‘The Ladies’ Chairman: Male Headship and Gender Equality in Pentecostal Ghana

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The Ladies’ Chairman:
Male Headship and Gender Equality in Pentecostal Ghana

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Abstract

Within the field of international development there has in recent years been an emerging interest to explore how secular and faith-based modes of development may interact. Yet there remains a considerable knowledge gap in how religious values, beliefs and practices may challenge, accommodate or complement secular development agendas. Against this backdrop, this thesis aims to make a small contribution to move our understanding onwards.

Based on fieldwork in Apam, Ghana, my project illustrates how an individual may navigate between Pentecostal ideology, secular development discourse, and traditional believes and practices in contemporary Africa. More specifically, I employ theoretical insights from the anthropology of ethics to analyse how a young Christian man constructs his ethical identity while aspiring to shoulder the headship of his family, and being a promotor for gender equality and women empowerment in his community.

Key words: Ghana, Pentecostalism, Gender equality, Male Headship, Anthropology of Ethics, Development
List of Acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NLF</td>
<td>New Life Foundation</td>
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<td>CHRAJ</td>
<td>Commissioner for Human Rights and Administrative Justice</td>
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1 Introduction

Sea winds sweep in over the Ghanaian shores in the evening. In over the coastal town of Apam, where people saunter toward churches that glow in the dense darkness. Flow gently through the wide opened doors of the parish hall, where I find myself seated and gazing at the fans on the wooden bulks above me.

Emmanuel is standing up front with the Bible closed in his right hand, speaking its moral lessons out of memory. The strong light from the bulbs in the ceiling falls on his youthful face as he addresses his audience in the scarcely populated hall. But his voice doesn’t echo. The blue drapes hanging on the walls seem to absorb most sounds. Or maybe it’s the pressing heat that renders his voice obtuse in my ears.

He walks back and forth beneath the platform where the elders’ chairs are vacant, and tugs his green shirt, with the press “New Life Foundation” fully visible on his chest. But he is not speaking about human rights, gender equality, or water and sanitation, as he usually does when wearing his employer’s logo. He is talking passionately for his children’s group about penalty and repentance. Reading from his teen syllabus that “repentance is a sincere heart sorrow for sin that leads a person to run from his sins to God to do his will”, while his young crowd listens attentively.

His voice then silence, and the floor is opened up for questions. A young girl sitting beside me raises her hand and is given the word. She stands up, takes a deep breath, and tells of a quarrel she has had with a boy on whether or not a woman can be a pastor. Listening carefully to her account Emmanuel then reassures the worried girl that “though the man is the head of the house, and the elders are male, women too can be pastors. For it is written in the New Testament that ‘there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28)” As he utters these encouraging words, he does so as a devoted member of his Pentecostal church, as an agent of change in service of a local NGO working towards the millennium development goal of gender equality, and as a young man determined to shoulder the headship of his family in the near future.

As this scene indicates, Emmanuel is living in a Ghanaian town where the Pentecostal movement has flourished alongside secular development initiatives. A town where one’s religious identity carries profound significance, and where men are pervasively expected to
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shoulder the headship of their families. His ethical self-formation in this specific context is the subject of this thesis.

The Anthropology of Ethics

Through an empirical investigation, I explore how Emmanuel works on his ethical self in his specific life situation and socio-cultural environment. In technical terms, I’m concerned with the formation of an ethical subject, which places my theoretical interests in the anthropology of ethics. This emerging field has lately received increasing scholarly attention, and constitutes one of two major strains in the growing anthropological research on morality.

In contrast to the other strain, which is concerned with investigating norms and values defining what is good or bad, or what one ought to and ought not to do in a given society, the anthropology of ethics gives particular attention to agents’ subjectivities. As such, it can be seen as a reaction to more established approaches to norms and values that tend to overlook human freedom in favour of social constraints (Fassin 2013:4-5).

Many anthropologists within this strain have sought guidance in the later works of Michel Foucault, in which he displayed an interest for ethical subjectivities and the freedom of the individual in relation to power-structures (see Asad 1993, and Robbins 2004). While I do not engage with Foucault’s work in a direct sense, I draw on two thinkers who have elaborated on his theories, namely James Faubion (2011) and James Laidlaw (2014). As both of them present their works under the name anthropology of ethics, I have also chosen to adopt this particular label among others alternatives, such as for example the “anthropology of moralities” advocated by Jarret Zigon (2007) or “moral anthropology” by Didier Fassin (2012). Before going into the respective thinking of Faubion and Laidlaw, I should clarify what is meant by an ethical actor – which is a term that is central to the analysis and the description of Emmanuel’s actions and reasoning throughout the thesis.

