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Back to whose "Eden"?: Social Evolution of Akan Marriage and Pentecostal Enforcement of Pre-Nuptial Ethical Boundaries

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Abstract

Since independence in the 1950s, several Africans have engaged in a counter-hegemonic use of the camera to turn the gaze of the equipment from the colonial objectification of women to the postcolonial empowerment of women. The goal of this paper is to contextually discuss the social evolution of marriage practices among the Pentecostal youthful constituency, focusing on how young men and women in the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Ghana's largest protestant denomination, are re-deploying a counter-hegemonic use of photography to stage their autonomy, choreograph their nuptial choices, as well as secure their marriages. I argue that since the CoP embarked on theological and cultural reforms in 2010 that offered significant "freedom" to women to determine their sartorial preferences, the church has more recently, in 2019 sought to recalibrate its control over how its youthful constituency engages in pre-nuptial practices. Framed as a return to "Eden" to reflect the "naked but unashamed innocent life of Adam and Eve," these women interpret their actions as showcasing "nakedness" as a signification for transparency in marriage - in the social media world of invisibility, impersonation, and duplicities. The CoP interprets all this as youths' violations of the church's pre-nuptial ethical boundaries. I interrogate the question: "What are the complex engagements between the CoP and its youthful constituency, as the CoP seeks to control its nuptial ethical boundaries, as opposed to the "freedoms" the youth are seeking to enforce? The data for the study is based on ethnographical in-depth interviews, and my positionality as a member of the CoP and Akan, and it also draws from church archives and circulars.

Keywords: camera; church of pentecost; facebook; marriage; women.

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Introduction

Marriage as uniting a man and a woman as a couple remains the most "policed" and guarded aspect of life's transitions. Marriage, therefore, remains the basic unit of fostering gendered-related roles and structuring of society. Consequently, several authors, including Simone de Beauvoir whose magnum opus, *The second sex*, valorized marriage; its distinction of gendered roles between men and women and expectations of fertility and phallic competencies as potentially oppressive.[1] Undergirding the feminist movement and its activism of liberating women, other civil society organizations have advocated legislative measures to forestall the fault lines of marriage, not least intimate spousal battery. Even so, marriage and its social expectations remain less amenable to "modernity" and the demands of feminists.

The sparse cultural fluidity of marriage stems from religious bodies anchoring the boundaries of the institution on established orthodoxy and concurrent orthopraxy. Ghana's religious institutions hold the fortress of marriage against the forces of Cultural Revolution from their understanding of the institution as a divine-cultural mandate. In both Christianity and Islam, marriage is considered a covenant/sacrament (in the case of the Catholics) and *ibadah* (an act of worship), respectively. They also routinize the institution as a sociogenic practice or group activity, with the legitimacy taken from individuals and vested in families and religious figures. Marriage in Ghana, therefore, remains a decidedly pre-political institution, for which reason the processes involved in its establishment are far removed from the direct control of the state. Specifically in the case of the Akan constituency of the Church of Pentecost (CoP), the focus of this paper, the church has since the late 1930s legislated watertight rules to structure and govern the performance of marriage and its attending gendered roles. For this, some scholars have profiled Pentecostals, including the CoP, as stifling and forestalling the historic religious freedom Akan women had.[2]

At the lower domain level, the Akan religious landscape was highly democratic with access to the spiritual world open to all individuals with the cognitive capacity, spiritual and material resources to communicate (or ritualize) as mediators of society. Against this context, it is clear that there is some validity in support of women's significant freedom in the itineraries of indigenous spirituality. Nevertheless, overstretching that argument as parallel to absolutized religious freedom in indigenous religions will collide with the reality of Akan's gendered

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, The second sex (trans. H.M. Parshley) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956); Diabah, Grace, and Nana Aba Appiah Amfo. "Caring supporters or daring usurpers? Representation of women in Akan proverbs." *Discourse & Society* 26, no. 1 (2015): 3–28; Ampofo, Akosua Adomako. "Whose 'unmet need'? Dis/agreement about childbearing among Ghanaian couples." *Re-thinking sexualities in Africa* (2004): 115–134.

[2] Sackey, Brigid M. *New Directions in Gender and Religion: The changing status of women in African independent churches* (Lexington Books, 2006).

history. This means that when religion becomes a source of cultivating and performing power for public governance, the democratic space of the spiritual map of the Akan is restricted and gendered. Just as the Akan *ɔhemaa* was considered powerful and yet her exercise of that power was domesticated, the same was true about religion.[3] The Asante, for example, had a democratized landscape until the "invention" of "*Nyame*", indexing the name and authority of God. Identifying the theophoric name *Nyame* with power for public governance and consolidation of Asantehene's sovereignty, it was taboo for individual religious functionaries to personalize the invocation of *Nyame*. They had to say "Osei Nyame" to reify the suzerain position of the first Asantehene, Osei Tutu.[4] Thus, contrary to scholarly idealization and romanticization, the Akan indigenous worldview did not absolutize religious freedom.

The above finds resonance with the CoP's formulation of gendered theology and its impact on ethical boundaries that the church draw about marriage. This is because the CoP started among the Akan and continues to draw its demographic growth from the Akan constituency. Secondly, the church draws on the Akan-gendered ethical vision to formulate its holiness theology. So, transposing the Akan cosmology to the CoP, the church appropriated the Akan ethos about women and gendered norms, as mediators for some of Paul's specific responses to questions from and to the Christian Church in Corinth, to formulate its "holiness theology." Leveraging this, I maintain in this paper that the CoP's initiative to disrupt young people's appropriation of modernity (the camera) to subvert the church's holiness theology found its quintessential expression in its declaration of a ban on pre-marital photos. The church interpreted pre-marital pictures as coterminous with promiscuity. The questions I seek to address in this paper are: Why is the CoP seeking to "police" the body of women? "Why is the church entering the domain of the family?" "Why do young women and men take pre-marital pictures?" In responding to these questions, I argue that the CoP recognizes the historical and contemporary relevance of marriage as the existential social reality to keep society afloat. The CoP also recuperates the historical assumption that women are the primary means through which new members of society enter the world. Hence, they are also the first teachers (nurturers) of the baby. This reinforces the role of women as the primary carriers and transmitters of society's values and virtues to the younger generation. Consequently, the biological and sociological survival of a society is significantly dependent on women. It is also women's performance of these expressive roles that mainstream marriage as gendered, sociogenic as well as "*sacred*" from the religious perspective. Similarly, these entanglements reveal the complex dialectic relationships between real and

[3]Manuh, Takyiwaa. "The Asantehemaa's court and its jurisdiction over women: a study in legal pluralism." *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 4, no. 2 (1988): 50–66.

