologies, such as Instagram, extend the spheres of lifestyles, consumption, and shopping malls into all realms of everyday life, it is substantial to understand these technologies better (cf. Barendregt 2008: 168). Accordingly, after understanding more about trends and fashions, the incorporation of even religion into these fashions, and how these trends trickle down from celebrities to their peer and fan groups, we now need to understand the way in which social media platforms, especially Instagram, function to distribute those trends and resulting from that, facilitate identity discourses.

4.3. Instagram as the Hub between Imagining and Representing

One medium, through which most photographers and young couples display the results of their common work, is Instagram. Most trends of particularly popular pre-wedding photography are channeled in Indonesia through this “shoot and share technology”, rather than the also common wedding fares, as many of my informants confirmed (cf. Borges-Rey 2015: 571). This digital photography-sharing app is in general often used as a “commercial sales-platform”, as Jauhary told me (also see Beta 2014: 9). But additionally, it is a medium of aesthetic exchange, where “people get inspired”, as my host-sister Yuyun put it. Correspondingly, the sphere of wedding photography is one – of many – business endeavors that combine both: the commercial and the aesthetic sphere.⁴⁰ Hochman and his colleagues, who wrote about Instagram's function to connect people spatially, and function outside of common time frames, propounds about the medium:

we are [...] encouraged to see ourselves as specific points of time and place, then we are also prompted to think of ourselves as singularities which are part of various wholes, each contributing to a constantly growing database that then needs to be visualized and explored. This is the essence of this new “media paradigm”: exploring diversities of singularities not through hierarchies and

40 As mentioned by Grimes, cited in chapter 2.2 about conspicuous wedding consumption practices in Makassar.

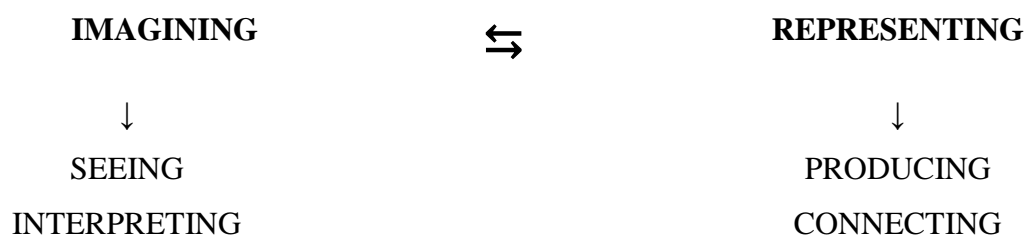
categories but rather through relations, transition and sequences, while moving from the singular to the plural, from the close to the distant. (Hochman et.al. 2013)

Hochman emphasizes how Instagram's technology works and is deployed, and what this means for individuals who enter the sphere of representation through relational connections. Connectivity between the individual and various collectives is therefore a crucial feature of this social media platform. Indeed, users of the platform are more and more skilled in communicating their self-expression and self-promotion (van Dijk 2013: 199, 210). Just as Instagram has become a repository of middle-class lifestyles, so is it also used to embed oneself into exactly those lifestyles (Beta 2014: 9, van Dijk 2010: 11-12). Accordingly, “personal photos – elements of self-representation” are made visible to a broad public, and also enhance a sense of community (Beta 2014: 8). As van Dijk states, “[it] is precisely the fissure between ‘share your pictures’ and ‘watch the world’ that makes you wonder what connects these two imperatives” (van Dijk 2010: 12, emphasis original).

During my fieldwork I observed many users, mostly young Indonesians, and their wedding photographers, drawing inspiration from this readily available, seemingly endless online database. Connected to this, Borges-Rey argues, “online photo-sharing platforms establish themselves as archives of collective performative discourses” (Borges-Rey 2015: 588). In this archival function lies one of Instagram's most important assets: Many people post their own pictures, and topically and also spatially relate them to the sphere of wedding photography in Indonesia via hashtags – such as #preweddingmakassar, #preweddingindonesia, #prawed, etc. As Beta argues, “[this] symbol [the hashtag] marks the user’s willingness to participate in a bigger pool of photos coming from around the world and to be categorized using words attached to the hashtag” (Beta 2014: 8)”. Some photographers who strive to reach a bigger, translocal audience (and potentially: customers) even include hashtags that would suggest the photo having been taken at several places at once, deploying the hashtags #preweddingmakassar, #preweddingbali, and #preweddingjakarta at the same time. During my fieldwork I found that many young couples browse Instagram for hours, looking for inspiration to later apply to their own photos, using just these hashtags, or looking at popular accounts they have heard of by friends or family members. As I have observed, users viewing these pictures inspire their own photographic endeavors, and will most likely result in posting at least some copies of their own before or after the wedding. Accordingly, with this *perpetuum mobile* effect of people constantly viewing, and then in turn taking part in this database growth by sharing their own photos, the database circulating wedding photography constantly expands. In practice, factually all of my informants referred to Instagram accounts and photos they screen-captured as a memory aid to show to the photographer. At the very least, they had found some themes, background ideas, or poses which they wanted to try out themselves. Most often, they

had talked to the photographer some days beforehand to make sure he or she was prepared to pretzel them into the right positions or shoot them from the right angles. In these cases, as Jauhary described, he himself as the professional hired to create a visual composition adhering to the photographic standardization – endlessly reoccurring themes, poses, dresses, backgrounds – was often asked for his expertise. This expertise included either thinking individually of a new combination of different themes and backgrounds, or entailed the almost exact replication of something the couple had seen before and rendered suitable for themselves. As Jauhary said about his clients, “they are going to see two themes and those themes are later combined into a new one [by us]”.

In all cases, the couples, and with them the photographers were striving to adhere to contemporary fashions and trends in pre-wedding photos from all over Indonesia, but mainly from the pre-wedding metropolis Jakarta, where most celebrities and stars, as well as political leaders reside in Indonesia. But also, and more importantly, they were striving to display the couple's *individual* cohesion and participation within these pre-wedding aesthetics and trends, which often exceed the local.⁴¹ Much more, the photos posted often functioned to project the couples into certain contexts of communal belonging, for instance by putting an emphasis on Muslim fashionwear, or more cosmopolitan, sexy garments, or even by relating to ethnic groups by wearing traditional costumes. By looking for hashtags and browsing through different accounts, my informants perceived what was fashionable or trendy; and in turn by employing hashtags, they participated in the fashions of the different communities present online. To put it in a nutshell, especially the visual double-ended mechanism which is ignited and perpetuated by (pre-) wedding photography is substantial to understand. Its processes can be simplified with the following:



As I interpret it, imagining and representing are inherently connected to each other. Firstly, what is being seen on, for example, Instagram accounts and what is thus interpreted to be, for

41 Indeed, interestingly, inspirations for pre-wedding and wedding photos are readily taken from especially Jakarta. Rather seldom, I have found informants looking for inspirations in the Southeast Asian region, such as Malaysia. However, since pre-wedding photography is also popular in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore etc., I do not doubt that there might be a substantial mutual visual influence between the wedding photography scenes. Hinting at this is the fact that the ppf photography collective was part of a wedding fare in Singapore in March 2015.

instance, a “Muslim lifestyle”, will impact what the viewer imagines to mean and look like “a Muslim”. Then, when it is the viewer’s turn to produce such photos – and express what he or she identifies within and with them –, he will inevitably connect back to what he previously imagined to be Muslim. Thus, what he represents is what he imagines. And this, again, will become – quite literally in the case of Instagram – part of the collective pool of visual representations, from which imagination will later be inspired and drawn again. This process is not monolithic, not singular in its expression: A photo referring to a Muslim lifestyle might allude to national or local identity formations, too. Like I mentioned above, pre-wedding and wedding photography differ slightly in what they can offer the person taking part in visual culture – whether as viewer or as viewed. While wedding photography substantially echoes the national based need for ritual validation through documentation; pre-wedding photography also allows for even further self-contextualization of the couple, by displaying them in more creative, individual settings.

With finishing this chapter, we have tied the mental bow between the theoretical analysis of weddings, consumption, and photography, and hereby opened the field for my research observations. Now, having comprehended the functions and mechanisms of pre-wedding and wedding photography, it is substantial to dive into the ethnographic case studies. Each one of them highlights the themes and topics differently which are central to my argument, namely expectations of marriage and weddings, the economic side of getting married, romantic love, identity making, Muslim lifestyles, and photographic strategies for consuming up. All three case studies highlight these themes in relation to bridal photography: In the first case, from the perspective of a young photographer and unmarried bachelor. In the second example, as a young couple planning to get married. And thirdly, from the perspective of using Instagram and social media.

5. Case Study I: Jauhary – Between a Professional and a Personal View upon Marriages and Weddings

By far, the photographer I worked most closely with was Jauhary. Due to his proximity to my family – both geographically as a neighbor, and socially as a close friend – and because of his family's good standing in Makassar, I was allowed to accompany him to jobs regularly.⁴² At some point, we met up almost daily, not only to go out photo-hunting, or organize pre-wedding shoots, but also because he was quite aware of his role for me and my research, asking me at one point: “Sophie, what would you have done without my help during this time of your research? You would have not gotten out of the house!”

5.1. *Being a Bachelor*

Indeed, Jauhary was my lifeline to the outside world and the people I was eager to meet and talk to. However, although we had become very good friends during the course of my fieldwork period, we had to maintain a highly professional facade to everyone else, since news travel fast in closely knit networks, and many people were starting to speculate on an ongoing affair between us. The fact that Jauhary is the notorious young single male in his friendship circles did not help with this, either. Even my host-sister living in Jakarta had at one point called him for an hour long talk about this issue, warning him “not to start an affair” with me. Further troubling was the circumstance that Jauhary is my high school sweetheart's best friend: During the course of my research I have seen several wedding invitations jokingly addressed to them as if they were a married couple, and I have witnessed quite a few circumstances during which people alluded to or joked about their relationship having a homosexual connotation. Though in the beginning this conjuncture indeed helped me get to know and open up to Jauhary, it later on always bore the

42 Jauhary is one of the closest friends of my host-sister, and his cousins are too. Untypically for what I generally experience when in Indonesia, and contrary to what people might have thought, Jauhary did never even attempt or hint at romantic advances towards me. Quite frankly, he was the person I could talk to most openly about all issues, concerns, and sorrows connected to my stay in Indonesia – whether they were research-connected or very personal. No topic was taboo or unpleasant for conversation on our almost daily drives through the city, on which we sometimes aimlessly drove from warung to warung to at least get me out of the house for some hours per day. Though I do have friends in Indonesia with whom these open and honest conversations are not rare, Jauhary's extremely reflective examination of all questions and themes we discussed astonished me. Especially, because I had not anticipated to find such a friendship during the course of my research. Thus, without hesitation, I can say that Jauhary was my most important contact during my fieldwork period. Not only, because he brought me in contact with new informants, reflectively discussed my research topic with me continuously, took me to photo-shoots, and weddings, but also because he was the friend I could turn to in need.

potential to turn the situation into a possible soap opera plot. Gladly, this did not happen.⁴³

As so often the case, I felt that Jauhary was an extremely clever and reflective young man, and maybe exactly because of this, seldom dared to look at his own issues closely. From what I observed, Jauhary is very concerned with how he can – in any way possible – help and be of assistance to his family. Thus, for some time now, he has occupied the family residency in Makassar all alone; to take care of the local business for his father, as is expected of him as the eldest son of the family. His mother, sister, brother and father have relocated to Jakarta though, leaving him alone with the family's “helpmate” to take care of the house, the business, and himself.⁴⁴ Jauhary does not live uncomfortably in the two storied house in the middle of Makassar, because his aunts and cousins still live in the city, and his family has a good standing and can thus afford to fly between Jakarta and Makassar if necessary. His mother and her sister married quite young and came to Sulawesi with their older husbands. This specific aunt is not only well known in the whole society due to her husband's – Jauhary's uncle's – politically active relatives, but is herself the highest ranking female employee at the local University, *Universitas Hassanuddin*.⁴⁵ Jauhary himself has studied in Kuala Lumpur. Although his career choice was quite predestined by his family's business, he was able to study in a more creative academic setting and started taking first photographing jobs during his stay in Malaysia. He, like his cousins and some of his friends, has an international portfolio and an outstanding family reputation to show for himself but is nevertheless – to his own discomfort – still unmarried.