1.1 Definition of an Ethical Actor

In Foucault’s understanding, ethical actors are those who freely and self-reflexively take up incitements and invitations – be they formal such as that from states or administrations, or more
informal – that invite them to become “subjects of esteemed qualities or kinds” (Faubion 2011:3). I hold that my main informant, Emmanuel, qualifies as such an actor – and a complex one at that. For not only does he freely and self-reflexively respond to the incitement of his socio-cultural surrounding in aspiring to become a good head of his family, but he also takes up the invitation of the NGO that he works for, in seeking to be an “agent of change” who champions women’s rights and opportunities in his community. Hence, he is a complex actor in the sense that he accommodates these two different commissions in the construction of his ethical identity. I should clarify here that “agent of change” is a term used by NLF, which they attribute to local youths who have been subjected to their trainings.

While Emmanuel figures as the locus of this thesis – the actor through which the ethical domain is explored – this does, however, not entail an exclusive focus on his person. I proceed from the premise that an ethical actor must be understood within his specific environment, and thus consider contextualisation to be essential. In order to inform the analysis properly, I shall therefore draw on a range of informants and other sources to encompass relevant aspects of the socio-cultural environment at issue. Put more specifically, I shall analyse the ethical actor in light of his interpersonal relationships, as well as prevailing discourses within his society.

### 1.2 Purposes and Aims

In order to explain the motive for writing this thesis, I begin by recalling observations and interpretations from my field. Below I provide a brief account of the research, and subsequently explicate the problem which it addresses.

In the spring of 2014, I conducted fieldwork through a NGO in Apam, called New Life Foundation (NLF). It is a local organisation which objective is to: “Empower people at all levels of society to be active partners in development” (NLF 2015). The purpose was to explore how local youths in Apam relate to the international development concepts used by the organization, and in particular the concepts of gender equality and women empowerment. Thus I established contact with three young individuals who had received education on these issues by NLF. Two were female, Christy and Vero, and one male, Emmanuel. While becoming acquainted with these informants I also learned that all three were devoted members of Pentecostal churches in Apam, which came to influence my research profoundly.
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In light of the given conditions, I became interested in what I perceived as a potential value conflict in my informants’ lives – that is seeming contradictions between Pentecostal gender ideology and the secular gender equality-discourse informing NLF’s objectives. To phrase it in a more precise way: I was inclined to investigate how my young informants were able to embrace such principles that “both male and female have the same rights and […] freedom” – as Emmanuel would define gender equality – and simultaneously adhere to the churches’ legitimization of male authority and female submission in the domestic sphere. For I should state that my three informants expressed support for both standpoints, and that they did not seem to be in a state of moral distress or concern over the contradictions that I initially projected.

The purpose here is to explore how an ethical actor may accommodate, and mediate, different, and seemingly contradictory, commissions in the construction of an ethical identity. In a wider perspective, my objective is also to illustrate how an individual may navigate between religious ideology, secular development discourse, and traditional believes and practices in contemporary Ghana. A third objective of the thesis is to discuss and explore the concept of freedom from an anthropological perspective – which I will return to in subsequent chapter where I outline the theoretical framework I employ.

Research Questions

As Emmanuel retains a prominent position in the thesis – for reasons that will be elaborated in chapter three – the formulation of my research question places its focus on him. The question is then: how the actor, Emmanuel, accommodates his different commissions in the construction of his ethical identity. These are: to shoulder the headship of his family qua man, and to be an “agent of change” who champions gender equality and women empowerment.

In order to approach this question properly, I recognize that certain sub questions will need to be addressed:

- What local understandings of male headship and female submission are found in Apam?
- What conditions do motivate Emmanuel’s decision to become the head of his family, and how does he reflect upon the expectations, obligations and virtues attached to this position?
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- How is Emmanuel’s commission of promoting gender equality and women empowerment accommodated, and mediated, with his adherence to the notion of male headship in his ethical reasoning?

I pose these bullets to guide the contents of chapters five, six and seven – each bullet will then guide one chapter in the order they are given above. The intention is that the discussions of the sub questions will jointly substantiate the conclusions I draw in the final discussion, in chapter eight. To explicate the structure of the thesis, I offer below a brief account of what each chapter is meant to establish.

In chapter five I show that there is no clear-cut conflict between Pentecostal gender ideology and gender equality – despite the existence of a strong discourse on male headship and female submission in the churches. In chapter six I elucidate that Emmanuel’s ambition to shoulder the headship of his family qua man is not motivated by a will to dominate, but rather by a strive to live up to his responsibility towards his family and the expectations they place on him. In chapter seven I provide insight into Emmanuel’s ethical judgement, and how he accommodates and mediates the ethical discourses to which he adheres.

Jointly, these three chapters seek to explain how Emmanuel’s different commissions may not be as contradictory as I initially perceived them in the field. However, my discussions in the final parts of chapter seven also explicate how the ethical actor needs to deal with conflicting demands and values attached to the notions of male headship and gender equality. In short, these chapters seek to answer the main research question by providing clarifying explanations, and by shedding light on complexities in how Emmanuel forms his ethical self.

