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## An Exposition of Activities of Ghana's Most Beautiful Pageant

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### **Abstract:**

*For the past thirteen years, Ghanaians have watched beauty pageants including TV3's Ghana's Most Beautiful (GMB) on television stations without adequate knowledge of policies governing them. This paper examined the purpose, policies and main activities of the GMB pageant. The pageant is organized by a television station, TV3 in Ghana to showcase the most beautiful aspects of Ghanaian culture using the female gender as a powerful symbol of communication. Descriptive research was employed in the study. The target and accessible population comprised of participants of the GMB pageant with a sample of forty-five (45) respondents. The GMB pageant requires Ghanaian ladies with potential and ages ranging from 20 to 30 years. Its activities of audition, regional durbars, in-house camping and reality shows aim at showcasing Ghanaian beauty from the cultural and traditional points of view. Every year, a new theme is given to guide main activities of the pageant which sometimes need clarification. It is recommended that organizers of GMB communicate as much as possible through publishing or advertisement the objectives and policies governing GMB activities to the Ghanaian public for greater acceptance or endorsement.*

**Keywords:** Activities, beauty pageant, policies, Ghana

### **1. Introduction**

Beauty has always varied considerably with times and between geographies. For the past years, Ghanaians continue to watch beauty pageants on television stations including TV3'S Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant without adequate knowledge of policies governing them. The pageant is organized by a television station, TV3 in Ghana to showcase the most beautiful aspects of Ghanaian culture using the female gender as a powerful symbol of communication. In a discussion with two members of the GMB organizing team during a national audition at TV3 premises in August 2017, they admitted that there was no comprehensive policy document spelling out guidelines of the pageant's yearly activities. For that matter changes are made subject to the discretion of the leader of the day. This was later confirmed in an interview with a GMB judge that "themes and activities keep changing yearly". Again, it was observed that these changes were sometimes made without any link to the overall objective of the pageant. A search for a model on beauty pageants on the internet also proved futile.

Hamashima (2012) indicated that from the beginnings, beauty pageants were a controversial and unwelcome venture. This was because people did not understand its purpose of existence and Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant was not an exception.

There was always viewer dissatisfaction whenever a contestant was evicted. In 2007 on "myjoyonline.com" website, a viewer wrote "I am not a critic of the arts, but I'm sure just like most Ghanaians who watched the finals of the Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant on TV3 this week, no one needed a third eye to conclude that the wrong candidate was chosen". In one of October 2016 Daily Guide issues / volumes, Casely-Hayford and Mauhayu-Deen wrote an article titled; "The case of a "Stolen Crown" and "Verdict". They expressed their dissatisfaction on the selection of the winner. Due to the above reasons and varied opinions the public continued to express every year their reservations about the pageants. It sometimes resulted in disagreements on the weekly evictions and final crowning of the overall winner. This could be attributed to the pageant organizers not publishing the policies governing the GMB pageant.

### **2. Methodology**

The research design employed in the study was explorative. The population comprised of participants of the GMB pageant from three geographical divisions in Ghana namely Northern, Middle and Coastal belts. Heterogeneous type of respondents was necessary in this study due to the demands of the research problem. Selection of population from various groups of participants was necessary because of specific roles played in "Ghana's Most Beautiful" pageant. Even though the

pageant was viewed nationwide, participants at the pageant's event grounds across the nation during 2016, 2017 and 2018 years formed the population of the study. Sample size was 45 with 67.5% females and 32.5% males. Three years of fieldwork was conducted during the 2016-2019 cycles of GMB events. Research instruments including observations, interviews, and content analysis of visual and print media were employed. A combination of these methods facilitated the discovery of content, structure, and various discourses surrounding the GMB pageant from variety of perspectives / angles.