[4]Akyeampong, Emmanuel, and Pashington Obeng. "Spirituality, gender, and power in Asante history." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 481–508.

imagined binaries, "culture" and "society", and "tradition and "modernity" in women's resort to pre-nuptial pictures. Reflecting on contemporary channels of communication, these "binaries" are expressed on social media – a major means of communication in the contemporary world.

Thus, as I shall discuss in this paper, any behavior of young people, particularly women that remotely smacks undermining women's moral rectitude and potentially disempowering their nurturing role receives a strong backlash. The backlash comes from the churches, religious institutions and society at large. Knowing this, as I shall discuss, the first challenge women threw to men, on the eve of radical feminism, was to withhold their wombs or use that to tilt political control in their favor.

Research Methodology

Considering that I seek to use this paper to shed some light on the CoP's efforts at turning the camera away from the body of women, I designed the research qualitatively. The qualitative approach was to allow for contextual, historical and in-depth analyses of the subject as part of the lived realities of young people and the church. I deployed the ethnographic technique of in-depth interviews and informal conversations with male and female adults (some of whom were octogenarians), and young people, mostly university graduates from the three main universities in Ghana. The paper is, therefore, based on about 20 years of interacting with different layers of interlocutors, including my parents, grandparents and their generations, and classmates and students. Having studied at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), the Institute of African Studies (IAS) - University of Ghana, and currently working as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural and African Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), I benefited from the wisdom of my lecturers, classmates and students. While on several occasions, I was very intentional about my questions on marriage, I was usually driven by curiosity, based on a spontaneous issue, to initiate informal conversations with my interlocutors. Even so, since the issue of social media and pre-nuptial pictures is relatively new, a little over half a decade old among young people, I selected a few of that constituency for interviews. Depending on my social circle, including friends and students, I identified 20 young female and male graduates across the three universities for the interview. My basic criterion for selecting my key interlocutors was "someone who either had pre-nuptial pictures or consented to it."

I was cautious about engaging most of my female interlocutors, the majority of whom were newly married thus, I requested the assistance of my female friends who helped me to identify them and occasionally accompanied me to the

desired locations for interviews. In instances, when my female friends could not accompany me, I made sure that all the interviews were held in a public place, but guarded against the possibility of eavesdropping. For my general female students, however, who were not my key interlocutors, I discussed the topic in class as part of cognate topics, an example of which was my course on African sacred worldview and science. Similarly, through the snowballing approach, I identified and sampled 20 female interlocutors and 20 male graduates. For the men, unlike the women, I did not have to go through the rigorous of maintaining a conscious social distance. But that in itself was/is part of the gendered nature of society, which constitutes part of socialization.

Given that the research was a highly sensitive one, as it focused on women's moralized bodies, I assured my interlocutors of anonymizing them; informed them about the academic purpose of the study, and allowed them to opt out of the study as and when they considered it fit. Fortunately, none of them exited the study, precisely because, using an open-ended question, I benefitted from the interactive aspect of the interviews. Through these interactions, we dovetailed into several issues. While being conscious of the data I needed, I carefully drew my interlocutors to reflect on the issue of marriage and pre-nuptial pictures. For example, we often begin our discussions by talking about school days, African cultures, Ghanaian cultures, church practices, marriage, colonialism, and independence and narrow it slowly to childhood fixation on pictures and finally pre-nuptial pictures. I also did not consciously hold recordings and a writing pad/ book. We had all our interviews in either English (usually for non-Akan speakers) or Twi – but a lot of code-switching and code-mixing. There were times we had a few breaks as my key interlocutors attended to their phones or any other thing that demanded their attention. In instances where we needed to reschedule, we did that. With the interactive style, interviews lasted between 2–3 hours with breaks and detours into the topic to keep the steam of the conversation running and to disrupt boredom. The advantage in all this was that I was able to put my analysis in a broader perspective: merging history, religion, gender, and contemporary issues of social media – *cyborg*.

All the "interviews" were successfully conducted in an atmosphere of consensus. My interlocutors felt relaxed, and for females, after a few interactions, tensions were gradually, minimized – paving way for "open" conversation. In terms of positionality, I am both an Akan member of the CoP, having been baptized into a branch (usually called Assembly) of the church at Maamobi in 1997 and a married young man. Both positionalities impacted on my study. As a member of the CoP, I came across in my study as an insider who through years of church involvement, including serving as a Bible Teacher at the CoP's Pentecost Students' Association (PENSA–UCC) on campus and lead discussant

in Home Cell discussions in Maamobi. This enhanced my entry and access to church leaders for interviews.

I hardly recorded my interviews, instead, I wrote copiously about my interactions with my interlocutors. After every interaction and on my way, I sat at any convenient place, ensuring that I was out of sight with my interlocutors, and wrote as copiously as possible. When I went home or where I was lodging because of fieldwork, I extensively wrote my reflections on the interviews. All my key interlocutors were Christians who were either Catholics or Protestants of different shades. I paid less attention to the ethnicity, region, and Christian sect or denominations of my key interlocutors since I observed that pre-nuptial pictures were/are common among young people. Once they fell within the basic category of whether or not they had a pre-nuptial picture, they qualified for my study.

The conversational nature of data collection allowed me to broaden the scope of my analysis. So, I analyzed my data from the prisms of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial histories, gender, modernity and Christian sex ethics. I often summarized the voices of my interlocutors, where necessary. Otherwise, I incorporated the responses of my interlocutors in the analysis. To better appreciate the data, I reflected on my conversations with the older generation and sometimes began new conversations with them, where necessary. For this reason, I sustained conversations with Nana Essiflie Conduah and Agnes Amoah, the former and first Assemblywoman of Nima East, Accra – both of whom are over 80 years old. Their perspectives were a gauge to measure the social evolution of marriage in southern Ghana, particularly the Akan – the country's major ethnic group. While my interlocutors were drawn from other ethnic groups, I argue from the perspective of the Akan, because I observed that for both the demographic and sociological reasons the Akan marital culture impacted strongly on my interlocutors. Several of them cited identifiable Akan proverbs, myths, beliefs, and ethos to buttress their point. But largely, it showed the hybridized nature of young people's popular cultures.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the next section discusses the evolution of marriage, highlighting social changes since the three major historic epochs; this is followed by the CoP and its assimilation of Akan sex ethics as part of routinizing its social ethics. After this section, I discuss marriage and modernity, focusing on young people's counter-hegemonic use of the camera, social media and the CoP's attempts at overreaching from spatial to include the virtual world of young people.