Rationale

The subject of this thesis is a timely one for two reasons. First, it connects to a relatively novel field of research within the discipline of anthropology, which is the relationship between secular development organizations and Pentecostalism in Africa. While the intersection of these two movements has long elided substantial scholarly interest, their parallel flourishing on the continent have lately led researchers to acknowledge that they often operate within the same societies and communities, and involving the same individuals.

The results from a more prominent research of this phenomenon was published in 2012, under the title: Pentecostalism and development: Churches, NGOs and social change in Africa.
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The book partly explores how the Pentecostal movement may pose an alternative to western development initiatives, but also how these movements may interact or supplement each other in order to achieve change. Most of the authors of this compilation of case studies devote considerable attention to economic and political dimensions of the respective movements, but a few also highlight the moral aspects of Pentecostalism and secular development agendas. Dena Freeman, for example, explores how the interaction between development organizations and Pentecostalism achieves accelerated transformation of subjectivities in the areas where they operate.

However, as a result of the narrow scopes of the case studies presented in the book, it does not pay sufficient attention to the individuals who live in communities where secular development initiatives coexist with the Pentecostal movement. In other words, the tendency among the authors – Freeman included – to focus on general descriptions of these movements, as well as their common denominators and differences at large, elides any deeper investigation into how subjectivities may be formed, and transformed, in their intersection, which is a gap that this thesis seeks to fill.

Second, the theoretical foundation of my work resides in the growing anthropological interest in morality, which has opened unexplored territory to embark upon in the discipline. In reflecting on the accomplishments and prospective of this turn, Didier Fassin acknowledges how it yields new questions and new answers concerning human life (2012:14). His point is well illustrated by recognizing how the question of individual freedom in relation to norms has been vitalized by the increasing interest in ethics. For as both Laidlaw (2002) and Robbins (2007) have pointed out, this issue has been slumbering in anthropology due to the pervasive influence of Emile Durkheim’s take on morality. Hence, the theoretical accommodation of individual freedom in present thesis renders it relevant in relation to emerging trends within the discipline.

It is further recognized by Fassin that anthropological enquiry into morality is timely in our contemporary world, where a moralization of politics has become a global phenomenon. Against this backdrop, he emphasises the need to study the “production, circulation, and appropriation of norms and values” (2012:10), and points out our tendency to otherwise take these norms and values for granted, and even regarding them as signs of moral progress (ibid). In light of his argument, I claim that my project finds its relevance also in its analytical focus on the use of the international development concepts of “gender equality” and “women empowerment”. For, in accordance with Fassin’s position, I’m not driving a normative agenda,
but am rather interested in exploring how these concepts are understood and used in a local context in Ghana.

In summary then, I employ theoretical insights from the anthropology of ethics to provide novel insights into how subjectivities are formed in the intersection of secular development agendas and the Pentecostal movement in Africa. My ambition is thus to make a timely contribution to a research field likely to receive increasing scholarly attention considering the ongoing entanglement of these respective movements on the continent.

Having explained the rationale for pursuing the subject at issue, I believe it’s apt here to address the theoretical framework that I employ.
2 Theoretical Framework

My analytically approach is mainly anchored in the theoretical framework James Faubion develops in *An anthropology of ethics*. In his book, Faubion moves beyond his precedent, Foucault, in many respects to provide a conceptual apparatus which aim is to serve the open-endedness of anthropological enquiry into the ethical domain. As an account of his program in its entirety would far exceed the limited space I have at hand, it suffices here to offer a sketch that highlights essential aspects of Faubion’s work, and to address concepts in his theory that are of relevance to my own objectives. In addition, I will also shed light on certain concepts in Laidlaw’s *The subject of virtue*, which complement my analysis where Faubion’s framework has not been adequate.

2.1 Mode of Subjectiviation

In developing his theory, Faubion builds upon Foucault’s four parameters of the ethical domain: ethical substance, askesis, telos and the mode of subjectiviation. *Ethical substance* denotes “that stuff – carnal pleasures, the soul or what have you – which demands attention and fashioning if a given actor is to realize himself or herself as the subject he or she would be” (Faubion 2011:4). *Askesis* then is “the particular work that a given subject has to perform on his or her ethical substance in order to become a subject of a certain kind or quality” (ibid), and *telos* refers “to the subject that is the end of any given actor’s striving” (ibid). While I will not dwell on these parameters further, the *mode of subjectiviation* demands extra attention in relation to my purposes.

In Faubion’s own words this mode denotes “the manner in which a given actor evaluates and engages the criteria that determine what counts as living up to being a subject of one or another quality or kind” (Faubion 2011:4). Laidlaw offers a similar view on subjectiviation, as he points out that subjectiviation entails an active processes of reflective self-formation (2014:101). These formulations, however, provide only a partial definition. For looking at how Foucault himself has thought of subjectiviation, one can note that it is also an intersubjective affair, as he describes it as “the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their
moral obligations” (Foucault 1997:264). Indeed, this intersubjective dimension of subjectiviation is also acknowledged by Faubion, who stresses that an anthropology of ethics “has no ground in the individual”. His point being that the ethical subject is always of “intersubjective, social and cultural tissue” (2011:119-120).