Upon asking him what his family thinks about this, he replied that if he would not find a girl within the upcoming two years he would go seek his parents' assistance in finding an eligible wife. However, he also expressed his worries about this to me. Though being a loving, and appreciative son to his mother, Jauhary seemed quite precarious about what his personal premises and

43 Although we indeed started fighting by the end of my stay – as good friends sometimes do –, we managed to hold the balance between professional contact and friendship. Also, my partner's visit in Makassar and meeting Jauhary certainly played a big part in the diffusion of this situation.

44 In many ways, the helpmate of the family, Pak Sul, is a fatherly figure to Jauhary. But although Jauhary holds him dearer, and is closer to him than maybe even to his actual father, I always found him talking “down” to him within the perimeters of the local accent. For example, instead of calling him by the polite, higher ranking “*ki*” (Makassar: You) usually used for all highly respected people in one's life, e.g. elders, disregardless of their relationship to oneself; Jauhary called Pak Sul “*ko*” (Makassar: you). “*ko*” is only used between people of the same age, and is quite a rude way to talk to one another, if the person addressed does not belong to either the same status group, generation, or friendship circle as oneself.

45 Her daughters, Jauhary's cousins, have been said to have asked for the highest bride prices one has heard of in quite some time. This was obviously, not only because of their family's reputation, but also due to their own fluency in foreign languages, which they acquired during exchange programs in high school. Similar to the one that I joined when coming to Indonesia in 2007. Interestingly, very few students are admitted to the full-scholarship exchange years abroad. In 2009 I was once lucky enough to attend one such “selection process” as an alumni. Amongst others, young high school children are assessed on the basis of their academic skills and knowledge, their outgoing (but still demure) personality, as well as their knowledge of local traditions. One essential part in the selection procedure is the talent show, during which all candidates have to show their skills. Thus, having gone through such an election process itself is often already a hallmark of excellence.

obligations were, when getting married. Since for the Makassar and Bugis, marrying is a political matter, which often defines the social standing of the family or parts of it, marrying relatively young to establish relations and positions is regarded as highly important (Antweiler 2000: 176). Obviously, getting married always implied expanding the family tree. Marrying at an age after which childbearing will be considerably more difficult hence implicates almost a disloyalty towards the family. Especially the eldest children are expected to get married soon, and with well-situated, eligible partners, because their social standing can often influence their younger siblings' chances for equally good marriages. Accordingly, it is usually the eldest child's marriage, which is celebrated the most extravagantly.⁴⁶ For young women, the standard time frame for getting married is often closer knit than for young men. In my experience, young women are expected to marry quite quickly after their secondary education is completed, or should finalize it shortly after the wedding. Young men are often expected to attend to their career first, but in reality often marry around the same time. Though their time frames are much more negotiable, still the peer pressure rises from wedding to wedding, often leaving the single ones being asked when they would finally find someone, after every event.

In line with this, Jauhary felt the pressure of having to get married within considerably short time. His case illustrates well, what an importance is put upon marrying – the right person, at the right time. After finishing college and starting to work in the family business – which are usually the most popular mile stones before getting married – he knew his clock was starting to tick louder every day. Consequently, Jauhary always told me he would not want to waste time with being girlfriend and boyfriend anymore – but rather cut to the chase straight away and marry if he ever found the right girl. However, his obligations towards his family always seemed to preoccupy him, and held him back from getting married or at least finding a girl at all.

5.2. Thinking about Marriage and Its Economy

First of all, Jauhary had told me that his mother often came to him, as her eldest son, instead of to her husband, when asking for money. Since all the work he does is actually for his father's business, and since he has to pay the bills in Makassar independently, it seemed quite a difficult task

⁴⁶ My eldest host-sister, Nunu, for example, held a much bigger wedding than her younger sister, Niny. To Niny's delight, her wedding was not overpopulated with even the remotest of all acquaintances of her parent's, though there were still well over a thousand guests present, most of whom she and her husband did not know. Furthermore, Niny and Athir had to hold two separate wedding receptions. One paid for by Athir's parents for Niny's family and friends, and another one for Athir's family and family's acquaintances – also paid for by his parents. Usually, only the bride's family holds a reception, but since he is the oldest child, his family felt the need to give him a proper send off by themselves, too.

to also provide for his mother's and sister's luxurious wishes – a new brand name handbag, a new dress, new shoes to go to weddings and other formal events.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Jauhary told me more than once that his mother expected him to buy her several costly gifts before she would allow him to get married. He himself called it, a “regular bride price”, the *uang pannai*, but in this case paid to his mother, not his bride's parents. Since after the wedding a husband's funds, earnings, and savings are preliminarily at his own, “new” nuclear family's dispense, Jauhary's mother thought it legitimate to demand herself a sort of parting gift from her eldest son.⁴⁸ After all, before his funds would all be for his wife, these would be the last things she would ask of him: A new *Givenchy* handbag, and a diamond gold ring.

Interestingly, this kind of parting gift from the eldest son to his mother seems not so uncommon, though Jauhary clearly knew his situation to be possibly more extreme than other cases.⁴⁹ Thus, looking at his upbringing, it is not unusual that his view upon marriage and also upon weddings would have a quite economic notion. The act of getting married, just as is being married itself, is to Jauhary economic tradeoffs. He once told me

I see it in my parents. It is always about money, money, money. My parents are married, yes. But sometimes I think that they are only still together, because of the money. They have such different interests and are such different people. [...] I also see it in all my friends. They have a constant headache [pusing], and all they fight about is always money. (Jauhary 2015)

Also, as mentioned earlier, Jauhary was also my informant who came up with the Football-club analogy for getting married. Indeed, when talking about weddings and marriages, and also about the photography involved in capturing both, Jauhary regularly – if not always – talked about prestige and *gengsi*. I cannot recall an instance in which he expressed that romantic ideals would be more important to him than satisfying his parents' demands or appeals. What this means is, that he is open to an arranged marriage, should he not be able to find himself a marriageable young woman with whom he was in love. To my mind, this expresses how eager Jauhary was to fulfill his parents' wishes and comply with societal expectations, to marry within a “standard” age and to a suitable woman. It also was an expression of a sentiment and Jauhary and me quite often quarreled, or at least debated about.

47 Still, not strange requirements according to Indonesian standards, especially for an eldest son. But difficult to achieve nonetheless.

48 Or, one might think a 'ransom' for his eldest kid.

49 During my fieldwork and after I have heard of other instances in which the groom gave his mother an expensive gift, so as to show his respect and loyalty to her, when eventually marrying and building his own family.

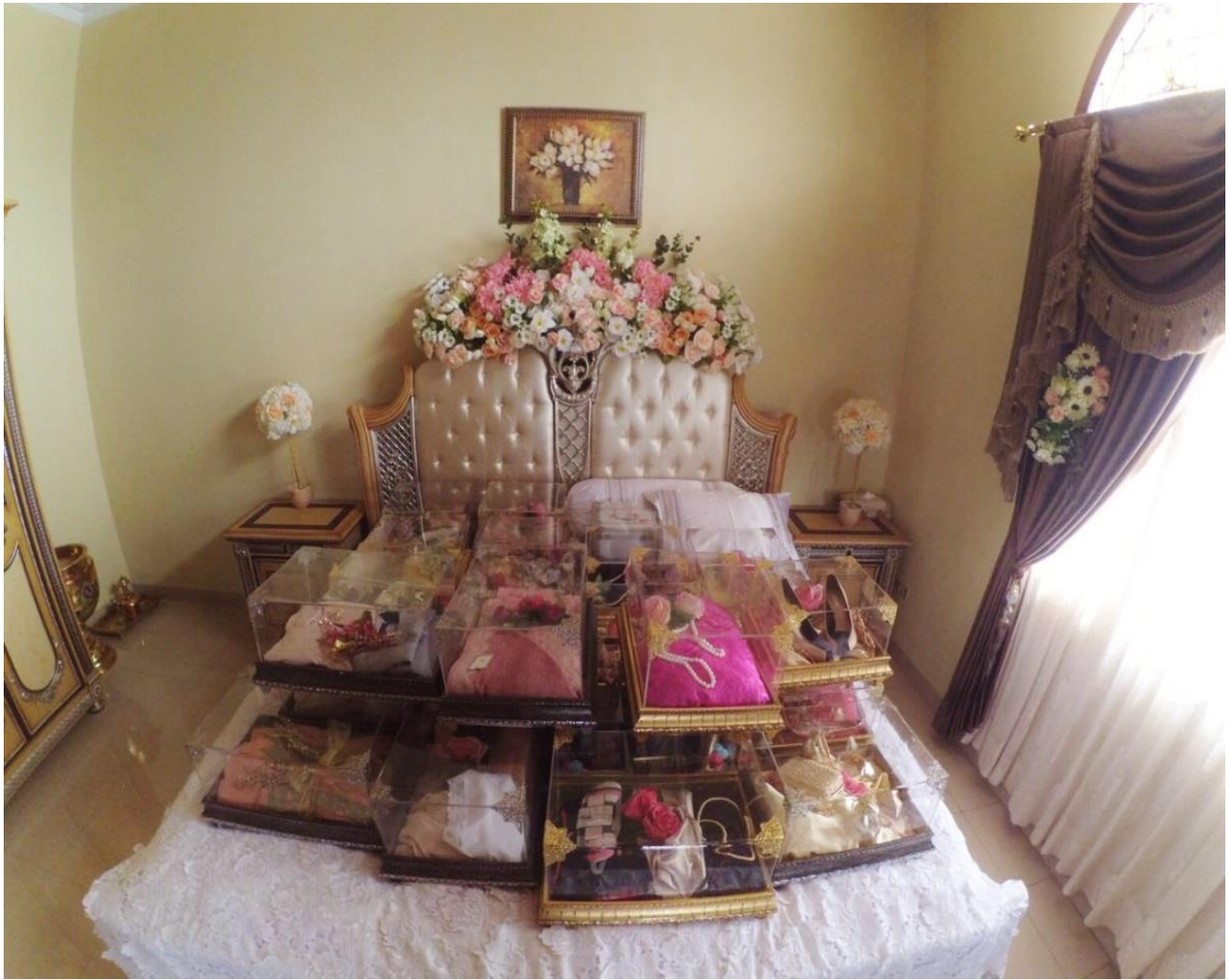


Figure 8: The photo above displays the *erang-erang*, courtship gifts, which are part of the local bride price in Makassar. Erang-Erang: For the ceremony at the bride's house in which bride and groom are pronounced husband and wife (called: *akad nikah*), the husband's family brings presents. This gift-giving is reciprocated by the wife's family in a ceremony usually succeeding on the same day and is called *mapparola*. The presents enfold utensils, clothing, and toiletry with which the newly-weds are starting their life together. For example, this entails new underwear, wrist watches, elegant footgear, soaps and perfumes. In most cases, the couple sets a loose pecuniary limit and then goes on a shopping spree together. In the cases I followed, the limit was usually set around five million Rupiah.