### 3. Objectives of GMB Pageant

The GMB pageant requires potential Ghanaian ladies within the ages of 20 – 30 years with characteristics such as being literate and fluent in English, fluent in language of her locality, bold and articulate, adventurous, dynamic and talented. She must be at least 5.5 ft tall, well-built and rounded but not fat and well-versed in the cultural values of Ghana. Ghana's Most Beautiful (GMB) pageant also consists of an exhibition of activities aimed at showcasing Ghanaian beauty from the cultural and traditional points of view. Over the years it engages the attraction of entertainment and fashion to bring Ghanaian cultural values into display. The following objectives among others were revealed through some documents obtained from one organizer of GMB Pageant. The objectives of the television station were;

- To unearth great skills and abilities or talents of young ladies in Ghana.
- To bring to the fore the various Ghanaian cultures.
- To foster tolerance among cultures and build bridges that unites the country.
- Re-position the youth to appreciate the beauty of customs and traditions.
- To unearth beauty that reflects the total beauty and hospitality of Ghanaians.
- To educate viewers, push for developmental agenda and promote the rich endowments of Ghanaian culture worldwide.

To achieve the above objectives GMB organizes a set of activities to ensure realization of its vision of "redefining beauty to promote national unity and development". The pageant aimed at accomplishing its purpose through mentioned qualities in every contestant.

Processes of GMB pageant include advertisement, audition, regional durbars, grand launching, in-house camping, TV reality shows, crowning and a winner's social project. The first process is audition during which potential contestants or applicants compete to be selected as GMB pageant contestants for their respective regions. This is followed by the second stage where culture and fashion are displayed to viewers and for the final winner to be chosen. The final stage has to do with the society where a proposed project of the winner is executed.

The objectives of Ghana's Most Beautiful (GMB) pageant seem to be similar to that of "Miss International Beauty" pageant which was established in 1960 by International Cultural Association. Miss International Beauty queens serve as "Ambassadors of Peace and Beauty" who demonstrate tenderness, benevolence, friendship, beauty, intelligence, ability to take action and most importantly, have a great international sensibility. While GMB pageant promotes unity and development in Ghana with the projection of cultural values as the ultimate goal, "Miss International Beauty" pageant promotes world peace and goodwill.

### 4. Stakeholders of GMB Pageant

Ghana's Most Beauty pageant participants are categorized into three groups: The first group consists mainly of the organizers of the pageant; TV3, judges, producers and contestants. Second set of people are those who play key roles in the dressing and grooming of contestants culturally such as fashion designers, chaperones, traditional rulers and past queens. The third group is the general Ghanaian public who also contribute to the crowning of the Queen; viewers and all who play various roles – viewing, voting, sponsoring and other personalities determined by organizers. Individuals in all the three groups perform significant roles in the pageant regarding culture and fashion.

### 5. Audition / Selection Process

The process of GMB pageant starts with an advertisement on TV3 a national television station inviting applications from potential contestants. Audition then follows for the selection of contestants at designated centers. Interested participants from regions without an audition centre travel to main centres for the selection exercise. Ladies between the ages of 20 and 30 years from the ten regions of Ghana participate by filling forms online or at any one of selected TV3 offices in Accra, Kumasi, Sunyani or Takoradi. In some cases, the forms were filled online, downloaded and, with an attached portrait photo submitted at the audition venues during the screening (TV3, 2011 Staff Report on GMB). Successful participants from the various regions compete to become regional representatives who ultimately compete for the national beauty crown, Ghana's Most Beautiful Queen for the event year.

#### 5.1. Processes of Audition Stage (Selection)

During the selection stage, contestants are taken through some screening to enable them bring out the qualities in them. This takes the form of interviews, talent shows and fashion modelling as participants exhibit their confidence and knowledge in their culture.

It was observed that all contestants were adequately prepared to ensure a level playing ground was provided for a smooth competition. They were all coached to relax and speak with confidence while appearing smart and well groomed as well. One could easily distinguish between the incoming contestants and the past queens who were called upon to

participate as judges. Past queens appeared well groomed, confident, bold and clouded with a high sense of beauty from all aspects especially the fashion concept of grooming.