Given this premise, one notes that people in the ethical actor’s surroundings may be crucially influential to his mode of subjectiviation, primarily through the roles of pedagogues and exemplars. In accordance with Faubion’s understanding, this thesis will approach the mode of subjectiviation as not merely an exploration of how the actor recognizes and evaluates his moral obligations, but also how he is invited by his social and cultural environment to take them up.

### 2.2 Mode of Ethical Judgement, and Ethical Discourses

Faubion’s own elaboration of the mode of subjectiviation is the *mode of ethical judgement*, which according to him “determine with greater specificity the ethical orientation towards code” (2011:69). This mode is then made up of two facets: ethical valuation: “the specific determination of the ethical chrism and so of its extension; the routinization of who or what is the subject of ethical regard” (115), and justification: “the apparatus of the defense of ethical evaluation and ethically marked decisions.” (116)

Important to stress here is that Faubion’s elaboration provides the space to explore how the actor may accommodate different ethical discourses in his ethical judgement. For while ethical discourses are seen as distinct semiotic fields, they are not closed off from each other in Faubion’s thinking. He explicitly rejects discursive relativism, and as such opens up the possibility to recognize how the ethical actor may draw from a semiotic catalogue of values, norms, guidelines, etc. This aspect of Faubion’s theory is particularly useful in chapter seven, in which I analyse how Emmanuel accommodates secular development discourse and Pentecostal ideology in his ethical reasoning.
2.3 Subject Position, and Ethical Complexity

A central concept in Faubion’s work, and for present thesis, is the subject position. In accordance with Foucault, Faubion delineates a subject position as that which an ethical actor is striving towards (2011:4). One can, however, note that a clear and concise definition of the concept is absent in his work, as he rather pins it down by occasionally addressing its conditions. This is also recognized by Robbins (2012), who, in a review of Faubion’s book, points out that the wide usage of “subject position” within anthropology may explain why Faubion doesn’t strain himself in clarifying the concept. I will however take the risk here to provide a concise explanation of the subject position which I construct from the clues Faubion leaves in his work. Though it might not be in full accordance with how Faubion himself understands the concept, it will at least bring some clarity to how I use it.

First, a subject position is not the equivalent of a status or a role, nor some kind of combination of the two. This, however, is not to say that the subject position does not bear similarities to these widely used concepts. Much like a status or a role, the subject position is always socially, culturally and historically specific, and functions to provide a social identity to those who occupy it (Faubion 2011:36). What, in my understanding, makes the subject position different is that an actor who occupies, or strives to occupy, such a position does not merely abide by certain norms, values, imperatives, expectations attached to it, and cultivates certain competencies and virtues that it necessitate, but he or she is consciously, and self-reflexively, relating to these norms, values, imperatives, virtues, etc. with a certain freedom.

As such, one identifies an open-endedness of the concept. In other words, it renders the position open to be shaped by its occupant, or to put it in a similar phrasing as Faubion: actors are not prisoners of a subject position (2011:4). Stressing this lack of fixity, Faubion declares that subject positions are malleable and can be altered, and that their legitimacy or illegitimacy are susceptible to contestation, which make them open to both replacement and displacement (ibid). Subject positions are therefore, in Faubion’s understanding, as well as my own, not static or closed, neither in regards to the individual occupying, or striving to occupy them, nor in relation to the socio-cultural landscape that renders them validity. This further implies that subject positions are not to be understood as enclosed within a mechanical model. For as Faubion points out, such an understanding would entail that “every alteration of a position would establish a shift from one position to another.” (2011:46), and that this is not particularly useful form an anthropological perspective, as it does not encompass the:
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coding or practical manifestation of alterations of subject positions that do not amount to one subject becoming another but instead to such familiar phenomena as a subject “developing” itself or “becoming more deeply” itself or acquiring or discarding one or another dimension of itself – but without becoming someone or something else in the process [Faubion 2011:46].

This recognition leads us on to Faubion’s notion of ethical complexity, which occurs when an ethical actor occupy, or strives to occupy, two subject positions simultaneously (Faubion 2011:14). The dimension of his work that renders ethical complexity open to analysis is referred to as the scope, structure and priority, and is define as: “the relative environment of any given subject position; its distinctive features and relative simplicity or complexity; its ethical weight or precedence relative to other ethical subject positions occupied or capable of being occupied.” (2011:116). It is particularly Faubion’s recognition that one subject position may be nested within another that has explanatory use in present thesis. For I will argue that Emmanuel’s strive towards the ethical subject position as an agent of change can be conceived as nested within his strive towards the ethical subject position as head of a family. Hence, Faubion’s theory provides the analytical space to explore how Emmanuel accommodates his different commissions in the construction of his ethical identity.

2.4 The Themitical, Ethical Self-formation, and Freedom

There are other concepts that demand attention: the themitical, self-formation and freedom. As the question of individual freedom is an underlying interest in this work, I bring forth these terms to support later discussions of the actor’s freedom in relation to constraints imposed on him in his environment.