The social evolution of marriage in Ghana

In this section, I provide a social history of Akan marriage to show that gendered tension has usually characterized conjugal relationships. Women's use of the camera to stage bodily autonomy is, therefore, a recuperation of a historic desire through the use of a modern gadget. The performance of marriage among the Akan has had extensive discussion.[5] There are also emerging research on the social evolution of marriage, in general, in Ghana.[6] Focusing specifically on the Akan, one aspect of their marriage practice that has not been emphasized and yet forms the anchor for the moralization of marriage and serves as a site for conflict is what is generally known as the "*Nkwasia siw*". In some Akan communities, the conclusion of a marriage ceremony, usually very brief, was a vow called "*Nkwasia siw*" – literary translated as "Foolish vow". It was superficially rendered a foolish vow because the man said to his bride and her family:

> "This marriage I am establishing, if anything good comes out of it, it belongs to my wife and her family; if anything bad comes out of it, it belongs to me and my family."[7]

Establishing marriage on such a vow imposes an obligation on the man to take care of his wife and the children he would have with her, alongside his sister's children. But it created its own antinomy of tension between a couple – explicitly expressed in the name for "wife" and "husband". The Akan word for "wife" is "*Yire* or *ɔyire*" – which is the shortened expression of "Me yire no"– literally "I hold her firmly."[8] Upon marriage, the Akan man often felt compelled based on the precarity of the marriage stability to ensure that he firmly brought the woman under his control. If he could not take over from the fruit of the woman's womb, which is one of the reasons for marriage, he controlled the woman's body. Like all men, in general, Akan men constituted a strong guardrail against the body of their wives, ensuring that no other man violated the body of his wife. This means that Akan men devised another way of exercising the uterus rights of marriage (a man's right over the womb is of his wife).

The inverted type of uterus rights partly informed beliefs and practices. Among the Akan, the issue of adultery ("ɛdwaman") was/is often associated with women, not men. The word "*ɛdwaman*" is expressed as "*wɛ dwa ɔman ne mu*."[9] Since the Akan believe that women pass on the blood (life) to the child, it is the

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[5]Oppong, Christine. *Middle Class African Marriage: a family study of Ghanaian senior civil servants* (London: Routledge, 1981).

[6]Ibid

[7]Lecture Note

[8] Brempong, Owusu, "Twi etymology: A study in ethno–linguistic", *Research Review*, NS, 7, 1&2 (1991): 93–110.

[9] I thank Dr. Ernestina Afriyie, a senior lecturer at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, Akropong, who shared this with me in our conversation on October 31, 2019.

woman who determines the boundaries of the family.[10] This makes the expression, "It is the woman who knows the father of the child" more applicable to the Akan than maybe other patrilineal groups. Also, since the children go to the woman, the woman is expected to unite the children, rather than split the children over several men. With several men having different competing spirits, it was assumed that competing spirits would compromise family unity.

Consequently, the determinants and boundaries of adultery were equally loose. A mere bodily contact between a married man and another man was treated as adultery.[11] Sleeping with another man's wife constituted a public delitescence that had a dire consequence. Worse is to sleep with the wife of a chief. The Nzema had a complex form of sexual ethics that governed the body of women. For a man to dream of having sexual intercourse with a married woman was treated as sexuality and considered for ritual interrogation. To give gifts to a married woman, without the prior knowledge of her husband was equated as a form of seduction. Worse was to shave the armpit of a married woman.[12]

The policing of women's bodies was also mainstreamed in the gendered relationship between men and women with men exercising control over public governance. This was to the extent that while the woman's stool was considered more politically important, women were never chief. The likelihood of a woman becoming chief was when she was in her post-menopausal status – when men no longer needed women's wombs. Also, at that point, societies were sure that no external man would want such a woman to lure her to take away the stool. Finally, any reaction from women was easily profiled as witchcraft. So, for both social and sometimes women's own assertion of being more intuitive, men easily profiled women as witches. In all this, women have also been creative in responding to men's control over women's bodies. The Akan word for husband is "*Me ku no*", which is also expressed as "*Me tu me ku no*" – to which, "I can kill him."[13] While this may equally sound crude, it has actually materialized in the rules of engagement among couples. Several Akan women were reported to use all means to also register their control over their husbands. Food and sex are said to be the main means through which women also try to control men.

Food, from the sociological perspective, is not just a piece of material that is ingested to satisfy hunger or for its nutritional content/derivative.[14] Food is a social construct that informs all social relations. Whether a woman prepares

[10]Gyekye, Kwame, African cultural values: An introduction (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996).

[11]Rattray, R.S., Ashanti Law and Constitution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929).

[12]Frimpong-Nnuroh, Douglas. "Conjugal morality and sexual vulnerability: the Ellembelle case." *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 18, no. 1 (2002): 27–32.

[13]Brempong, "Twi".

[14]Feeley–Harnik, Gillian. "Religion and food: An anthropological perspective." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1995): 565–582.

her husband delicious food to get what she wants or uses food as a means to poison her husband makes men precarious. In a cultural milieu where men have the self-imposed taboo of avoiding the kitchen, women see the kitchen as their socio-political space to exert themselves. In my interviews with three young women who recently completed their doctoral degrees in Mathematics, Physics, and Astrophysics respectively, they all said that food is one of their main means of controlling their husbands.

One of them said what I have summarized from my fieldnote as follows:

> As an accomplished academic, my husband may feel threatened by my title, since he does not have a terminal degree. But obviously, he cares so much when we share opinions over an issue. Often, he raises his voice, sometimes unconsciously, because he feels I may overcome him with my title's gifts – logic and consistency of thought. His family also loves me, but they are similarly concerned about whether I am a good cook or not, as highly educated women are stigmatized as poor cooks in our world. So, I take charge of the kitchen. I communicate my opinion in the kitchen. I satisfy his family's expectations in my kitchen. My kitchen is my space; no one is allowed there. [15]

The interlocutor's statement is shared by several of my female interlocutors. It is also imbued with several sociological significance – indicating gender play in marriage. First, even in the middle class, which I shall discuss later in the paper, marriage is still precarious with men feeling insecure. Similarly, in such marriages, extended families try to overreach their influence over their sons to include the wives of their sons and what their sons eat. Women, therefore, avoid obvious tensions by not speaking nor writing as elites about their marriages. Instead, they use food. Through food, they communicate their aspirations and concerns. For example, as several of them told me, when they are sexually satisfied, they cook their husbands' favorite food with flavor and style. When their husbands underperform sexually, these women deliberately oversleep to avoid preparing breakfast for their husbands. Similarly, these elite women also engage more in hybridized culinary skills to upset any potential rivalry disrupting their marriage.