Interestingly, these bridal gifts were not arranged, decorated and kept at the husband's house, but rather at the wife's family themselves. On the day before the wedding, they were brought to the husband's house wherefrom they were brought back again, the following day: Clearly this is a quite elaborate and inconvenient way to do it. Still, it pays off to the actors since it is a symbolic act of very status oriented consumption.

Marriage and getting married, to Jauhary, has a highly economic aspect to it, which in certain ways overshadowed the romantic ideals of married life one is confronted with in Indonesian popular culture.⁵⁰ Indeed, getting married to the right person is just as important as getting married within the eligible time frame.

Remarkably then is that Jauhary continuously joked about asking father Rasulong for his youngest daughter's hand. "Obviously", as he always stated right after alluding to this topic, "as a joke. But you can take it serious, if you want". Though I do not think that Jauhary was actually in love with my younger host-sister Yuyun, he still found her a very suitable bride of desirable background. Upon asking him why he found her so eligible, he answered

She seems like a very serene [*tenang*] and patient [*sabar*] girl. I think I would like that in a bride. Somebody calm and who isn't always up for fighting. I have had that already in my previous relationship, and I don't want it again. (Jauhary 206)

Apparently, Jauhary's wishes and outlooks for a marriage are quite gloomy. Both, because he is already expecting a marriage to come with a certain set of problems, and since these problems are not desirable to deal with for him. For him, finding an eligible partner became more about finding the least demanding, or at least most patient partner. On the other hand, prestige is an important factor when getting married. My host-sisters are all very charming and beautiful young women, who had to ward off many admirers when they were single. Their excellent education and family background was the backdrop in front of which their most desirable features and virtues of beauty, knowledge, and piety could unfold. Now that the first one is married and has two children, the second one is just recently married, and the third is in a long-term relationship with prospects of getting married soon, the number of admirers has sunk, but not drastically, leaving them still popular among their peers.

Although Jauhary is quite eager to marry, it does not correspond to an expectation of romantic love, as I have often seen in my friends in Makassar. Much more, it was about building a family due to societal expectations.⁵¹ Also, Jauhary himself often stressed the *gengsi* character weddings and the relating practices wielded. One of the most important prestige-laden practices is for example the bride price offering. Additionally, and for this thesis more importantly, wedding photography must be interpreted as such a consumptive pattern of lifestyling, as will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

50 For example in sinetron, the popular Indonesian soap opera format. For a closer analysis of the topic of sinetron and imagined communities, refer to Ida (2006).

51 As mentioned earlier, he himself was also quite refusing towards pre-wedding photography, his main source of income for his photography hobby, saying that "the only good thing that comes from pre-wed is actually that there is a photographer who is getting paid. Other than that, it doesn't have a purpose other than being *gengsi*" (Jauhary 2015).

5.3. Being a Photographer: Examples from Jauhary's Work

Jauhary himself is a hobby photographer who has become extremely popular among the young people from Makassar as a pre-wedding photographer. In the upcoming section, a closer look at his work with young couples from Makassar will show how his expertise and services as a photographer with professional technological and aesthetic literacy was employed by the couples. Though Jauhary actually managed his father's business in South Sulawesi, he still finds time to do what he actually likes to do: Taking portraits. What he liked about photography was that it could “capture what it is to be human”. His favorite photographers were without exception interested in an anthropological, if not philanthropic view upon humans through photography. If Jauhary traveled, he traveled to take photos. On our trip to Flores in the last month of my fieldwork, he was mainly preoccupied with changing between his four lenses and two DSLR cameras to get the perfect shot. He is not a fan of pre-wedding photography and finds it quite a waste of money. On uncountable incidents, I heard him tell me

They [the couples] shouldn't print out the pre-wed photos too big. Where would you hang them? It's all for nothing anyway, but this is just wasteful. The big prints look good in the ballroom, alright. But after that you take them home – where will you put them? You cannot hang them anywhere, because they are too big. But everybody just wants the big prints. Nobody thinks about how useless they will be at home. They are all just gengsi. (Jauhary 2015)

Jauhary, being a fan of photography in general, knows how to cater to the needs of his clients. Although pre-wedding photos would not be his choice of artistic expression, he knows how to make use of the aesthetics, he knows how the photos are supposed to look, and what they should tell. Rarely, his clients complain about the result. At the shoots, Jauhary takes his time and re-checks with the couple frequently, when he thinks he has made good shots that they could like. Technological literacy, i.e. knowing the technological scope and possibilities of his camera are just as important as knowing what is asked of him as a professional.⁵² For example, being one of the

52 I would position Jauhary at the lower level of professional photographers. Indeed, it is not his main source of income. However, if he wanted to, he could surely make a living out of taking professional photos. His technological literacy, combined with his (cultural) understanding for the needs and wishes of his clients could turn this for him into more than an amateur hobby. Following the traditions of amateur photography clubs which have been popular in Indonesia since the liberation, Jauhary, too, goes out photo-hunting (cf. Strassler 2008: 395). Though he is not part of any photography club, he sees himself being part of a tradition of semi-

more affluent couples which Jauhary portrayed, Eni and Andi both had gotten new tailor-made clothes for the outdoor photo-shoot, and had another indoor shoot with expensively rented traditional costumes, the *baju bodo*. The photos they took as orientation for their own were mainly from popular studios from Jakarta. During one shoot, for example, one of his clients showcased his quite expensive watch in a manner that resembles and visually evokes glamorous watch advertisements, and certainly a “James Bondesque” masculinity. Embodied in the watch and the bodily posture he takes, there is more than just the wish to look cool. This very photo, though taken at their pre-wedding photoshoot was never in the run to be one of the few chosen photos to be displayed at the reception or on social media. In fact, the photo was taken for the sole purpose of being taken. The property thus becomes a prop: A theatrical element of self-definition and identification, which the young man uses to his advantage. He makes visual references to what he has seen – James Bond, signs of masculinity, symbols of affluence and luxury. By this, he turns what he has seen and comprehended as being desirable for a young man his age, into something he in turn displays and what he wants to embody.

Jauhary knew this. To him, the necessity and wish of his client to take certain photos was as self-explaining and evident as the fact that the photo would most probably never be posted online. Though photography is a side-job or hobby to him, Jauhary has much experience, technological and aesthetic literacy and the professional equipment to take the photos his clients want. Jauhary has refurbished his upstairs living room into a simple indoor studio with spotlights and differently colored backdrops. Concerning the equipment, he can thus cater to couples looking for a pre-wedding shoot outside, as well as inside, just as even more professional photographers. The clients who approach him usually heard of his photography through friends, or saw his photos at another wedding. The prices Jauhary asks for differ from couple to couple. During my stay, I have seen him ask for varying prices for photo-shoots of the same effort. Once, he asked for a price that only covered his expenditure of time (1.500.000 Rp in total), without asking the couple for gas money. On another occasion, he asked for 5.000.000 Rp, plus gas money. He said

I don't really care about the money the people give me. It's a hobby, a side-job. I don't need to live off it, but it is just something extra I can make in my free time. I know how important it is to people to have nice pre-wedding photos. So I don't have a fixed price. Actually, I don't really want to be concerned with the price, so I just ask them to ask my assistants to handle it. I want everybody to be able to have good photos. If they can't afford a really expensive shoot, well then at least I can give them something: An indoor shoot or something in my garden. At least they have the photos they need. (Jauhary 2015)

professional photographers who capture, but also exoticize what is to be “Indonesian”. But contrary to amateur photographers, he gets paid by clients, to take photos.



Figure 9: This photo shows the vice president Jusuf Kalla's daughter Charaini Kalla and her – at that time – fiancé Marah Langit. When they got married in 2013 and showcased their pre-wedding photos at their wedding and on their photographer's website, they started a new trend to take the pre-wedding photos in traditional costumes (here Buginese): simple and elegant. As evident from the comparison with figure 10 their photos were soon copied by other couples.

Figure 10: This young couple from Makassar emulated, as even their photographer noted to me, the photos of Charaini and her husband very systematically. Beginning with the facial expressions, the photos – except for their positions – resemble each other remarkably. For the photo below, though wearing a more traditional version of the *baju bodo*, the couple chose the same color scheme.



Certainly, Jauhary was able to be this flexible in the negotiation of his prices, because he was not a professional photographer in the sense that his living was not based on this profession. Rather, making it his professional hobby gave him the freedom to decide on the terms and conditions under which he would take the photos. He built his reputation mainly through making great photos for a good price, which depends on one's income. If the couple is not too affluent, he would make a good price. If the couple is known to have rich parents and good jobs, they would have to pay a bit more. Still, his photos looked glossy and lavish, well photographed and beautiful, but were just minimally retouched. He told me that this way, his clients would be more satisfied with the photos

Actually, making it cheap is a good way to make the customer happy. They will like my photos even more, because they're not too expensive. I'm not asking for a high price so they also don't expect something super extreme [*heboh*]. Instead, they'll be happy with what I do for a fair price. (Jauhary 2015)

In all of his cases, he would have a quick meeting with the couple before driving to the shooting destination the next time they met. Often, the clients – usually, the bride in particular – had skimmed the internet looking for different examples of pre-wedding photos. Sometimes, it was theme related, sometimes about the pose, sometimes about the location. Jauhary told me that in some cases, the client had actually brought specific wishes to the preparatory meeting, and that in other cases he and his assistant had to come up with something.⁵³ For this, they also skimmed Instagram accounts and pre-wedding blogs they knew. In many cases, they put two themes together to create a new one, so as not to simply copy another photographer. The clients valued his and his assistants' input.