Presentation; performance of assigned task e.g. poem recital and singing in this selection stage was normally full of passion, anxiety, determination and competition as the young ladies tried hard to be selected as representatives of their regions. Aspects within the preliminary session included among other things fashion modelling, talent exposure, confidence, intelligence and cultural awareness. During the audition, contestants appeared in ordinary clothing, some of which were traditional outfits made in Ghana (See Figure 1.)



Figure 1: Ladies Waiting to Be Auditioned in Kumasi

Examination / Selection by Judges – It was observed at this stage that, the jury wanted to see the individual's view on issues raised in questions by the judges. The answers given were a means of appraising the strength of the contestant's character and personality. The questions and answers were a contestant's first chance towards making an impression on the public at large, (Gigliotti, (1995).

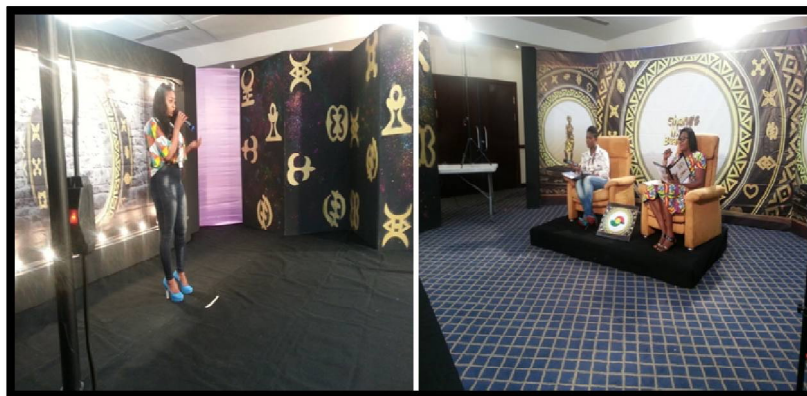


Figure 2: GMB Contestant Being Examined by Judges at the Regional Level

Questions at this level were so general aiming at unraveling the potentials or qualities of would-be regional representatives. It was observed that more focus was on a contestant's figure type. While emphases were not on the very slim figure the extremely plump figures were rejected. A participant was expected to possess higher qualities of a queen with regard to intelligence, physique, good grooming and talents. Good questioning skills by some judges were adequate enough to determine a potential queen while others were out of place. In an interview with one of the judges, it was evident that, they were not just looking for physically beautiful ladies but those intelligent to showcase the cultural traditions of Ghana.

Beauty queens have a lot more to do, than just look beautiful. A beauty pageant is not about walking the ramp in fashionable clothes, and sporting a million-dollar smile. "It is about cracking the tough round of questions and answers with conviction" (Gigliotti, (1995).

Observations during audition revealed that some ladies with physical beauty were disqualified due to issues peculiar to their figure forms and output behaviours. The search was based on a combination of qualities which is not necessarily one of knowledge, beauty and culture but a box naturally ticked with various scores as stated by Caves (2000); Friedman and Jones, (2011).

### 5.2. Medical Exercise for Final Selection

A medical fitness exercise is organized before the final selection of the regional contestants, a practice that is in conformance to the requirements of selecting contestants for international pageant as affirmed by Ann Toneya, (2016). A lady must be of good health to participate fully without limitation in any activities. Participants who were medically unfit were dropped while those declared fit were given a calendar for the preparation of the sending-off regional durbar. A durbar was organized by families of regional representatives at specific venues; the durbar day was balloted for by TV3 in the presence of judges and the producer (APL production).

## 6. Regional Durbars

A regional durbar is a traditional occasion organized for the introduction of selected contestants and the display of rich culture of the regional representative at her home town. During this occasion, cultural presentations of the regions of Ghana are displayed to showcase traditional cultural identity. Marketing of the towns within the regions to potential investors were imminent with some tourists watching. Community leaders emphasized significant traditional practices of their culture and the exhibition of traditional drumming, artifacts and various food stuffs from each region. A contestant is introduced to Ghanaians alongside her traditional stuff. Traditional cultural values are projected during these regional durbars as shown below.