The above makes sense when even in an elitist home, women are limited in expressing their sexual pleasures with their husbands. When I asked one of the three ladies with terminal degrees whether she would openly tell her husband about her sex pleasures, she only exclaimed, "Eiii, this one; I don't want trouble ooo!" Her response, which was after I had rendered the conversation less sensitive by contextualizing it as a kind of role-play, demonstrated the tension in marital homes. It showed the extension of childhood moralization of sex in the marital

[15]Fieldnote, 2021.

home to, as several of them said, cow women into submitting to male authority. Several of these women would use such an expression as the equivalent of dislocating the plight of culturally-imposed guilt and shame. This was often the same as being labelled "bad and spoiled girls" if they initiated sex play or evolved any sex style beyond the usual "missionary style". The "missionary style" is believed to have accompanied the Victorian idea of womanhood where women were to lie down calmly and not moan as their husbands lay on top of them during sexual intercourse.[16] But at least, they all admitted that their husbands could easily discuss their sex pleasures and the kind of sex styles their husbands wanted.

Akan Marriages During The Colonial Era

This section discusses the colonial impact on Akan woman. Since the turn of the millennium, several debates have formed the scholarship on women in Ghana/ Africa. Basically, the debates have morphed into two questions: did colonialism liberate or suppress women? Given that the missionaries were responsible for educating the colonies, until the beginning of the 20th Century, the discussion is narrowed to the role of the missionaries in advancing or domesticating women.[17] In all this, the peak of colonialism merged with Queen Victoria of England at a time when England had become significantly secular in public governance. With Christianity losing its social control over the public life of the English in both England and the colonies, Victoria reinvested in Christian ethics and universalized them.[18] Regrettably, several scholars have read Victorian ethics as rather Western ethics, when actually she was countering the laxity of 19th century liberal ethics in England. Meanwhile, Western civilization was essentially influenced by Judeo-Christian values, until the beginning of the 20th century.[19]

The simplistic conflation of Judeo-Christian values and "Western values" is a major deficit in postcolonial scholarship. As part of the "post" theories, it is now fashionable among postcolonial feminists to deploy Marxist and Foucauldian theories of postmodernism and poststructuralism, as part of deconstructing every legacy of colonialism.[20] Several female academics, therefore, repudiate the

[16]This was part of the spill overs of premodern sex ethics on Victorian sex ethics: See: Brundage, A. James, *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[17]Hansen, K.T., 'Introduction: Domesticity in Africa'. In K.T. Hansen (ed.), *African encounters with domesticity,* 1–36 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

[18] Hilliard, David, "Unenglish and Unmanly: Anglo–Catholicism and Homosexuality," *Victorian Studies* 25, no. 2 (1982): 181–210.

[19] Stark, Rodney, *The victory of reason: How Christianity led to freedom, capitalism, and western success* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005).

[20]Tamale, Sylvia, "Nudity, protest and the law in Uganda," Inaugural professorial lecture, October 28, 2016. Makerere University, Uganda, 2016, i–37.

religious requirement for women to be submissive in marriage as imperialistic, while asking women to stay away from premarital casual sex as gagging the sexual pleasures of women.[21] While some married women may have "unreasonably" submitted disastrously to some men, the sublation of *self* among couples is ideal in fostering the stability of marriage. Also, much as the sex ethics of the missionaries had also been mediated by the Christian Reformation, the ethics were largely Judeo-Christian in origin. This informed Christian sex orthopraxy. Among the Basel missionaries, for example, they were very strict about gender segregation, such that men and women could not mix in church service.[22] Also, strong sex ethics were highly enforced. For example, a male teacher who sexually abused a school girl was publicly shamed. He would be brought to the class; a bell rang behind him and he was paraded in public to declare him a misfit to interact with children.[23]

The foregoing brings out a significant symmetry between the missionaries and the indigenous Akan enforcement of sexual ethics. Both cultures may have expressed different degrees of extremities, but both sought to control the bodies and sexual reproductivity of women. When the missionaries established schools, the girls received education that predisposed them to perform domestic chores. This contradicts indigenous societies' sex ethics where women may have played some public role.[24] But, as I have previously stated, politically they were confined to domestic roles – such that the Queen mother (*ɔhemaa – ohene a oyɛ ɔbaa*) was largely in charge of women's affairs, not men. There are only a few examples of women political leaders and military leaders both pre-colonial and colonial Akan.[25] Even in other African societies like the Igbo, women's foray into colonial politics was more exceptional than the norm.

Away from ascribing the perceived subjugation of women to the missionaries, other scholars argue that Christian education benefitted women.[26] That is whether it was incidental or not, missionary education empowered several

[21]Diabah, Grace & Amfo, N.A.A. (2015). 'Caring supporters or daring usurpers? Representation of women in Akan proverbs'. *Discourse & Society*, 26(1): 3–28; Darkwah, Akosua K., and Alexina Arthur. "(A) Sexualizing Ghanaian Youth? A Case Study of Virgin Clubs in Accra and Kumasi." *Ghana Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 123–149.

[22]Miller, Jon. "Institutionalized contradictions: Trouble in a colonial mission." Organization Studies 12, no. 3 (1991): 337–364.

[23] Prof. Seth Asare–Danso, "Fulfilling the mission of the Basel Mission for sustainable development: the Presbyterian praxis," Inaugural Lecture, 12 August, 2022.

[24] Akansor, Justina. "Missionaries and British Colonial Education for Females in the Gold Coast" In Akwasi Kwarteng Amoako–Gyampah, Bea Lundt and Edmond Akwasi Agyeman (eds.), *Education in Ghana: History and Politics*, 119–142 (Bamenda/Cameroon: Langaa RPCIC, 2023).

[25] Arhin, Kwame, 'The political and military role of Akan women'. In C. Oppong (ed.), *Female and male in West Africa*, 91–98 (London: George Allen & Unwen, 1983).

[26] Ayesu, Ebenezer, Francis Gbormittah, and Kwame Adum–Kyeremeh. "British colonialism and women's welfare in the Gold Coast colony." *Africa Today* 63, no. 2 (2016): 3–30.

women, who became elites in their own right and contributed to shaping the colonial and postcolonial politics of Ghana.[27] The emergence of women elites as a social class and the colonial enterprise affected gendered relations among the Akan. Several Akan political elites felt they were losing control over women. The colonial-induced urbanization disrupted the social structure of the Akan society. Women either received Western education which rendered them not easily pliable to indigenous androcentrism or determined how they used their bodies. It included women claiming control and autonomy over their bodies to practice commercialized prostitution, as against the precolonial type where men simply "enslaved" women's bodies.[28]

The European introduction of the cameras, a colonial import, became a means to debase African women and men.[29] But more so African women were considered aesthetically inferior to European women.[30] Meanwhile, by taking nude pictures of African women, Western men fed their own debased and decadent voyeurism. In all, through images produced from colonial cameras, African women were debased as sexually impure, ugly, and seductive. As if African men and women have imbibed the colonial image imposed on women, women for several reasons continue to bleach to look light-skinned.[31] Just like women using prostitution, as part of exercising autonomy over their bodies, as I discuss they use both bleaching and the camera to exercise agency in marriage. The discussion has laid out yet another complex engagement between men and women with several precolonial gender norms concretizing in the colonial era.