At the photoshoot of another couple, I was present for the couple's preparatory talk, as well as their shoot. At this shoot, the bride to be had brought several screen-shot photos of other people's pre-wedding photoshoots, to show as examples for what she wished for her own. Resulting from this, the poses and costumes worn were quite similar to what she had seen before on the internet, too. With this, she actively took part in what she interpreted as being fashionable for young people from Makassar, since she looked most readily at the photo examples which had been accumulated under the hashtags #preweddingmakassar, and the location of her shoot, #leangleang. In comparison to Eni and Andi, Ari and her fiancé took, as Jauhary phrased it, quite *kaku* (stiff) poses and needed much more guidance considering facial and bodily expressions.

⁵³ His assistants were mainly two high school friends of Jauhary's. On the one hand Irfan, recently married with a young infant which was born during my stay, and on the other hand Reza, my high school sweetheart. Both of them had recently started new chapters in their lives, Irfan with his family and child, and Reza with a small eco-friendly vegetable business, and were thus not able to help him as much. Fortunately, Jauhary thus turned to me to help him with his work and I started assisting him in all required tasks.



Figure 11: In comparison to other pre-wedding photos depicted above, this example shows a couple with fewer ambitions for glossy, magazine-like photos. Indeed, their photoshoot – though involving several costume changes – was done within a few hours. I was present for the photoshoot and was coordinating the poses of the couple, who were quite *kaku* (stiff, awkward) in the beginning of the day. Clearly, they needed more guidance in fashionable body language than other couples, and very happily received guidance from both me and Jauhary. From facial expression to finger movements, here, everything was coordinated by the service of the photographer and his assistant (who was, in this case, me).

Rather than taking as orientation photos from Jakarta or in general big, famous photo studios and collectives such as *axioo* and *Past Present Future Photography* [ppf photo], they alluded to more Makassar-bound versions and visions of what pre-wedding photography is. Indeed, they also took the obligatory traditional costume photo, but the aesthetic aspirations they had were, different from Andi and Eni, not the direct visual quotation of Jusuf Kalla's kid's pre-wedding photos.

Jauhary's case is important to my argument in many ways. Firstly, his familial circumstances portray well how the pressure to get married rises considerably with age. Especially for the oldest child. Also, Jauhary's sentiments towards getting married in relation to economic considerations versus romantic love are quite substantial. Accordingly, getting married is a socio-political and an economic endeavor in which the whole family is involved and not only an individual decision.⁵⁴ His case illustrates how marriage is interpreted by many young men I met during my fieldwork. What marriage means to them obviously also influences how they will chose to represent it. Not only as a matter of romantic love, as seen in movies or advertisements, but especially as a necessity which echoes familial obligations in terms of economic and social respectability.

Secondly, Jauhary as the professional help for young couples in need of pre-wedding photos is an interesting case, because of his highly reflective view upon photography. Not only does he comprehend the wishes of his clients in accordance to different trends, may those be regionally bound or spread nationally. But Jauhary also has the technological and aesthetic literacy to translate those aspirations and allusions into portrays of the couples, which echo the societal frames for which they are taken. He understands which allusions the couples want to make – to national idols, regional trends, religious affiliations. His work is affordable to almost everybody, since his prices are regulated not with a strict budget plan, but rather in accordance with the young couples' economic possibilities. His family's reputation and standing in the city definitely plays a part in how popular he is as a photographer. Nevertheless, he is still an affordable option, which promises good results. Due to this, he is a pre-wedding photographer frequented by people from both sides of the middle-class spectrum and thus a very well-rounded example of what is required of one service, pre-wedding photography, by different people.

In the next chapter, we will now take a closer look at one specific couple, their wedding preparations, and the wedding itself, to have another exemplary case of pre-wedding and wedding photography – this time from a couple's perspective.

⁵⁴ Socio-political, in that a marriage has an impact on the family's standing within society, and on a meta-level it accordingly projects and connects the couple to certain social frameworks.

6. Case Study II: Niny und Athir – How to Get Married in Makassar

This chapter deals with my host-sister Niny and her fiancé Athir, whom I have known as a couple for almost nine years now. They had been together for more than ten years, before getting married in December 2015. To me, Niny is a special case. Not only personally for me, because she is so close to me, as the second eldest daughter of the Rasulong family, but also because her behavior regarding pre-wedding photography diverged drastically from what I usually observed during the preparation phase of weddings, and during weddings themselves. Thus, I find her case substantially interesting, especially contrasting with what I have observed amongst other young people who planned to get married. I will hence examine her case since I would agree to the proverb that “exceptions confirm the rule”. Indeed, her own consciousness and will to stand out of the more common behavioral pattern is also a big part of why talking to her was very resourceful.

Since Niny and I are very close to each other and can talk about all matters openly, I know how much she had anticipated the wedding and how relieved she was after it was eventually finalized and over. In many ways, having been together with her partner since the beginning of high school had many ups and downs. After one year of dating, for example, he had finished high school – two years before her own graduation – and had moved to study in Java. Since then, their relationship was mainly long distanced. Since her university graduation, everyone had pressed her on the matter of when, finally, they would get married. Niny also told me that for a few years she had played down her answer to the question about how long she had been together with her boyfriend

Nowadays, I actually tell people that I have been together with my boyfriend for over five years. If I had told my new co-workers that we have actually been together for over nine years, they would have been shocked [kaget] and might think it weird [aneh] that K'Athir and me are still not married [laughs]. (Niny 2015)

Though Niny was continually and stably liaised to Athir, a very suitable young man with prospects to marry, she had the feeling that she had to fit the length of her relationship to a socially acceptable, appropriate standard:⁵⁵ Over the years I visited, I noticed that Niny was continually getting more anxious about the length of her partnership, since it was constantly evaluated by friends and family members, on the basis of its successful outcome – the engagement, and then marriage. Niny herself thus took my research and my extended stay in Makassar as an opportunity

⁵⁵ Instead of admitting that she and her fiancé could have had middle-school aged children by now had they married right away, she rather played the length of the relationship down. This suggests, that even if you have a suitable partner, the relationship is not validated as officially stable (even after a dating period of over nine years), until the vows are said and the wedding bands put on.

to start pressing her partner and her own parents more intensely on that matter: “When can you go to K'Athir's parents? It needs to be before Sophie leaves town again, so she can see the ceremonies!” Soon, all family members, including me, chimed in to her vigor towards her father and partner, to set a date for his parents to formally come over to discuss the matter. And eventually, they did. During this very formal occasion, on which only the parents of the unwed were present, my younger host-sister and me eavesdropped on the conversation and updated Niny via WhatsApp regularly.⁵⁶ Not without being proud I can say that my host-parents were quite inflexible during the discussion with their in-laws to be on the dates for the engagement party, the *mappetuada*. They repeatedly told them, that it *had* to be, without a doubt, when “*all* their children”, especially stressing my presence, were at home, because everyone had anticipated this event for so long. They agreed. And on the day before I left Indonesia after four months of fieldwork, Niny and Athir held their engagement ceremony and party at our house.

6.1. Planning a Wedding

What I found striking about the planning of Niny's wedding was that her own input and wishes were only granted and permitted in non-essential matters. Similar to the engagement party, for example, Niny was allowed to pick both the designs and covers for her invitations after the latest fashion, flowers, but had no saying in many other things. And why was the case? Going further into detail about this, the upcoming paragraphs reflect on how much weddings are a personal, versus a collective decision and process. Also, the following observations mirror the theoretical analysis on the *dokumentasi* character of weddings and wedding photography, namely the repetitive predictability of the event, presented in chapter 4.

In the advanced preparation phase for the wedding during which I was still finishing my courses in the Netherlands to later come back for the wedding itself, I had paid close attention to what was sent to the family's common WhatsApp group. The Rasulong family has a WhatsApp group which is frequented and used by the family members in an extensively inflationary way during the wedding preparations. Everything from outfit ornaments and embellishments, to guest list queries were debated at length in the group chat. Since Niny was living in Jakarta at that time, while the rest of the family was in Makassar (or, in her brother's case, Surabaya) she was updated

56 Throughout this evening, during which Yuyun and me sat by the door and peeked around the corner of the living room carefully from time to time, I had – interestingly enough – not my research in mind. Much more, I was the younger sister, excited to listen to the life-changing grown-up conversations, we were denied access to. The sincere excitement I felt was not due to the valuable data I had gathered, but due to the relief I felt buzzing through the chat with my sister Niny. The only things she wrote in response to our were “Alhamdulillah, alhamdulillah”, thank Allah, thank Allah.

on proceedings, progresses, and plans via phone continually. (OK, move this upfront) More than once, *Ibu* Rasulong sent a photo of an outfit to the group, followed by a short exchange on the topic:

Ibu Rasulong: [sends a photo of a dress]

Niny: What is this, mom?

Nunu [eldest sister]: That is your wedding dress for the *pengajian* [Qur'an reading] ceremony, *dek* [little sibling]

Interestingly then, Niny let all these decisions be made without many objections. She took care of the design for the invitations herself and took some days off to accompany her mother and sisters to the fabric vendors' mall in Jakarta. *Ibu* Rasulong and two of her daughters had flown in to Jakarta, the most exhaustive, but to *Ibu* Rasulong “the most complete [*lengkap*] and most fashionable place to buy fabrics and clothes in Indonesia”, besides Bali. They looked for dress patterns, fabrics and embroidery supplies for the outfits that were going to be sewn. Contrary to what one might believe, they did not only choose their own outfits' supplies, but also Niny's. During this phase of the wedding preparation, the WhatsApp group was flooded with endless streams of photos showing different combinations of fabrics for tops and bottoms, for *batik* and embroidery, for veils and beads. In sum, *Ibu* Rasulong spent several weeks orchestrating all outfits carefully: bright pink and flower patterns for the *mandi bunga*. Shy, pastel colors for the *pengajian*. Green, the color of fertility and Islam, for the *akad nikah*. Back in Makassar, *Ibu* Rasulong got to work right away, spurring her team of hired seamstresses working from the back of the house, to get all outfits ready until the big day. In total, everybody of the nuclear family was equipped with five outfits, all handmade, all custom tailored, with supplies from Jakarta.

Thus, Niny gave her mother freedom of action and decision in most matters concerning the dresses. Her wishes to have floral patterns and pastel colors were granted at some points, but more often, *Ibu* Rasulong had to decide for herself. Of course, not only because she opposed her daughter's wishes in some aspects on brightness of colors, but also because she was in charge of organizing the wedding in general, since her daughter worked in Jakarta.

Furthermore, there were some discussions on where the reception was going to take place. Niny was in favor of an outdoor wedding, which barely ever take place, not the least during the rainy season for which the wedding date had been set. Still, Niny found it a beautiful idea to hold a wedding outdoors: She imagined it to be warm, and calm, and similar to the dancing scene in the teenage movie *A Cinderella Story*, in which the main leads of the story dance in a small gazebo under the stars, accompanied by soft string music. However, her father cut her off right away,

because he was both concerned by the weather, and the mosquitoes. Where would the guests sit? One could not expect them to sit outside in the rainy season! Where would the buffet stand? What about all the bugs, which would happily and readily join the meal as soon as it was set up for the guests? This motion was thus quickly overruled and never talked about again. Also, Niny would have liked to hold her wedding at the newly built *Novotel* in Makassar, but when her parents visited the building and found it not to their liking – too small! too stuffy! where would the VIPs sit? – , Niny was quickly overruled and accepted her wedding to be at the most popular wedding location of Makassar, the *Grand Clarion Hotel*.