The themitical, which Faubion himself coins, denotes a certain dimension of the ethical domain, which dynamics pertain to “the order of the reproduction of what at any particular place and point in time constitutes the regnant normative order, though in its normativity an order that may include values, ideals and exemplars as well as imperatives.” (Faubion 2011:24). In relation to the ethical actor then, the themitical pertains to one of the two forms of what Faubion calls ethical autopoesis – the becoming and maintenance of the ethical subject (2011:20). (As autopoesis is synonymous with self-formation, I shall henceforth use the latter and more easily graspable term.) The themitical dimension of ethical self-formation is, then, most apparent in the actor’s subjectiviation to regnant norms and values of the society
Theoretical Framework

concerned (2011:104). The other form of ethical self-formation is more dynamic, and in that sense more indebted to inventiveness and creativity of the ethical actor in his ethical becoming and maintenance.

As the previous paragraph indicates, there is a strong attention to the concept of freedom in Faubion’s theory on ethical self-formation – which I would argue makes for much of the appeal of An anthropology of ethics. For as Laidlaw has convincingly argued: “an anthropology of ethics will only be possible – will only be prevented from constantly collapsing into general questions of social regularity and social control – if we take seriously, as something requiring ethnographic description, the possibility of human freedom” (2002:102). And Faubion does indeed take freedom seriously, as he even perceives it as a necessary condition for being an ethical subject (2011:37).

Given this accommodation of freedom, his position contrasts works that have been more concerned with social and cultural reproduction. One example can be found in Pierre Bourdieu’s Masculine domination, which develops a powerful critique of gender inequality. In this particular book his interest mainly resides in the reproduction of the gender order. The idea being that individuals’ dispositions are formed by objective structures in the socio-cultural environment, which lead them to choose in accordance with these dispositions, which in turn reinforce the gender order of the given society. Interesting to note in relation to this work is the existence of research within masculinities studies which recognizes alternative masculinities that are not necessarily conducive to gender inequality (see Forsberg 2007, Groes-Green 2011). Stephen Whitehead, who is an influential researcher within this field of studies, has also pointed out that in the framework of patriarchy “all that is seen is the structure” (2002:57). His argument being that such focus elides the subjectivity of individual men, as well as the complexity of masculinities. While I have noted Bourdieu’s interest in cultural reproduction here, I should clarify that his thinking does not exclude the possibility for individual freedom.

Admittedly, Faubion is also interested in reproduction – hence his themitical. However, it’s important to stress that his approach does not restrict freedom to what lies beyond the actor’s subjectiviation to the themitical within his society. For as he points out: “routinization itself is a mechanism fundamentally of selection” (2011:85). This point is also resonated in Laidlaw’s account of Aristotle’s ideas concerning the virtuous person. According to Laidlaw, Aristotle did not conceive the virtuous person as the sole “product” of coercion or indoctrination. For, while the ancient philosopher conceived instructions to constitute an essential part of the initial stage of a subject’s development into a virtuous person, the full realization required “attainment of a conscious understanding of who one is and what one is doing, of ongoing reflective endorsement
on critical self-understanding” (2014:74-75). The point I’m reaching for is that freedom resides both in the creative ability of the ethical actor to intervene into, or re-experience the paths imposed on him, and in the formation of a habitus.

2.5 Value Pluralism

The recognition of value pluralism is an essential theoretical premise in relation to my purposes. The concept is convincingly advocated by James Laidlaw in The subject of virtue, in which he, like Faubion, builds his ideas partly on the later works of Foucault. The central point of Laidlaw’s attention to value pluralism is well captured in his following formulation: “actually living a life requires doing so with reference to values that make conflicting demands, and managing the inherently irresolvable tension between them.” (2014:169). Hence, he recognizes that ethical subjects are always managing conflict of values in their everyday lives, and rejects how liberal thinkers, adhering to a Kantian tradition, have sought to establish coherence in one’s moral character as a necessity for being free (2014:165).

As I seek to explain how Emmanuel is able to pursue his aspiration of becoming the head of his family qua man, while being a proponent of gender equality and women empowerment, I proceed from Laidlaw’s position that managing conflicting claims is a normal state of affairs in the lives of human beings, and that it is not necessarily a resolvable matter. Hence, my aspiration is not to portray Emmanuel as a coherent ethical actor, in the sense that he manages to mediate the sometimes conflicting notions of male headship and gender equality into a coherent set of principles that regulate his ethical practice and reasoning. This would, as Laidlaw points out, divert attention from the important empirical question of when value conflict arises (2014:167).