The CoP and women

In this section, I will focus on how the church aligns with the Akan ethics in its engagement with women and marriage ethics. The origin of Pentecostalism remains quite unclear on the Gold Coast. But the problem is even more nuanced when assessed from the perspective of the definition of Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism has a highly diverse and fluid expression worldwide; the movement

[27] Akurang-Parry, Kwabena O. "Aspects of elite women's activism in the Gold Coast, 1874–1890." *The International journal of African historical studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 463–482.

[28] Ampofo, A.A. '"My cocoa is between my legs": Sex as work among Ghanaian women" In Sharon Harley (ed.). *Women's labour in the global economy: Speaking in multiple voices*, 182–205 (New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

[29] Ayo A. Coly, "Un/clothing African womanhood: colonial statements and postcolonial discourses of African female body," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 33, 1(2015): 12–26.

[30] Hirsch, Afua, Brit(ish): On race, identity and belonging (London: Vintage, 2018).

[31] Tate, A. Shirley, Skin bleaching in black Atlantic zones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

does not lend itself to a simple and singular definition. Nonetheless, as a working definition for this study, I propose that Pentecostalism is best understood as "a way of doing theology" related to experience mediated by the Holy Spirit, open to oral rather than literary forms of transmission, ecumenical by virtue of its plurality and "expressing itself in the categories of pneumatology."[32] Though this definition elides the fact that Pentecostalism in the West has managed to adapt itself to theological fixity and technological change,[33] it nonetheless fits the Ghanaian CoP well, which is the focus of my paper. This is because the CoP has a theology that is based on orality, flexibility, and the Spirit-mediated experiences of its devotees. It is these defining characteristics of the CoP that have underscored the many reforms that the Church has witnessed over the last twenty years.

Building on the above, I argue that the so-called African independent churches (AICs), such as the Mosama Disco Christo Church had launched their religious decolonization. As part of the nationalist zest of the 19th Century that was also reoriented toward cultural resurgence, the AICs creatively recuperated Akan indigenous cultures.[34] But while the permitted issues such as polygyny that the missionaries had rejected, the AICs reinforced the gendered ethical purity of the Akan and the missionaries. Consequently, these movements were as rigorous in enforcing gendered ethics as both the indigenous Akan and the Basel missionaries.[35]

By the beginning of the 20th Century, a group of Akan men in Asamankese had begun their craving for pneumatic experiences. Congregating under the leadership of Peter Anim, the group requested from a missionary, who was on his way to Nigeria via the Gold Coast, for a missionary to be sent to them. In response, Peter Anim, already reading Pentecostal publications, such as the Sword of the Spirit, edited by the Faith Tabernacle Ministry in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the Apostolic Faith, published by a Pentecostal Movement based in Portland, Oregon in America.[36] From these magazines that group was introduced to the faith, unaided by medicine, as the base of healing – hence the group adopted by 1922, Peter Anim left the Presbyterian Church and also founded the Faith Tabernacle Church at Asamankese. Later Anim called for help

[32] Hollenweger, J. Walter. *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 1997), p. 329.

[33] Kay, William. *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009)..

[34] Anderson, H. Allan. *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton/ Asmara: African Word Press, Inc., 2001).

[35] Prempeh, Charles, Christianity, Culture, and Pentecostalism in Ghana: An Ethnographic Study of Pentecostal Traditional Authorities in Contemporary Akan Society (1990s – Present), PhD thesis submitted to the University of Cambridge, 2021.

[36] Mohr, Adam. 'Zionism and Aladura's Shared Genealogy in John Alexander Dowie'. *Religion, 45*, 2 (2015): 239–251; Daswani, Girish. *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Transformation and Ethical Practice in the Ghanaian Church of Pentecost* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Kalu, Ogbu. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

from England and in response, James McKeown was sent as a missionary to Anim and his group in 1937. McKeown was sent by British Elim Pentecostal Church, but as a result of doctrinal differences over faith and healing, McKeown parted ways with Anim's group in 1939. As minimally educated, McKeown did not involve himself in the complex theological issues of acculturation, assimilation or cross-cultural missions, in general.

Instead, McKeown was said to be more accommodating of Akan cultures than the 19th Century missionary.[37] But this cannot be taken for granted as McKeown simply being a cultural altruist. Two factors possibly shaped McKeown's attitude. The first was that by the time he arrived in England, England, the epicenter of missionary civilized nation, had become deeply secularized. So, at the beginning of the 20th Century, several missionaries told Africans to look to African cultures as ideal historic Christian cultures.[38] The second was that the nationalist movement was peaking at the time McKeown arrived at the Gold Coast. The tide against Eurocentrism in the Gold Coast and the colonized world was so strong McKeown could not swim against it.[39]

Nevertheless, the nationalists, the majority of whom had had mission-related training and discipline, and McKeown shared the ethical vision of the 19th Century missionaries. Even Kwame Nkrumah, a voluble pan-Africanist favored the contributions of the missionaries to the formation of the Gold Coast ethical base. Meanwhile, the retention of missionary Puritan ethics favored McKeown. This is because the main focus of Pentecostalism which is holiness is also part of the enduring legacies of the Wesleyan Movement in England and globally in the 18th Century.[40] Pentecostalism enforced ethics that discouraged the consumption of alcoholism and extreme ones such as women using make-up.[41] The group also ensures that there is a clear distinction between men and women in appearance and in gathering. While the boundaries of ethics are always difficult to be kept,[42] the group believes that through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, one could live the ethical demands of Christianity. Pentecostals, therefore, have historically emphasized the importance of Holy Spirit baptism, evidenced by speaking in tongues, in addition to water baptism. The emphasis Pentecostals placed on speaking in tongues has proven difficult to be universally applied since not all converts end up speaking in that *glossolalia*. For this reason, the British

[37] Leonard, Christine. *A giant in Ghana: 3,000 churches in 50 years: The story of James McKeown and the Church of Pentecost* (Chichester: New Wine Press, 1989).
[38] Stanley, Brian, *The Bible and the flag: Protestant missions & British imperialism in the nineteenth & twentieth centuries* (Leicester: APOLLOs, 1990).
[39] Prempeh, "Christianity".
[40] Ibid
[41] Kalu, *African Pentecostalism.*
[42] Daswani, *Looking back.*

Pentecostal church, Elim that sent McKeown liberalized the emphasis they place on speaking on tongues, as the primary evidence of Holy Spirit baptism.