6.1.1. Excursion: The Grand Clarion Hotel

Most notably, the *Grand Clarion Hotel* in Ujung Pandang is a highly popular location to get married in for couples from the upper-middle class and upper-class. For 80.000.000 Rp, one can invite 500 guests. Everything exceeding this number will be counted extra.⁵⁷ Here, a *per capita* price is standard for the attending guests, recently varying between 150.000 and 180.000 Rp, depending on the package. The couple can usually choose between three different packages, varying only slightly in the food served at the buffet, and the number of permitted attending guests. Obviously, these numbers are usually widely and commonly exceeded. Ibu Rasulong once told me:

You tell me that in Germany, when you invite 30 people, maybe 20 show up. Here, it is the other way around! If we invite 1500 guests, there will be 2500 attending the party. Everybody brings somebody: A sibling, a friend, a partner. And why not? (Ibu Rasulong 2015)

Though the buffet always offers the same dishes, and the decorations only vary slightly from wedding to wedding, I have never heard of someone who found this location boring, or too predictable. Rather, I would say that marrying in the *Grand Clarion* is an essential part of the standardized local wedding repertoire. Interestingly, this reflects exactly what I have stated in regards to Karen Strassler above, namely the value of predictability for ritual events and their documentation. Instead of having a negative impact on the public perception of the ceremony, a ritual's predictability and coherence with a well-known ceremonial conformity, give value and authenticity to the event. Similarly, like other details of the ceremonies involved in the wedding, choosing a well-known and popular location to marry definitely has an impact on how the whole affair is seen and interpreted by the guests.

⁵⁷ Usually, as I was told by my host-father and -sister, the number of attending guests will be counted on the plates used. Obviously, it frequently happens that some guests take more than one buffet plate

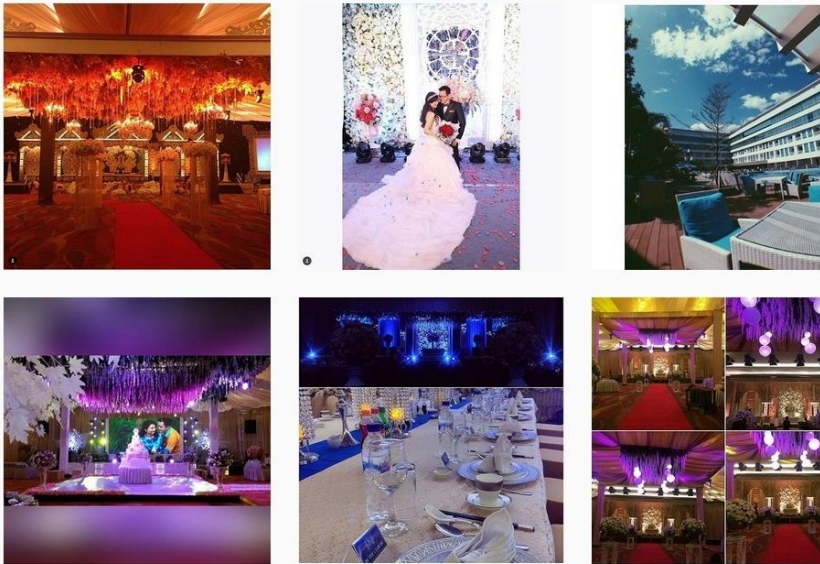


Figure 12: The Grand Clarion Hotel’s designated wedding Instagram profile features, among many others, these photos. Most weddings I have witnessed at the Grand Clarion Hotel were similarly adorned with floral (plastic) decorations. Interestingly, the feed also features many photos such as the one in the upper middle section. Though most often the Hotel is

booked by Muslim couples, the website features comparatively more photos alluding to the “white wedding gown romantic idyll”, as in this specific photo. By this, the local icon of hotel wedding receptions, the Grand Clarion, does not make – as one might suspect – a religious statement, but much more alludes to other popular Instagram feeds, on which white wedding gowns are rather the norm than the traditional baju bodo attire. Though one could interpret this as not catering to their clients’ wishes, the Grand Clarion actually does exactly this: Construct a location which can offer the iconographic wedding one has seen on famous Instagram accounts. Though all of my informants eventually married in more traditional ethnic attires, the decor was remarkably similar. Indeed, the aesthetic template of what was seen posted as fashionable and elegant – first by photographers and then by local reception venues – was gladly taken up by all couples I met.



Figure 13: This picture depicts a pre-wedding photo table at the Grand Clarion Hotel wedding reception hall. Clearly, the floral patterns are taken up here, as well.



Figure 14: axioo photography’s Instagram feed – especially before the wedding fare in Singapore started (upper left column) – put a remarkable emphasis on the above mentioned iconic “white wedding gown imagery”. They are a photo studio, which is oriented towards a more international audience, but also caters to Indonesian couples, including ethnic Chinese Indonesians. Not surprisingly, especially before the very internationally construed wedding fare in *The Ritz-Carlton’s* Grand Ballroom on the 3rd of April 2016, the photos became more and more about this internationally understood iconic aesthetic of getting married. In these photos – for example the center, or the middle lower row – one can see how the photos in figure 12 by the Grand Clarion Hotel Makassar, were inspired. An opulent flower decor, dramatic lighting and an easily identifiable bridal couple hugging intimately in the center of it.

The *Grand Clarion* is quite expensive, compared to other locations and hotel convention halls in the city. When planning on getting married on a budget, there are other locations, which suit a tight pocket: Either getting married in smaller ballrooms in other hotels, or even in the halls of a mosque.⁵⁸ But naturally, it is exactly this glamorous grandeur, and popular reputation that made it the primary wedding location for almost all of my informants.

Also, since the trend of instant-photography has also reached the wedding industry in Indonesia, most hotels now offer instant-photography booths for the wedding guests. Here, wedding guests can be photographed in front of a romantic, floral backdrop and after waiting for their print, can take home their own copy. Usually, the frames are wedding-specific. Only some feature the wedding invitations' design, but all of them necessarily bear the name of the couple and the wedding reception's date on them.

6.2. “Is That Really Necessary?” – Considering Pre-Wedding Photos as a Couple

At Niny's wedding, there was also a photo booth with an instant-photo flat rate, so that all guests could take as many photos, as they wanted.⁵⁹ Also, the standard “pre-wedding photo corner” was decorated at the entrance to the convention hall. Photos featured Niny and her husband Athir in a studio. Quite simple photos, but well made. The next pages, will illustrate my ethnographic insights into why Niny and Athir found it unnecessary, at least for themselves – to take pre-wedding photos. As apparent from the included photos, they eventually did take them, but reluctantly at best.

Among others, the themes at Niny and Athir's pre-wedding session included the shots in

58 The latter is preferably used for people whose houses are too small to host all guests for the akad nikah. In these cases, the akad, the actual procedure of legally getting married by Muslim law, is done inside the praying halls of a mosque. Thereafter, the newly wed husband retreats to a back room of the mosque, where the bride – instead of in her own maiden room – is waiting for him to pick her up and put their wedding bands on. Instead of moving the whole family to a big convention center, and without the usual changing of costumes for the couple and their family, the newlyweds descend to a ballroom within the mosque and receive their guests. Here, too, buffets are the norm, though much simpler and less lavish than in hotel ballrooms which have the possibilities to cater to even the more fashionable or eccentric wishes of their clients. Of course, it is too simplistic to assume that some people only marry in mosques due to financial aspects. However, the couples and parents I talked to were, if possible, in favor of holding the reception at a big hotel, mostly for conspicuous reasons.

59 On similar occasions, I joined into the instant-photo frenzy, too. Since I was a bridesmaid at Niny's wedding, I was unfortunately not able to take any instant-photos that day. My role as a bridesmaid entailed not much though, except for assisting with some tasks like delivering the invitations, and running for minor errands. However, this was not exactly directly related to my being a bridesmaid, but rather to me being a sister and member of the household. Indeed, Niny had around twenty bridesmaids, including high school friends and high school friends' wives. Their role was less active, and much more an honorary position, which grants the gift of a kain seragam (uniform fabric), from which the bridesmaids can sew their own costumes. This way, uniformity and formality of the dresses is ensured, while at the same time granting some room for individuality.

traditional costumes – the *baju bodo* – and photos with a chalkboard. Astonishingly, Niny had told me before I left Makassar after my long-term research that she herself would not want to take pre-wedding photos. When recognizing my astonishment about this matter, she replied

I don't know. We have been together for so long. It seems unnecessary to take such photos. I understand why people want to take photos. But K'Athir and I are just too busy with work to take the photos. So we actually just rushed to the photo-studio around the corner and took a lot of photos within an hour or so. That was enough for us. (Niny 2015)

Interestingly, she ended up having a simple and quick photo-shoot, but a pre-wedding shoot, still. She did not, however, take the photos with one of her best friends, Jauhary.⁶⁰ Since, against her own liking, her siblings, but first and foremost parents, had decided that not taking pre-wedding photos would be a deficiency to the standard wedding procedures, she had decided to take photos as quick and as simple as possible. Thus, Niny and Athir both flew in to Makassar to take photos in a small, new, and quite unknown photo studio right around the corner of the house. Since both their families live here, this was the most convenient option for both. When telling me about the photoshoot Niny laughed and said:

Actually, we didn't really want to take photos at all, like I told you in summer. But we had to. So we made it a very fast shoot. Actually, we were already really busy that day and only planned the shoot to be one hour. The photo studio is really quite good. Although we actually just went there because it was so close and because a friend of mine had told me it was a good bargain. We told them we wanted couple-photos, not pre-wedding photos. They knew though, that it was actually pre-wedding photos we were taking, but we didn't want to pay 1.500.000 Rp for the same service. Ordinary couple photos are so much cheaper. Do you know what we paid? 350.000 Rp. (Niny 2015)

Obviously, a higher price for the pre-wedding photos would not have mattered to Niny and her husband, since both work in well-paid jobs. Interestingly then, is that she decided for a cheap studio and the “improper” procedure of pre-wedding photos not due to insufficient affluence, or a bargain to save the wedding funds, but because she did not want to pay that much for a service she and her partner actually did not want in the first place.

60 Interestingly enough, she did not want to take photos with Jauhary, because she knew he would definitely not want to take money from her. She was uncomfortable taking advantage of her friendship with Jauhary in this way, although many other friends of theirs had done exactly that. Jauhary himself told me he would be happy to help the two and work with them, but that he would also understand if they just wanted to keep it a quick and simple matter.