2.6 Responsibility

Lastly, I want to highlight another theoretical contribution of Laidlaw’s, namely his attention to responsibility. Recognizing that the concept of responsibility has not received enough attention in scholarly works on morality – a claim that to a certain extent also befits Faubion’s framework – Laidlaw provides a compelling account that does not only make for a valued
contribution for my own purposes but also for anthropologic enquiry into ethics and morality at large. Through an illuminating criticism of the limiting usage of the concept of agency within actor network theory (ANT) and practice theory, he stresses the importance of attention to the ethical terms of responsibility and blame when analysing actions of human beings. His argument is that our actions are not to be settled solely in deterministic and casual terms as is the case within ANT, nor in such terms as choice, decision and intention that speak to some inner characteristics of the individual as is the case within practice theory, but also in the ethical terms of blame and responsibility “as an aspect […] of the relational processes whereby stretches, phases, or stages of people’s ongoing conduct are interpreted as acts for which distinct agents […] are accountable.” (2014:197). To support Laidlaw’s argument a brief example is in order. Thus, I make a quick detour to ancient Greece, where Socrates’s acceptance of his unjust death sentence offers an illuminating case. The course of events from Socrates trail up till his execution by means of poison, is given to us in Plato’s dialogues Apology, Crito and Phaedo.

In the Apology, Socrates is unjustly sentenced to death for impiety and for having corrupted the youth. Having accepted his sentence the philosopher addresses his judges with the following request “when my sons grow up, gentlemen, punish them by troubling them as I have troubled you; if they seem to you to care for money or anything else more than for virtue […] rebuke them as I have rebuked you” (Plato 1924:145).

Incarcerated, and awaiting his death in Crito, the famous philosopher is then visited by his old friend Crito, who has made proper arrangements for Socrates to flee his unjust punishment. The old philosopher refuses however to save himself, and convinces Crito that he has a responsibility to abide by the laws and remain in his cell. Elaborating his argument he imagines how the laws themselves would judge his escape:

“Observe then, Socrates,” perhaps the laws would say, “[…] what you are now undertaking to do to us is not right. For we brought you into the world, nurtured you, and gave a share of all the good things we could to you and all the citizens. Yet we proclaim, by having offered the opportunity to any of the Athenians who wishes to avail himself of it, that anyone who is not pleased with us when he has become a man […] may take his goods and go away wherever he likes […] But we say that whoever of you stays here […] has thereby entered into an agreement with us to do what we command […]” [Plato 1924:179-181].

Living up to his responsibility towards the laws he remains in his prison cell. But in Phaedo, which depicts his final hours, Socrates is still reflecting upon why he sits on the floor and awaits his death. He rejects the teachings of Anaxagoras, who would explain his action by how his
body is composed and how it is able to assume a seated position. For this would fail to recognize the real cause according to Socrates. The real cause he believes is:

that the Athenians decided that it was best to condemn me, and therefore I have decided that it was best for me to sit here and that it is right for me to stay and undergo whatever penalty they order. For, by the Dog, I fancy these bones and sinews of mine would have been in Megara or Boeotia long ago, carried thither by an opinion of what was best, if I did not think it was better and nobler to endure any penalty the city may inflict rather than to escape and run away [Plato 1924:339-341].

So why does Socrates choose an unjust death when given the opportunity to flee? I would claim here, in accordance with Laidlaw’s argument, that an explanation of his action must include an attention to responsibility and blame. Socrates actions and reasoning clearly provides an example of how human beings will seek to conduct their own behaviour, and to conduct that of others, according to certain conceptions to these ethical terms.

In the case of Emmanuel then, it will become evident that an enquiry into his ethical self-formation, judgement and actions must equally not neglect the concept of responsibility. More specifically, it must not overlook the obligation he recognizes toward people in his social surroundings.

In summary, I have in this chapter sought to establish a theoretical framework that supports and facilitates an analysis of the problem at hand – that is how an actor may strive towards different ethical subject positions in the construction of his identity. However, the reader may want to go back to specific definitions of concepts and terms, as they are admittedly not easily grasped outside of a given context.
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In her celebrated *Veiled Sentiments*, Lila Abu-Lughod provides a clear-sited understanding of the field work-experience which lays bare the chimera of control over the endeavour. She writes:

> Especially for young anthropologists, perhaps insecure about their professional competence, the cloak of secrecy shrouding the fieldwork experiences of successful predecessors inspires fantasies. It is easy to imagine, for example, that these great figures were not plagued by doubts about their abilities, the adequacy of the material they collected, or their hosts’ of feelings toward them. Rather, they must have begun with the ideas set forth in their final products, polished, crisp and profound [1999:9]

While conducting my own fieldwork, I could indeed have been coupled with those “young anthropologist” that Abu-Lughod envisions. Making my way through the field, and comparing my diffuse process with illusions of how precise and clear-cut an anthropological research project ought to be, I grappled with how to define my methodology and put it into practice. In retrospect however, I was probably just involved in a process common to any anthropological endeavour, for as even a professor will admit about fieldwork: “However well planned and prepared it may appear to be in one or another grant proposal, it is almost always ad hoc, situationally specific and vulnerable to circumstance” (Faubion 2011: 207).