The CoP, however, retains the speaking in tongues. The church's insistence on speaking in tongues is part of retaining hope of moral reformation among its youthful constituency. Even so, the young people of the CoP in the Western world, especially its second-generation members in England do not necessarily share the pneumatic emphasis of the church.[43] The church's emphasis on holiness was difficult to apply since the Bible did not give minutes and pedantic detail on what constitutes how one's holiness should be lived. The CoP first depended on obvious moral issues spelt out in the Epistle and pastoral letters of Apostle Paul. Next, it tapped into the Akan notions and ethics of boundaries to formulate and concretize its ethics. Consequently, by the 1940s, the CoP became one of the enforcers of the 19th Century ethics. The church deployed the Akan old women's use of scarf as a mark of seniority as a symbol of consecration and separation of women towards holiness.[44] Just like the Akan and Judeo–Christian sex ethics, in general, women in the CoP became the primary focus of the church's revitalized Akan ethics. The Women's Movement, which was co-led by McKeown's wife, Sophia McKeown, had as its motto: "Holiness Unto God."

As part of the enforcement of the CoP's ethics (then known as the Ghana Apostolic Church), they held one of its regular open-air General Easter Conventions. It was held at Sekondi from Thursday evening, 18th to Monday 22nd April 1957, a few weeks after Ghana's independence. As part of the CoP's enforcement of its ethical rules, the church announced conditions for attendance, which said "may be useful to some new converts in Christ":

> 1. Don't attend the convention if you intend to engage in buying and selling, trading or making money in any way. Come with this purpose only, "To find and be the PEARL of Great Prince" Matthew 13: 45–46.
>
> 2. Don't come in search of a wife or a husband. You will be disappointed. The Great hover of souls is ready to meet you and to make you His forever. COME prepared to meet Him and you will find him. Song of Solomon 3:4.
>
> 3. If you are not prepared to forgive a neighbour who has wronged or offended you, DON'T COME. Matthew 6:15. Have we not received

[43] Nyanni, Caleb, *Second-generation African Pentecostals in the West: An emerging paradigm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021)

[44] Prempeh, Charles, "Religious reforms and notions of gender in Pentecostal Christianity: A case of the Church of Pentecost". In Nimi Wariboko & Adeshina Afolayan (Eds.), *African Pentecostalism and World Christianity: Essays in Honour of J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu,* 75–87 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020).

> abundant forgiveness from the Lord? COME with the spirit of thankfulness, rejoicing that the Lord has forgiven you of all your many sins and has restored you into the Fold. Luke 6: 37.
>
> 4. If you have a mind of coveting and robbing other people's goods, PLEASE DON'T COME. Remember Achan. Joshua 7:21. Your sin will find you out. COME rather with a spirit of giving. Matthew 10:8. Acts. 20:35.
>
> 5. If you are not prepared to give up a besetting sin in your life, DON'T COME. Proverbs 28:13. If you are not sufficiently broken in spirit, and not willing to be reproved, DON'T COME. Proverbs 29:1. We would all like to see the Glory of God manifest at the convention, right from the very beginning. Malachi 3:1. So please COME with the attitude to surrender to the Lord, with a spirit of humility, and a willingness to receive from Him. Psalm 51:17.
>
> 6. DON'T Attend the Convention with a grumbling, criticising, and fault-finding spirit. It harms no one but yourself, and it hinders no soul but your own from receiving a blessing from the Lord. After all, it is the Grace of God that is leading us all. I Corinth15:10. COME, with a heart full of praise and thanksgiving, and a spirit of forbearance, and you will go back overflowing with all kinds of blessings. Ephesians 3: 20, 21.
>
> 7. Lastly, remember that it is only the pure in heart that will see God. Matthew 5:8. Therefore, COME to the Convention with a sincere heart, prepared to receive the Word of God and to obey the voice of His Spirit. James 1:21.[45]

The above demonstrates the extent the CoP went to enforce its moral ethics, such that even at a Convention, church members must bear the visible marks of holiness. The fear that the young people could not be trusted well enough, and also to reflect the Akan gerontocratic tendencies, the CoP hardly allowed young people into leadership. The young people in some of the branches of the CoP were disallowed from wearing extended hair and new clothes such as *kaba* and slit for women.[46] In some extreme cases, some branches did not encourage members to watch television – similar to William Kumuyi's Deeper Life

[45] Ghana Apostolic Church, Circular Letter: To all Assemblies, June 1957 (CoP's Electronic Archives).

[46] Interview Elder Godfried Asante at the Birmingham Christian College, Birmingham, UK on February 2, 2022.

Church, founded in the 1970s.[47] Men and women, even a couple could not sit next to each other during service. Women could not wear a pair of trousers/jeans.[48]

All this is crystalized in the ritual of communion where a week prior to the ritual is dedicated to spiritual purity through prayers. During communion, a tall moral list is read that bars fornicators, adulterers, polygynists and persons co-habiting from participating. The communion becomes the table to define the boundaries of Pentecostal ethics between the "holy" and the "unholy". Old stories of old divine punishment against persons who violated these rules, ate the communion and suffered subsequently are told to ward off violators. In several of the CoP churches I attended during my study, I realized, that young people's attendance at church during communion Sundays, usually the first week of the month, declines.

The CoP's enforcement of ethics was challenged during the late 1960s, with the rise of para-church organizations, such as the Scripture Union and the Charismatic Movement in the 1970s.[49] These religious movements allowed the youth more room to operate in leadership and enjoy fashion. The charismatic churches also cherished the use of the English language and modern musical instruments which attracted several university students.[50] At the beginning of the 1980s, some young people of the CoP background in the universities pressured the church for linguistic reforms. By the 1980s, therefore, the church introduced English Assembles.

In the 1990s, when Ghana, under its military leader Jerry John Rawlings, re-democratized, the country became the hub of several West African citizens. The majority of these citizens, fleeing the dictatorial regimes of Gnassingbé Eyadéma of Togo and Sani Abacha moved into Ghana, settling largely in the cities. Some Liberian refugees added to the complex socio-demographic mix in Ghana. In response to these changes in social formation in the cities, the CoP, under its former Chairman Apostle Professor Opoku Onyinah, introduced the Pentecost International Worship Centre in the 1990s to appeal to foreigners and persons who were not comfortable worshipping in the local languages.

[47] Ibid
[48] Ibid
[49] Adubofuor, B. Samuel. 'Evangelical Para-church Movements in Ghanaian Christianity: c.1950 – early 1990s' (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburg, 1994).
[50] Prempeh, "Religious reforms."

The 2010 Reforms and Women

Language is a medium for cultural formation and transition, as well as cultural change.[51] With the CoP reforming to incorporate the English language, several youth lifestyles started creeping into the church. As the church retained several of its young people and attracted new ones, as a result of its pro-English reforms, the young people retained their cultures. For example, on university campuses, PENSA students and graduates hardly wore the headscarf during communion. They are also hardly physically segregated during service. In my four-year period at the UCC, there were very few weeks that an invited pastor read the moral orders during communion service.