Figure 15 (above): More in the direction of the urban *hijab* culture, on the chalkboard photo Niny and Athir dress fashionably.⁶¹ With this photo, they are in line with pre-wedding fashions of writing on chalkboards to add textual content (and thus personal context) to the photos. In the above photo, they play humoristically with their personal struggle of having been together for a decade without getting married.

Figure 16: Much more demure and pious is this second theme of their pre-wedding shoot in comparison to the first one. Echoing the floral designs we have already seen several times in the above figures 12 to 14, the photo also foreshadows the forthcoming *mandi bunga* event of the wedding. Comparing this photo to figure 3 You will note that the outfit Niny is wearing is the same one as during the ceremony. Athir, in turn, is dressed in a casual Muslim outfit and jeans. The pose they strike is very formal, though friendly and open towards the viewer. Rather than resembling a fashionable pre-wedding shoot, this photo already looks like a married couple's Ramadan photo to be posted online. This illustrates their attitude towards their marriage quite well: They are already an established couple in their social circles, but have only just now made the liaison an officially attested one.



⁶¹ For more on hijab culture, see Carla Jones' work.



Figure 17: Niny and Athir – presenting themselves full front simply as a young Muslim Buginese couple. Niny posted this photo on the social sharing platform Path a few months after the wedding, captioning it: “One of the result from our photoshoot before the w-day. Temanya [the theme]: As simple as possible (we decided to do this in indoor studio), and as fast as possible (it took only about 1 hour). But we do love the result [sic]”.

Also striking is the fact that the photo-studio, as many others, was oriented towards making an immense monetary surplus on pre-wedding photos. For the same service as simple couple photos, they requested a price three to four times higher for pre-wedding photos, which require quite the same amount of skills – alas, usually some more time. Niny did not have to pay the standard pre-wed price though. She told the studio she wanted to take couple photos – not pre-wedding photos – and instead was able to take advantage of the same photo service for around 300.000, instead of 1.500.000 Rupiah.

Obviously, the photographer of the studio was aware of what her photos were for and could not be fooled. Niny told me that he indeed recognized her and her partners scheme, but “just did not care”. On the contrary, I think it might have been a good way for the newly established photo-studio to make itself better known in the area, and within the circles Niny and Athir can be counted to. Though Niny herself was quite uninterested in taking pre-wedding photos with her fiancé, she was the one who gave me much clues and insights into the topic, when I first started working on it. Niny knew all important Instagram accounts, and followed them, too. During several occasions she mentioned to me that she looked at those examples a lot and enjoyed their aesthetics, even though on some accounts the photos most frequently feature couples kissing and hugging very intimately – which, for her, did not comply with her personal beliefs. Nevertheless, she did not seem bothered by it and instead made remarks about which trends, for example, she liked in pre-wedding photography.

6.3. Staying Calm in Times of Distress: Behind the Scenes of a Wedding in Makassar

In revision, I have tremendous respect for how Niny and Athir managed to get through the week of their wedding. Never, not even in Hollywood romances spinning around the theme of stressful wedding events, have I seen such a frequency of disaster on an occasion so happy, leaving one wondering whether weddings are not actually always as messy as in this case.⁶² I dedicate the forthcoming paragraph to my detailed observations regarding the ceremonial processes, the ritual divergence from standard procedures, and my insights into what the criterions are for a successful wrap to a wedding.

Remarkably, all preceding events before the actual nuptials take place in the homes of the bride and groom separately at the same time, and thus both households are buzzing with people who

⁶² Naturally, this might be due to the fact that this was the only wedding of which I myself was actually a part of.

built up tents in the parking lot or the several buffets around the house. Also, a wedding booth, in which the bride or groom sit during the rituals has to be built up.⁶³ When hosting at least 100 people per day during the course of five to six days, it takes the utmost care and effort to re-decorate the house after each event, to make it representable and representative again for the following ceremony. Knowing this, *Ibu* Rasulong had hired two extra maids, and invited – again – some less affluent family members of hers to help keep the house clean and tidy, and to cook for days on end for the hungry masses overwhelming the house during the ceremonies. In total, some ten people foreign to the usual composition of the household stayed at the house for the week of the wedding. It is due to these helping hands whose owners slept little if at all during this time, that the events were all successful, even though much went wrong.

First of all, the electrical system in the whole must have been overloaded during the whole week. Not only due to the storms and immense rains, which are common during the rainy season, but also because, there have been many new construction sites in the area of *Panakkukang*, where the Rasulong family lives. Every day, the electricity went out for some hours. Also, it rained heavily. This made sitting in the tents on the parking lot frankly unbearable. Furthermore, the water system in the house was broken throughout the week, leaving the household of seven fully equipped bathrooms, with exactly two working showers, and no running toilet water. Handling a group of twenty people using these bathrooms is already a challenge. Add the daily inrush of wedding guests who enjoy the buffet and specially imported ice tea drinks then, and imagining a bathroom system in such a house, now similar to a music festival's public toilet looms more imaginably over the situation. Most significantly though, during the *akad nikah* ceremony in which the newly wed husband ascends the stairs to the house of his now married wife to put on the rings in her bedroom, it only very late in the process became clear – i.e. the second before he was supposed to put on the rings – that the wedding bands were still locked in the safe in the downstairs master bedroom. Then, during the reception at the hotel, when the procession of the family into the decorated convention hall was already half an hour late, Niny's brother realized while getting dressed, that half his costume was still at home. He had to rush home and back to the hotel, change hurriedly in the restaurant's toilet, and then stormed back to the convention hall. Alas, even the most crucial of all ceremonies did not actually adhere to the formal requirements. The ceremonial procedures had to be altered frequently along the way.

Nevertheless, everyone was very happy with the outcome of the wedding. To me, this

63 In Niny's case, her great-cousin was in charge of the wedding committee, the *ketua panitia* (head of the committee), which included only family members. Among others, there were sections (*seksi*) which were responsible for parking, the tents, chairs, or food. During the last one of those meetings shortly before the wedding took place, they went through the detailed run down of the ceremonies at our house. The meeting itself was very formalized and included a cable free microphone which was passed around the different *ketua seksi* (head of section).

implicates that the wedding's success was measured by its outcome, not necessarily its smooth run down. In regards to the photography, the event's major memory mechanism, by which the wedding will be judged in the aftermath, the event was a success, too. Though not everything went according to the usual standards, still the photographers got all necessary shots – never mind the wedding band exchange in the living room, instead of the bedroom.

Looking at Niny's and Athir's case, the question obviously arises, why they did not care much about pre-wedding photos. Niny was an exception to the rule: Instead of fussing about the possibilities and wheres and whens of the pre-wedding shoot like most others, Niny was not very interested in the whole matter and only after her whole family urged her to, was willing to take pre-wedding photos. From what I observed and mentioned above, to her, pre-wedding photos were not something she was eagerly looking forward to, although she likes to take her picture taken, also enjoys consuming pre-wedding photos, and even though she would have had the perfect conditions to have outstanding pictures being taken of her and her partner. She is Jauhary's best (female) friend and would likely have gotten a pre-wedding shoot from him for a bargain. But instead, she was reluctant to take pictures at all. One factor contributing to her indifference towards the portraits is to my mind, that in many cases, pre-wedding photos function to establish the couple within different frames of reference. For young couples who have not been together for a long time, this might be an important platform to showcase their affiliations.

But for a couple of ten years, which is quite rarely found even amongst my acquaintances in Indonesia of that age, all these variables have been established already – not only for themselves, but for their peers and acquaintances, too. Since they have been together for as long as anyone can remember in their circles, everybody is aware of their relation and through gossip and social media forums, everyone could have followed their path as a couple. Also, everyone from either side of the family knows already how to interpret their standing in society: He is a young doctor; she works for the biggest telecommunication company in Indonesia. Both have the assets to visit each other frequently to bridge their long-distance relationship (now marriage). They are a devout and pious couple, both from well-situated families in Makassar: They have established this image over the long time they have been together already. Is it then necessary, to make representative photos which re-establish their position in their social scope, or which elevates them visually within the social stratification? To Niny, it seemed not only redundant, but also slightly immature to have *heboh* (exceptionally excited) pictures taken.

Indeed, their representational aspirations were much more directed at fitting into the social norm of young married couples, i.e. without a ten year long relationship preceding the marriage. Their pre-wedding photos, which were demanded by their families, rather than something they were

looking forward to themselves, were thus held simple and only emphasized the most important features of them being a couple articulating its position within society: Their photos display a fashionable young Muslim couple from Makassar, who have finally gotten married after ten years.

7. Case Study III: Collecting Collectives – Pre-Wedding and Wedding Photography in Imagining and Constructing Communities

The digital sphere and its platforms of visual orientation – i.e. Instagram, blogs, Path, and Facebook – were important to how my informants a) imagined, and in turn b) represented, what belonging to different social scapes, means. Being Muslim, higher middle-class, Indonesian, or a person from Makassar: All these components of making an identity were arguably negotiated in pre-wedding photos. The forthcoming pages will constitute the last ethnographic chapter. After an individual's and a couple's perspective in the preceding cases, this last one will incorporate a collection of views upon the theme: a digital assemblage of angles onto (pre-) wedding photography, taken from the distribution channel through which they are spread, and read, namely Instagram. Here, I will specifically give some visual examples of pre-wedding photos. These examples vary between photos of middle-/ upper-middle-class couples, and pre-wedding photos by high- and upper-class couples. Especially, the direct comparison between the photos will be of interest in the photo boxes in chapter, as they show well how the big Instagram accounts or hashtag-pools inspire new pre-wedding photos.⁶⁴

7.1. Taste, Trickle-Down Trends, and Traveling

In line with my argument, I observed many couples from Makassar looking for inspirations for their own photoshoots online, especially Instagram. There, my informants monitored popular trends in fashion – both linked to the pre-wed culture, and beyond it. Taking the biggest, most famous photography collectives and studios as their main pole of orientation, my informants then emulated what they had previously seen. Some examples are traveling photos, or Chairani Kalla's pre-wedding pictures. The next part will discuss this example, and relate it especially to the previous chapter concerning lifestyle and taste.

As mentioned before, what struck me during my research is that after Jusuf Kalla's child got married and had made very simple pre-wedding photos in the *baju bodo*, the trend of such simple depiction started spreading around all of South Sulawesi. Jusuf Kalla is quite famous and popular in South Sulawesi, since he has been vice president for some time now, and for two different

⁶⁴ The comparisons taken are not from different couples I met and talked to during my fieldwork, but rather drawn from the Instagram repositories of pre-wedding photo examples.

presidents.⁶⁵ Now, very few young couples have ever pre-wedding photos made without at least some shots in the traditional costume. Often, the couples I met even emulated the simple indoor or garden shoot that Jusuf Kalla's child had.⁶⁶ Except for one couple I talked to, most of them were not aware from which starting point this trend had spread. Jauhary, on the other hand could within a few minutes show me the original photo. Two of his clients I talked to and interviewed copied even the poses of those pre-wedding photos. The trend has now also spread throughout Indonesia.