Therefore, I will in this chapter describe my methodology, and my use of methods, in light of the possibilities that were given. This will allow for a comprehension of the limitations of my empiric material, as well as how my methodology relates to the theoretical orientation and content of the thesis.

3.1 Before Going to the Field

A couple of months prior to my arrival in Ghana I was still trying to locate potential fields where I could conduct my research. With my mind set on West Africa, and an interest in studying cultural change in relation to youth, I imagined that NGOs within the development field would provide a point of entrance.
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In New Life Foundation, located near the small coastal town of Apam, Ghana, I found what I was looking for. It was a locally based NGO “with no religious or political affiliations” (NLF 2015), whose vision was to become “a leading local Non Governmental Organization […] in Ghana, contributing to the building of a free society, where people can realize their full inherent potentials with respect to equal opportunities and human rights” (ibid). They were working primarily with youths, and most importantly, they were willing to host me for nine weeks and assist my research.

The formulated ideas I had before arriving in Apam were of a rather open-ended character. As I write in a research proposal:

The main purpose of my research project is to elucidate both the experiences and the creative agency of young individuals as moral agents. To be clear, my aim is primarily to study what happens in the meeting between the young individuals and the values being advocated to them.

“The values” referred to the values guiding NLF in their operations, which in light of what was written on their webpage seemed to be derived from contemporary international development discourse, placing strong emphasis on equality and human rights. More concretely, my plan was to follow a few of the young individuals who had received education on gender equality and human rights by the organization, and explore how they relate to these concepts in their daily lives.

I intended to use participant observations in whatever activities my young informants would be invested in. But also to conduct several individual semi-structured and in-depth interviews with them, as well as group discussions, in which I would have them discuss ethical dilemmas. My plan was, in other words, to use research methods common within the discipline, and to complement them with the perhaps not so common method of group discussion based on ethical dilemmas. The idea was that the group discussions would provide me a richer insight into their moral reasoning. In addition I also planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with a range of other local residents in order to acquire a broader understanding of the socio-cultural context of Apam.

3.2 In the Field

Ulf Hannerz eloquently states that ethnography is “an art of the possible” (2003:213), and my endeavour was of course not an exception. Like any other researcher investigating human social
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life in an uncontrolled environment, I had to act upon the opportunities that were given and make adjustments of my initial plan. For though I was able to follow the structure I had in mind to a great extent, circumstances would lead me to place considerable more focus on one of my informants than the others, which had not been my intention at the outset. While this allowed for a fruitful, and more deep-reaching investigation into the ethical practices and reasoning of that particular individual, (Emmanuel), it meant that the study did not give an equal attention to my selected group of main informants, which has shaped the outcome of my project. To explain the circumstances, a brief account of the context of my fieldwork is needed.

According to plan, I was able to become acquainted with three young individuals who had been subjects of NLF’s trainings, and who had subsequently been employed by the organisation in various programs and projects, which made them suitable candidates for my research. Two of them were female, Vero (25 years) and Christy (21 years), and one was male, Emmanuel (24 years). At the time of my stay, however, Emmanuel was the only one of the three employed by NLF, which meant that he was considerable more available for me than the others. As part of his job was to attend me as a guest of the organisation, we initially spent a lot of time together, which allowed for many informal conversations, and good rapport to be established. Importantly, it offered me the opportunity to also interview his mother, and one of his sisters. This circumstance came to shape my research profoundly, and explains Emmanuel’s prominent position in the thesis.

Another important factor that informed my research was the discovery of my informants’ memberships in Pentecostal churches in Apam. Emmanuel and Vero belonged to the Apostolic Church, and Christy to the Victory Bible Church. In the case of the former two, it was clear that their social lives to a great extent revolved around their church-related activities. Both of them were leaders for children’s groups, and members of youth groups at their churches, as well as having additional obligations bestowed upon them by their elders. This meant that they attended church several time each week, and carried out work on its account in their spare time. Christy however, had no officially assigned duties for her church, but was part of a women’s fellowship, which she attended sporadically. Most of my participant observations were thus conducted at their respective churches. Given these conditions, my field came to be largely defined by the positions that my main informants occupied: being, as they were, devoted followers of the Pentecostal movement, and educated agents of change.

To complement my study, I conducted twelve interviews with local residents in order to gain more insight into local discourses pertaining to the issues of human rights, gender equality and Christian ethics. I interviewed both men and women, young as old. This inclusive approach
is explained by the fact that I was not interested in a specific sex or age group – my main informants aside, who I wanted to be youths. The additional interviewees had, however, a common denominator in being members of Pentecostal churches in Apam, for I imagined that it would be difficult to explore how they relate to Christian ethics otherwise.

In addition I also conducted interviews with strategically chosen persons in order to learn more about specific domains of the socio-cultural landscape. These persons included a Human Rights Officer at the local governmental institution Commissioner for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), who provided me more insight into how the government works in Apam with the issues of human rights and gender equality. Further, I interviewed the Chief of Apam to learn more about local history and traditional customs, and a health officer at the local hospital to learn about health issues. I also interviewed a local bank man to learn more about economic conditions in Apam, as he had explained to me that he had long experience and knowledge about the local economy. Last, I also conducted two lengthy interviews with the Executive Director and Program Manager of NLF.