*Figure 3: Fashion and Culture in Display as Regional Representatives Are Led into Durbar Ground Accompanied by Traditional Dancers*

The regional durbar was attended by traditional rulers, members of parliament, people of high status within the locality, international observers, friends, family members, well-wishers, youth etc. Family lineages or ties are emphasized with solidarity messages given to their representatives / contestants (see Plate 4a & b).



*Figure 4: Dignities and Friends at the Regional Durbars*

The nomination of a contestant from any tribe was considered a privilege to the young lady's family. The durbars were therefore an activity for the entire family relations and region at large; hence the support from the whole community. Most durbars were organized from the chief palaces could therefore be considered a community affair. It was also observed that the activities at the regional durbars were based on traditional norms where appropriate traditional practices and channels were followed. An example was the pouring of libation, drumming, singing, dancing and general excitement. Traditional clothing and regalia were also in full display during this occasion (Plate5). Traditions were duly followed to the admiration of all.



*Figure 5: Procession of Chiefs to Durbar Ground in Brong Ahafo Region*

Rich culture, unearthing of traditional norms and practices in the various regions were in full display to the admiration of all viewers. This is confirming Sproule (1974) theory that Fashion process is a mechanism of stages by which a potential fashion object moves from its creation to public presentation and public acceptance. The ceremony depicted a typical traditional gathering meant to bid farewell to one of their own parting for a warfare that involves the entire community's pride. Traditional Donations accompanying pieces of advice and exaltations from various representatives of each clan and tribe were presented to the contestants. The donations were in the forms of food stuffs, traditional items /clothing, cooking utensils. These varied from region to region making it easy to differentiate traditional items from all regions and the possible business opportunities that could arise from all the regions in Ghana (Plates 6a & b below)



Figure 6: Gifts Presentation (Middle Sector)



Figure 7: (Northern Sector)

Traditional leaders also seized the opportunity to call for unity among the entire region and massive support of their representative. It was obvious that every region wanted the crown back home, a call that sparked real competition among the contestants. To every region, their culture and beauty was unique and deserve a stand-out.

The youth of the contestant communities were encouraged to take education serious in order to uplift their areas in similar manners. They were entreated to avoid social vices and to live exemplary lives. Fashion theory holds it that a fashion object such as a regional durbar should have the process of changing lives. Since Plato affirmed that art activities such as poetry, drama and the other arts including pageantry, should be part of the education of young citizens.



Figure 8: Traditional Stools Awaiting Their Occupants

Contestants were introduced to the nation through a national durbar (grand launching) where all stakeholders met.



Figure 9: Regional Contestants in 2019

## 6. In-house Camping / Reality Shows

In-house camping takes place in the national capital of Ghana, Accra where reality shows on specific subject areas are viewed on TV3, a television station over a thirteen-week period. Selection and crowning of the winner is done during final week.

The in-house activity aims at camping contestants under same roof for co-existence and learning of each other's culture. The first week is basically for orientation which includes introduction of rules and regulations regarding time management, co-existing with housemates and duty assignments.

Grooming of Ghana's Most Beautiful contestants consists of photo shooting, music and video making that comprise the makers-over session which includes changing facial outlook to suit make-ups, skin treatment as well as education on mannerisms of a beautiful queen. Occasionally experts are invited from outside the country to help. For example, in 2011 a Holland next top model and face of a cosmetic product in USA was brought into the country to assist; one of the GMB organizers revealed. The in-house camping grooms the "potential queen" into an acceptable identity of a community as illustrated by King O' Raian (2008) that a beauty pageant can be seen as a cultural package of collective identity as well as an embodied production form of cultural identity.

## 7. Conclusion

Public awareness of the objectives and activities of GMB would minimize if not avoid reservations and controversies surrounding the crowning of GMB winners or Queens. Participation and event viewing by general public would very likely increase and therefore result in a greater impact of GMB in the society. It is recommended that organizers of GMB communicate as much as possible through publishing or advertisement the objectives and policies governing GMB activities to the Ghanaian public for greater acceptance or endorsement.

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