Taste, as mentioned in reference to Bourdieu in chapter 3, is a distinguishing factor in recognizing the standardized visual imagery deployed in pre-wedding photos. Hence, even though the themes of the shoots might trickle down eventually, the viewing party will still be able to distinguish between the original and the mimicry. When showing my informants different photos with similar themes, one by a well-known photographers collective from Jakarta, the other one from a semi-professional amateur photographer from Makassar, none had problems identifying the original (see figure 18 and 19).⁶⁷ Not only did my respondents knew which photo was the original right away, but two of them even knew directly, that it had to be from one of the major pre-wedding and wedding photographers collectives based in Jakarta. Two of these, which I took a closer look at, were ppf photography and axioo.⁶⁸ Both photography studios were formerly based in Jakarta. Axioo now also has a branch on Bali, a popular pre-wedding destination for couples from all over Indonesia. The iconographic sceneries have not lost their impact and romantic gloss. Rather, going to Bali is a lasting trend among middle- and upper-middle-class couples. Though it is still an affordable option in comparison to going the Maldives or Iceland – as the most affluent Indonesians do – its scenic landscapes can be recognized easily from their iconographic reputation. Without a doubt, leaving the city, or the island all together, is a luxury not everyone can afford. Thus, the greater the geographic distance from one's hometown, the more luxurious the photo seems to be in the eyes of the viewer.⁶⁹

65 As mentioned, South Sulawesi has historically been shook by quite some political upheavals and moves for independence. Having a "local" in the presidential office is thus politically quite an achievement and is taken as a sign for more political influence, besides the Javanese in national Indonesian politics.

66 You can see the exemplary comparison on page 41.

67 Before reading the descriptions under figure 18 and 19, take a look at them and try guessing yourself which was the original, and which one the example from Makassar.

68 I mainly reference these photography studios since all of my major informants mentioned them to me. I thus regard these two exemplary studios as paradigmatic for what I am arguing.

69 As mentioned before, Irfan, one of Jauhary's assistants, told me – as I have mentioned above – that if photos were taken in front of brick walls and said to stand in Korea, the audience's appreciation of them would definitely rise



Figure 18: Flamboyantly posing in front of an Icelandic planewreck, this couple photographed by ppf photo in 2015 look like they could be posing for a high-end fashion magazine, instead of pre-wedding photos. This exact photo location has been visited several times by the photography collective already, suggesting continuous interest in this imagery.



Figure 19: What we see this couple from Makassar express in this photo, is their belonging to different shared (imagined) communities. What they understand as representing themselves is visually reassembled in this photograph: among others the allegiance to Islam as a religion, Indonesia as a nation, the iconicity of marrying in white, as well as to having pictures taken in front of airplanes, as seen in figure 18. Likely not able to fly to Iceland to take pre-wedding photos, this couple incorporated their own connection to airplanes – his job at the military – into a shared visual trend in pre-wedding photography, i.e. planes.

Indeed, who would actually be capable to tell the beaches apart that occur in endless pre-wedding shoots, if it wasn't for captions or at least some hint at the location on the website or the Instagram account? Interestingly enough, ppf and axioo both only rarely make clear which location the photo was shot in. Whether the beach scene was shot in Indonesia, or on the shores of the Philippines: who could know? Whether the castle in the background stands in Germany or France, or Disneyland Tokyo: how could one recognize them? Viewers with geographical knowledge, perhaps. Or a good enough education to understand the architectural styles in the old buildings. Or maybe people who have been lucky (and affluent) enough to have traveled there themselves already. Inherently, the photos posted online by the popular Jakarta photographers require the viewer to either know where the photo was taken, due to a good education, or well-rounded common knowledge, i.e. cultural capital – or to submit to the mystery of the photo and simply acknowledge its geographical foreignness, its glamour.

Of course, in many cases the iconographic features of the backgrounds can help to recognize where the shoot took place, for example when taking photo in front of the opera house in Sydney. Hence, traveling is part of a lifestyle, which is reflected also in the pre-wedding photos a couple chooses to a) take, and to b) post on social media, which will be discussed next.

7.2. Social Media: To See and To Be Seen on Instagram

Sharing the photos is more important than simply owning and keeping them as a nice memory. Therefore, I observed the relevant sharing platforms further. The most important platform is, as shown already, Instagram. This is for three main reasons: sharing is *easy*; it is *cheap* and *wide-reaching*. Especially the last point is crucial. After having theorized the photography sharing app in chapter four in connection to different ways of seeing, it is now indispensable to give an account of my fieldwork considerations and observations regarding this digital photo distribution app.

The online behavior by both the couples and the photographers on social media is quite interesting. While all my informants rated Facebook as rather unimportant to their social media activities and posting behavior, all of them had switched to a new social media app called “Path” within the past few years. Path is an app actually quite similar to Facebook, in its shared capacity to live update connected people about one's whereabouts and activities. Usually, this not only entails a text post, but also a photo to underline the status information.⁷⁰ Though very similar to Facebook in

70 For example, a post about being in the mall with your good friends would not only be a text stating this, but would also show a photo

its posting features, interestingly enough, this app has – according to my informants – overruled the Facebook dominance in Indonesia by now.⁷¹ Still, most young people use the biggest social media platform, but active posting and the constant digital information flux are by now rather managed via Path. However, other social media channels are still used, too. Instagram, for example, is nowadays mainly used as a platform for small businesses. Here, amongst others, the independent retailers sell from their home: Often using quite unprofessional photos to offer their goods and commodities. My host-sister Yuyun together with her boyfriend, and another three friends of mine, each had their own businesses run and promoted via this app.⁷² On Instagram, my friends posted photos of a makeup spray, cookies and cakes, and even a cable wrapping plastic string they sold. Connections were made via the app by posting their contact details in the captions or Instagram profiles, and sales were later made via those phone and email contacts. Likewise, my informants and friends all buy from Instagram accounts regularly or get inspiration for what they were going to look for in the stores. My host-sister once told me

Yes, to my mind Instagram is a good platform to promote your own product. Most people use it for that, I think. For posting photos oneself, yes you can use Instagram, but now we already have Path for that, too. (Yuyun 2015)

It is then not at all surprising, that from makeup artists, to big photo studios, and amateur photographers, all service providers for pre-wedding and wedding photography would post examples of their own work on this platform. Since it is mainly used for sales, and to provide input about the latest trends in fashion, decoration, makeup artistry, or also studio photography, all my informants referred to Instagram, when looking for inspirational input.

Accordingly, the photographers I talked to posted some best shots of their photoshoots – might that be just fashion, or indeed pre-wedding photography – on Instagram.⁷³ Usually, they used hashtags like #preweddingmakassar, and their own photography studio's name, for example #elegantphotographymakassar, to make their work more accessible for potential customers. Obviously, the hashtags referred the photos to certain location or to certain photographers or studios. When indeed looking for good locations in Makassar to take pre-wedding photos, all photographers I know checked in with Instagram to look for special locations they could go to. Especially, because one of them told me,

of you, preferably sitting at a large table, eating or about to eat.

71 Undoubtedly, Facebook still outcompetes most other social media platforms. However, I observed during my fieldwork in Indonesia, that indeed very few of my informants were still frequently using Facebook. Rather, they would post and send messages via different other apps or social media channels.

72 Needless to say, I had to pose as a quite unprofessional model for all of these businesses.

73 But my other respondents also posted their own pre-wedding photos and wedding photos on Path, and sometimes on Facebook.

I am so bored with all locations in Makassar. I've seen them all. It's so hard to find new locations. Sometimes we go location hunting, but we have been everywhere, I feel. It's the beach, some islands, the highlands, or on a mall. It is so boring. (Jauhary 2015)

Naturally, if the photographers have seen the most frequented pre-wedding spots, so will the audience. Always going to the same location is for the photographers in the long run not an option. Customer numbers will sink, if they cannot provide special themes or locations. Certainly, being in line with common trends in pre-wedding photography is important, too. But also having something unseen in the photos – a theme, a location, or even just a dress – is to many of the couples I talked to another deciding factor of whether they deem the photoshoot a success, or not. Touching on the topic of imagining oneself, couples present themselves desirably. If not through locations, they might do so through striking clothes or exotic objects. The aim is always to impress the recipient, in order to convey a certain image of oneself: positioning oneself favorably in a certain relation to society.

7.3. Revealing Photos, Muslim Morals, and Lifestyle Choices

In Makassar, the boundaries of how far one can go in terms of poses or revealing dresses are quite limited. Since Makassar is considered a very Muslim city within the archipelago by other Indonesians,⁷⁴ the Muslim norms and morals also have to be adhered to in the photos – at least in the ones made public. However, on the biggest Instagram accounts and blogs, as seen above in various figures, the couples kiss and hug intimately. Nevertheless, many of my informants still used the photos as inspirations for their own shoots. Instead of merely repeating those poses though, they also combined the fashion looks or themes of the photos with more demure and pious features. Imitating, in other cases, the intimate poses of the couples they see in magazines or on the most popular Instagram accounts like axioo, especially two of the couples I accompanied to their pre-wedding shoot lived this out in the poses they struck, despite the conventions they might break with this. This last part of my ethnographic examples again addresses identity construction in regards to different social scapes. Most prominently in this part, is the public ascertainment but also private subversion of regular Muslim moral codes in pre-wedding photos.

For instance, in the remote highlands' tea plantations, or the white shores of the tiny isolated

74 And by people from Makassar, quite proudly, too.

islands off the coast of South Sulawesi, some informants hugged, and kissed. In one of these cases, their friends even brought alcohol to the location, which they then conspicuously drank, until all three crates of beer, and bottles of wine were empty.⁷⁵ Also the photos that were taken on that day, as well as on another occasion I observed, were not what I had expected. All girls, at the mentioned shoots were quite openly intimate with their partners.⁷⁶ On set, they hugged closely, and nearly kissed.⁷⁷ On one of the shoots, since the location was so remote, they actually took photos kissing, or him slyly touching her behind. When I expressed my astonishment about this, one of the involved photographers told me that

Oh, I'm already used to it [*terbiasa*]. I have seen so many couples over the years, I can tell you after five minutes, whether they have actually waited for their wedding to do things, or whether they have been doing them already [*sudah melakukannya*]. You just see it in the poses of the couples. You even see the difference whether they have just kissed, or done more before. No way, that they can be that close [*dekat*] without being awkward [*kaku*]. What did you think? That all of them wait five years – wait until they are married [LAUGHS]. (Jauhary 2015)

We then discussed whether the couples could actually make even the more slightly sexual photos public, or whether they could showcase them at their reception. The said photographer then predicted that they probably would choose more well-behaved photos for that occasion, as well as for all social media posts before the wedding. Also, Jauhary predicted, that the couple, since they liked themselves so much in those slightly more cozy photos and found them to be extremely “cool” [*keren*], would post them after the wedding. “Then”, the photographer told me, “no one can object to it, since they are already married!”⁷⁸ Generally speaking, this reflects the need to adhere to expectations by their families and norms set by society. Disregarding these could definitely mean a downgrade within the social status ranks. Social mobility, as propounded by Antweiler in chapter 2 on marriages in Makassar, is possible: But towards either direction of the social stratum.