Consequently, the wind of change was already blowing. So, in 2010, during his second-term in office, Onyinah as chairman, introduced seismic reforms. That Onyinah introduced the reforms in his second-term is significant, because he had securely gone through the first term, studied the cultural climate, established a strong base support through mentoring and training young Apostles and was unlikely to be impeached. The reforms relaxed the imposition of the headscarf on women; the wearing of a pair of trousers for women; allowed men and women to sit together at their own convenience, and permitted men with dreadlocks to freely worship with the church. The means through which the reforms nearly split the church in Takoradi form the entire body of the CoP. Suspicion of a leakage of the document to the media pre-empted the church's plans to educate the members prior to releasing the reform.

The media published sensational articles about the reform. The media deployed cartoons to depict the CoP's reform as inviting women in miniskirts to freely worship with the church. This deepened anxiety and frustration among some church members. A few weeks after the 2010 reforms were announced, I was on my way to school, then as a postgraduate student at the Institute of African Studies (IAS). At the 37 Military Hospital, I greeted a woman, visibly drabbed in the CoP's customized cloth for women, "Holiness". After she responded, "Unto the Lord," and determined that I am a member of the CoP, she said, "You, young people are those destroying the church, but the Lord will punish anyone who destroys His church." Obviously, seeing me in my lens with a backpack, she could clearly tell I was a student and possibly supported Onyinah as he was accused of falling for the lure of "modernised" students.

[51] Sapir, Edward, *Culture, Language and Personality: Selected Essays* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949).

Facebook, Pre-Marital Pictures and the CoP

Several young people of the CoP were excited, but the church was not sure of what to do with retaining its holiness ethics, especially in the face of the pervasiveness of social media. Over the last decade or so, social media handles such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Instagram have significantly democratized the channels of communication.[52] Barring issues of digital dictatorship, social media, in the case of Ghana has broadened the opportunity for young people to reclaim some autonomy against gerontocracy. Globally and locally, young people have mobilized through social media for online political reforms, such as the #DumsoMustStop in 2015, #DropTheChamber in 2019, #FixTheCountry in Ghana in 2021, and the Arab Spring in the Arab world in 2011, and #EndSARS in Nigeria in 2017. Regardless of whether these online activists have been successful or not, young people have found social media an important space for championing reforms.

Social media with far-reaching visibility also creates invisibility. In a world of social media, the "social" is hardly about in-person sociogenic gatherings. Since the social media revolution in the Western world in the late 1990s and in Ghana about a decade into the millennium, offline activities have progressively migrated to online space. The same has implied invisibility in communication. It is, therefore, possible for young people to have hundreds of social media friends without meeting any one of them throughout the year. Meanwhile, offline sociogenic activities have declined progressively. For example, since the outbreak of the current coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 in Ghana, sociogenic activities such as religious conventions (initially considered not a safe zone for wife seekers in the 1950s) have migrated online. Funerals and even weddings are moving online, with the whole idea of "for special invites." Against all this is the fact that young people would have to find their suitors, all the same. But in a world of invisibility and anonymity, it has increasingly become difficult for them to know sincere love-seekers. The proliferation of dating sites has also been commercialized, such that with some of the dating platforms, until one pays, one cannot see the real pictures of potential suitors. Impersonation is similarly on the increase. The summary of this is that the social media world is about individualism – embodied in the common online language "selfie."

Given that marriage is based on potential couples knowing the social identity of each other, with the absence of sociality, several women in particular and men, in general, have been duped by impostors. As part of my research, I interviewed a lady who said a young man whom she met on social media and fell

[52] Agana, Agana-Nsiire, and Charles Prempeh. "Of farms, legends, and fools: Re-engaging Ghana's development narrative through social media." *Media, Culture & Society* 44, no. 7 (2022): 1290-1306.

in love with him deceived her. According to her, after dating online for a year with a few in-person meetings at eateries in various joints in Accra, they arranged for marriage. She introduced the young man to her parents. When it was the turn of the young man to introduce her to his family, he rather formed a fictive family of friends and presented the fictive family as his real family.

Unknown to the young woman, the young man had hired impersonators to present themselves as his family. After all the initial processes were done, the marriage, quite simple was held at a church in Accra. A few months into the marriage, the young man started complaining about the lady not doing a few things right, including cooking. When the lady asked that they addressed the issue by talking to his family, the man became angry. One day, while the lady was at work, the young man packed his things and left. When I asked whether the marriage was registered, the lady said it was registered. But the gentleman had a family – living with his wife and three children in a marriage that was not registered.

In the course of my study, I realized that there were several issues of bigamy relative to marriages conducted under ordinance. In some instances, my interlocutors said that when one complained about bigamy, virtually nothing was done about it. If offenders were arrested, the cumbersomeness of the judicial system, including legal cost and social shame and its attending stigma, compel victims not to report to the police. To forestall either a repetition of such impersonators or stop it from happening entirely, several young women take to social media to announce their relationships and marriage plans. Several of my interlocutors said that a good indicator of an impostor is when the person constantly refuses to take a picture with them and have the pictures put on Facebook and other social media handles. An interlocutor said she had to block a young man after they had taken pictures offline –after half a year of online dating– and the young man refused to have her upload their picture on Facebook.

The young men also complained that until the marriage was established, they would hardly accept ladies putting a picture they have together on social media. One of them queried, "What if the marriage does not work, because these days there are a lot of born-one who will pressure you to marry them". The idea of "born-one" is about a woman with a child without husband. Such women are stigmatized as having been "used" by a man. Meanwhile, because they are also ageing, they would want to marry anyone who comes their way with the least sense of responsibility. The young men said that such women are desperately waiting to splash pre-nuptial pictures on Facebook to ward off all potential threats. Usually, such women also want to avoid repeating what they call, "hit and run" men – men who enjoy sex without taking up responsibility for pregnancy and childcare.

With all the above complexities, the consensus derived from my study was

that the men were more reluctant to have their pictures with a lady shared on social media than the women. But it also showed the precarity of women in conjugal issues. Women often have evidence of sex when they conceive, not men. Women bear the burden of nearly stopping everything to attend to their babies, for not at least a year, while the men walk away freely. Meanwhile, the churches, families and other state institutions are overwhelmed by the intensified invisibility that social media has added to the complexity of city life. The plurality of the cities makes it difficult for the moral gaze of the older generation to pry on everyone. Also, the poignancy of rituals of imprecations appears to have lost its usefulness to the religious young men and women who think such rituals are outmoded.

Once in a while a few Christian women resort to the service of Muslim ritual functionaries in the Muslim enclaves – popularly called Zongos. A typical example was a Christian lady of the Apostle Church International, who approached me to know whether I could help her find a *Mallam* (*Mualim*). The lady had been impregnated by the same young man three times and aborted accordingly. Unfortunately, the young man jilted her and married another lady. Out of frustration, the lady thought, as a resident of a Zongo community – noted for several Mallams – I could help. When I rather told her to forgive, seek justice in court, and also appeal to her church, she rather said she would go to her village to imprecate. But they would also not go to the church for two reasons: First, they risk being excommunicated and second, they would be stigmatized and nearly reduced to pariahs in the church. In the example mentioned above, this lady, who sings in the church choir would have lost her position if she had reported to her church elders about her plight.

The camera: a counter-hegemonic juju

Several young women I interviewed and the men who consented to pre-nuptial pictures felt it was a necessary evil. As I have said, the decline in church control, the increasing plurality of the city, the invisibility imposed by social media, the *retreat* of deities, the Reformist Muslims' attacks on Mallams, and the legal complexities have revitalized the need for a camera as a panopticon. Social media works in a virtual space, where a good smartphone is enough to curate a person beyond social reality. For example, a person can take a picture and "crop" it to promote a "*selfie*." The "selfie" of Facebook is the type of individualism that the American sociologist Robert Bellah referred to as "expressive individualism" and Charles Taylor's, "Age of authenticity."[53]

[53] Bellah, N. Robert, Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Swidler, A. & Tipton, S.M., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 142–166; Taylor, Charles, *A secular age*, 473–502 (Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

Through the mediation of the smartphone's camera, individuals "curate" or "crop" themselves to meet their sartorial and aesthetic choices that would appeal to their suitors. In the course of my data collection, one of my interlocutors had social media pictures that could hardly be identified with hers. I would have gone past her if I had met her on my way without her friend. For these women, the camera is their *juju* that allows them to straddle time, bridging modernity and tradition. Through the camera, they can recuperate their childhood spotless bodies during their pre-nuptial pictures to, as one of my interlocutors said, "show my hidden rivals that I have really taken over." Last year, a high-ranking Christian gospel mission got married. Two weeks after the marriage, social media was swamped with pictures of the bride, showing how she appeared to have lost weight around her hips. Several commentators concluded that she had appealed to a "lawyer" – the mechanism of "loading" herself with pads to look very attractive at marriage.

From the research, I realised that the sense of marital insecurity is felt by both men and women, except that men are unable to express it without being ridiculed. Two things, however, make it possible for men to withstand marital difficulties. The first is the strong presence of indigenous masculinity that imposes on men to obscure their pain in public. The second is the less stigmatization attached to men who either cheat (on?) their wives or have post-marital multiple lovers – popularly called "Gardens". But this could also work out against men, as storing the pain of marital disputes may prevent them from seeking support which could potentially lead to men committing suicide.

On the other hand, women would talk about their pain, and take to social media to directly or indirectly solicit support. Sometimes it works for them. But in a social media world of cancel culture, they may equally be stigmatized. These complexities sustain several women posting pre-marital amorous pictures that, as one of them said to me "express their desires to be naked with their would-be-husband without any shame." The idea of being naked without shame is physically expressed in the pre-nuptial clothing that usually shows the would-be bride's sensitive parts, including thighs and cleavages. For these women, such physical expression against society's imposition is a way of arguing that their marital issues should have no secrets when the man is potentially cheating.

However, in 2019, the CoP banned what it considers amorous pictures that cast potential couples in a state as though they were married. After this, the church introduced a new rule about marriage. At the end of the CoP's 45th General Council Meeting, a gathering of church leaders and pastors where major decisions are taken about the governance of the church, the CoP concluded in pre-marriage engagement, which was sent as a circular as follows:

a. **Counselling**: Ministers and their wives were encouraged to be actively involved in pre-marital counselling of would-be couples.

b. **Parental Consent**: The practice where the parents of would-be couples are required to travel long distances on the invitation of marriage committees to ascertain their consent is to be discouraged. Rather, Ministers were encouraged to liaise with colleague Ministers of the Districts where these parents reside for such tasks.

c. **Redefinition of Existing Marriages**: Ministers and officers were also to note that the Church's definition of existing marriage has not changed. Since the Church has not redefined existing marriage, Ministers are advised to stop considering marriages as existing when the would-be couple engages in pre-marital sex during courtship. During the counselling, if they volunteer information that they have committed sexual immorality, the minister should not define or consider it as an existing marriage. Rather, they could be pardoned. The Minister should provide the necessary pastoral counselling, encourage them to complete the process of registration and the payment of the bride price or what is termed as "engagement" and end it there. They can live as couples without having a formal wedding. The practice where such cases are considered as an existing marriage and brought to church for a formal wedding without veiling is not acceptable. Such marriages may be considered at a later date and blessed without a veil. Preferably during a mass wedding. Would-be couples are admonished to stay chaste.[54]

The above ruling of the church brings out several issues for consideration. First, it shows the increasing role of the CoP in the family lives of their members. Second, the ruling of the church blurs the line of demarcation between the pastors and family heads in family matters such as marriage. Third, it complexifies the family laws of Ghana where the church does not contract marriages but represents the states in the established family-approved marriages. But in responding to this situation, an Elder, a non-salaried officer of the CoP, argued as follows:

> The church is a voluntary organization, so once people join it, they must abide by its rules. Otherwise, if they find the rules burdensome, they are compelled to abide, except that they cannot also act in contradiction to the established norms. This is because the church is a family in itself, preparing people for the ultimate Lord and Father.[55]

[54] Eric K. Nyamekye, "Pastoral Letter," The Church of Pentecost, May 27, 2021, p. 3.
[55] Interview with Elder Godfried Asante on February 2, 2022.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the complex relationship between the church and families over the issue of marriage. As to whether the church should have control over members' marital choices or leave it to families to decide is also part of the nature of the church. As a voluntary organization, members are at liberty to join or not and when people join the church, they are to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ and declare Him as their Lord and Savior. Usually, this is symbolically done openly at church, where everyone sees the new converts raising their hands, signalling complete surrender to Jesus. Often, the commonest evangelistic–oriented song that accompanies the entry procedure is "All to Jesus, I surrender." It is the need for the member to abide by what he or she has surrendered to that the CoP emphasizes the Holy Spirit baptism for the moral transformation of its converts. Consequently, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, the CoP seeks to resolve the tension between members following Jesus Christ and yet practicing what the church considers anti-Christian, such as pre-marital sex and pre-marital amorous pictures. But as I have said, all of these raise complex issues about the freedom and agency of individuals and the church. This also highlights the church's argument that once one comes to Christ one loses one's freedom to Him. One becomes a slave, surrendering one's will to Him. These are all issues that would need further research about the state and religion and church and families over marital issues.

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Cape, 1956)

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