75 From what I saw, this was not only about the thrill of drinking beer, and being rebellious. Much more, it was also a statement about their own “modern” lifestyle. All the time, I was asked whether, and how often, and which brand of beer I drank when in Germany. What, indeed, Germans and Dutch people would prefer as their go-to liquor. How easy it was to buy alcohol, and whether it was true that you could drink on the streets without anybody being bothered by it. To me, this curiosity in the beer and alcohol consumption patterns of Europeans was a statement on their own behavioral patterns. Indeed, it seemed to me that their interest in the matter was at least partially to understand the behavior in order to have a measure of orientation for their own demeanor.

76 A deciding difference between these shoots, and others I have seen, might be that the brides were without the *krudung*, the headscarf, whereas I had previously been to pre-wedding shoots with only “covered” brides.

77 The tension was palpable, even for a person desensitized by public sexual ubiquity in Europe.

78 In some cases, this photographer told me, the couples go to their parents before the photo-shoot and ask them how far they would be allowed to go. Most often, of course, simple hugging is tolerated. Naturally though, there is a difference between hugging in a team photo, or hugging in a wedding photo. Still, this was one way to tare out of what would be accepted by the parents –and thus the family – as a good, and not too intimate pre-wed shot. Accordingly, the shots that the parents would get to see would be chosen beforehand, too.



Figure 20: Andien and Ippe, Indonesian celebrity couple, in Muslim fashion wear in Saudi Arabia



Figure 21: Muslim pre-wedding photos of a couple from Makassar.

The Instagram account of the prominent celebrity jazz singer Andini Aisyah Hariadi (Andien) and her husband Irfan Wahyudi (Ippe) was called “andien ippe wedding”, before their wedding. After the event, the name of the account was changed to “andien ippe story”, where they now frequently upload photos from common trips and from their personal collection. Their wedding photos featured a vintage nostalgia aesthetic, similar to the simple photos of Chairani Kalla and Marah Laut in chapter 5. Andien and Ippe are considered a trendy and trendsetting couple by many of my informants, and many of them followed the photo updates before the wedding continuously.

What their photo above also shows is that celebrities allude to their religious affiliations frequently on their online accounts. They post photos from their trips to *tanah suci* [holy land], and Ramadan greetings. Islam, here, becomes a lifestyle to the viewers closely connected to traveling and fashion per se. A married couple now, Andien and Ippe also often post photos of intimate situations, whose public display might be seen ambivalently by elders (see figure 22). Again, as I have shown above in the example of figure 7 of the pfp photo Instagram feed, being a Muslim is therewith set into relation with more open lifestyle fashions and trends. Thus, many couples also take photos in front of mosques, dressed in Muslim and demure clothes, as the couple above shows well.

But as I also demonstrate, some moral limits are frequently transgressed with bridal and couple photographs. This is not only evident in the photos which are posted by celebrities, but also in the way they are interpreted by young couples, and in turn emulated during their own photoshoots. Though they might not make the photos public on social media, I argue that the act of taking them itself is a crucial way to identify with the lifestyling choices made by idols.

Figure 22: Andien and Ippe in bed. Interestingly, when looking closer at the caption of this photo, it turns out to be a product placement for a mattress company. This very neatly underlines my argument that Instagram is a pole of orientation for consumption behaviors, both visual and monetary.



As mentioned earlier, identities are not monolithic. So pre-wedding photos offer the chance to subvert social norms or Muslim moral codes to a certain degree.

I especially found this divide interesting: Not actually being allowed to do certain things, but doing them still, and then waiting for the appropriate moment to showcase this. Indeed, the couples seemed to live a life that was not quite acceptable to what I observed as an averagely accepted lifestyle, but which was already more common in Jakarta's higher classes depicted in the popular Instagram accounts. Whereas Jakarta was understood to giving greater autonomy and self-governance to youngsters and to be more “modern” by my informants, none of them felt confident enough to openly and publicly – except for the safe confinements of the pre-wedding shoots – make similar advances. Upon asking my host-father about the, to him most vital factor to why it is not allowed in Makassar to have intimate relations before the wedding, he answered

Imagine if a woman here had a child without being married. Nobody would want to marry her than, because she is damaged [rusak]. Who would want damaged goods? No one. In Germany, it might be different, because you can be independent as a woman, too. And work and all. You can provide for yourself. But here, that is not so easy. So you have a husband to depend on, too. (Bapak Rasulong 2015)

Although I refuse to believe that it is impossible for young unmarried women with a fatherless child in Makassar, to be unable to provide for herself and her kid, I have to agree that – especially due to the societal norms – it will be a very hard task. Social relationships and networks are the corner stones of a successful living in Makassar. From job placement, to finding a house, and being able to borrow money when necessary: All these depend on how well you are connected, and how well you play and work those connections. Besides family, kin groups and friendship circles, the Muslim community plays a big role for the people I met. For the couples I talked to, the Muslim community was hardly dissociable from what they understood as ‘family’ and ‘elders’ (*orang tua*). Generally though, also the global Muslim community, as a transnational group with similar ethical codes and moral norms, was referred to: “For Muslims, it is not allowed [*tidak diperbolehkan*] to get intimate before the wedding. It is not *halal*”, one girl mentioned to me.

The couples participated in the visual imagery and standards of conduct, as seen in more open Instagram accounts, on which it is normal to see couples kissing. Hence, the couples can imagine, and also represent their aspirations for social mobility and scope of social conduct which they see in their idol’s photos. Within the boundaries of the pre-wedding shoot, where usually only friends and professionals are present, they can subvert limits set by authorities, namely family members or the local society, and further explore the lifestyles they imagine to be “urban”, “lavish”, or also “modern”. With taking photos that pick up on those lifestyle features they project themselves into

similar contexts. Though only a small number of people might see these photos, their shooting is still immensely important: It is exactly here, where the couples take charge of expressing themselves, where they have agency over their self-identification. In these photos, they can choose into which frameworks they want to project themselves, imagine their lifestyle – their future together.

8. Discussion: Chasing the Light

In pre-wedding photography, the decisions of the “where, when, how and with whom” are not made out of context, but much more so, are linked to expectations and negotiations between individual and collective. Which photographer should be picked? Which photos *can* and which photos *should* be made public? Accordingly, Grimes poses that “rites of passage are often rife with rhetoric and idealized images aimed at animating the emotions and cultivating community values” (Grimes 2000: 177). Particularly, in pre-wedding photos, the couples can play with aspirational identities and personal objectives. Here, “the photograph permits things that are impossible in reality as it is conventionally understood and experienced” (Fraleigh 2006:101). For example, lavish holidays by the beach, luxurious travels to the mountains, or grandiose wardrobes worn casually in the streets: What pre-wedding photos do is not only to mimic certain lifestyles, but especially to demarcate the photographed couples' proximity to them. “Every photograph is a certificate of presence”, and so are pre-wedding photos the certificates of the couples' capabilities to be present in extraordinary landscapes, dressed extraordinarily (Barthes 1981: 87).

In the case studies above, I have described three different examples, which correspond with the major themes of my argument. Jauhary's case offered insights into the local marriage economy, expectations towards young people from their families and peers. Also, his case offered the reader a photographer's perception into why the service of pre-wedding and wedding photography is so popular. The second ethnographic chapter comprised a description of a couple's wedding preparations and therewith also expectations for marriage by themselves and their families. More importantly, it described in which contexts pre-wedding photos and wedding photos are of importance for a bridal couple – and under which circumstances they might not be of importance. This chapter also underlined the differences between pre-wedding and wedding photography. Both of these chapters made clear in which ways the local societal circumstances strongly impact the young couples. Also, they showed how photography is used for self-expression. Additionally, the last ethnographic chapter dealt particularly with the use of Instagram. With a collection of multiple cases and examples, here, pre-wedding photography was delineated as a practice for expressing compliance with various identity-establishing communities. But also, remarkably, to subliminally subvert or transgress socially accepted limits.

Accordingly, I wholeheartedly agree with Eunji and his colleagues, when they state that “[p]hotographs are much better than texts for self-expression and impression management, since the myth of photographic truth lends photography a credibility that text can lack” (Eunji et.al. 2015: 555). Cameras wield a mechanical objectivity, which give photos a value of authenticity: no matter

the viewers' knowledge of various altering and enhancing technologies applied to the camera's final products. Photography is in this sense

“[...] authentication itself; the (rare) artifices it permits are not probative; they are, on the contrary, trick pictures: the photograph is laborious only when it fakes. It is a prophecy in reverse [...] Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence” (Barthes 1981: 87)

During the course of this thesis, which is based on my observations during my four months of fieldwork in Indonesia in 2015, the overarching themes of marriage, consumption, and photographic technology have been discussed in detail. Starting with theorizing marriage and wedding customs in regards to status oriented behavior and interests in Makassar, to conceptualizing Indonesian middle-class and new rich consumption patterns, the above has answered my questions about what the motivations are for taking (pre-) wedding photos, and how this new type of photography analogously complies with local interpretations of marriage and consumption. My analysis has proven different points about pre-wedding and wedding photography:

- 1.) (Pre-) wedding photography on social media platforms is a mechanism through which the frameworks of reference *themselves* are imagined and subsequently appropriated.⁷⁹ Thus, photosharing and viewing are primary practices through which individuals **imagine collectives**. In turn, articulating one's belonging to these is also negotiated in photos.
- 2.) Pre-wedding and wedding photography constitute the visual aids which help **express notions of prestige**, as well as **visualize, negotiate, and even subvert societal expectations** towards the couple through conspicuous consumption.
- 3.) Pre-wedding and wedding photography **enable the photographed to elevate themselves** with their self-representation in the social stratification.

In conclusion, technology can enable and channel strategies of self-conceptionalization and self-identification. Photosharing of bridal photos and pre-wedding pictures via Instagram is a vivid example for this. Still, an even further analysis of the tactics of subverting socially accepted and expected norms would be interesting. Though there is already academic literature connected to the *jilboob* debate on subverting Muslim moral codes on social media, and the commodification of Islam in fashion trends, to my mind, further research on bridal photography in other Southeast

⁷⁹ Connected to this, Karen Strassler argues, that “[...] as photography becomes more widespread as both a personal and a public form of representational practice, images become increasingly central to the ways individuals and collectives imagine and recognize each other” (Strassler 2010: 3).

Asian countries could comprise answers to substantial questions: How are technologies used differently to represent seemingly contradictory parts of identity? And in what ways are they reconciled in the consumption of visual culture? In how far are local societal circumstances essential for the trend to gain foothold different from country to country. It is this what anthropologists have ultimately always been interested in: what motivates people, what ignites people's creativity, such as seen in pre-wedding photography. How do phenomena differ from place to place, and how are they analogous. Indeed, what do people strive for, and what is it that makes them chase the light.

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