The reader will find that I sometimes use informants’ names, and sometimes use abbreviations, or only a title to signify an interviewee. These choices are in accordance with my informants’ preferences.

**Interviews**

Aside from in-depth interviews conducted with Emmanuel, I did in all cases use a semi-structured format in my interviews. This was primarily motivated by the fact that the people I interviewed were in all cases – my main informants, and representatives of NLF aside – individuals I met only once. Under these conditions, the semi-structured interview is particularly suitable as it provides space to explore the answers and directions taken by the respondent, but simultaneously allows the interviewer to assure that all the relevant topics have been covered (Bernard 2011:157-158).

Concerning the interviews I conducted on the subject of gender equality with my main informants, my approach resembles that used by Niall Hanlon in his *Masculinities, care and equality*. Hanlon states that “A balance needs to be achieved between the advantages of good rapport and trust and a critical dialogue with respondents” (2012:19). His point being that there is otherwise a risk of colluding with dominant constructions of masculinity. Given that my research was not only concerned with collecting my informants’ perspectives, but also to study
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how they reflect upon and justify their value positions, I found that Hanlon’s suggested balance could serve my purposes as well. Like Hanlon, I used an approach that allowed for a free-flowing dialogue in my interviews. In other words, I mainly conducted the interviews in informal settings, where my informants would feel more comfortable, and I didn’t constrain the conversations to strict obedience of my prepared interview guide, nor did I refrain from asking my informants to explain their positions, or offering my own views when they were asked of.

Group Discussions

I led four group discussions with my main informants, in which all three were present. In these discussions, which each lasted about 1.5 hours, I posed various ethical dilemmas and claims for my informants to discuss. My way of conducting these group discussions resembles a method used in education on moral-democratic competencies called the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion. In this method one uses “semi-real dilemmas”, which implies dilemmas that do not directly affect participants, but which they can relate to, and thus stimulate real moral conflict within and between participants. Further, it is a method in which the discussion leader gives up the chair to the participants, and in which the participants should feel comfortable to express themselves, and have sufficient time for doing so (Lind, 2005). While this method was developed to improve education on moral competencies, my purposes of drawing on its guidelines was merely to stimulate moral discussion in order to explore my informants’ reasoning.

Participant Observations

The participant observations I carried out were mainly situated at my informants’ churches, where I took part in various meetings and services. In addition, I attended a two-day training of peer-educators on the subject of HIV/AIDS, arranged by NLF in collaboration with a local Christian organisation – (peer-educators refers to young persons from various social groups, who, on account of their influential positions in their specific social groups, are hand-picked for the NGO’s trainings.). I also participated in an activity with a youth club supporting local women in the area, of which my informant Christy was a member.
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While the interviews and the group discussions make up the primary material for the analysis in the thesis, my participant observations are to be seen as a complementary source of insight.

3.3 Contextualized Life History

As stated earlier, my research came to place its main focus on Emmanuel, and upon returning from the field I was inclined to find an approach that would allow me to structure the thesis around the empirical material I had gathered on him in particular.

I recognized that the methods I had used with Emmanuel – informal conversations, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, group discussions, as well as interviewing people in his immediate social surrounding – had offered me insight to his narrated life, his interpersonal relationships, and moral reasoning. Given this material I sought for an approach suitable for a more deep-reaching analysis of a single person. As it turned out, I found this in the same work that offered me a theoretical foundation for the thesis, namely Faubion’s *An anthropology of Ethics*.

In his book, Faubion demonstrates how his theory may be applied to a methodology which he calls “contextualized life history”. By eloquently analysing the life, and ethical formation, of a marquise in contemporary Portugal, he illustrates how his conceptual apparatus generates insight into an actor’s process of constructing an ethical identity. What Faubion does, more specifically, is to analyse the marquise in light of his specific socio-cultural environment, as well as events in his past life and his present views and opinions. I have in this thesis analysed and structured my material on Emmanuel in a similar way. That is, I have gone through my notes and interviews with Emmanuel guided by Faubion’s modes and concepts, and structured the chapters with support of a model he offers for analysing an ethical subject (2011:115). My engagement with his work has however been selective. In light of my research interests, I have placed particular weight on certain of his contributions in the book, such as his elaboration of subjectiviation, while giving less attention to other parameters, as for example his discussions on askesis and ethical substance. Further, as the life history is to be contextualized, I have gone through the entire scope of my interviews and observations from Apam with an attention to socio-cultural conditions and ethical discourses that may inform Emmanuel’s judgement and practices. It has thus been an analysing process where I have scuttled back and forth between
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the material I gathered on Emmanuel in particular and my material in its entirety, all with the purpose of attaining a more grounded understanding of Emmanuel’s ethical formation. This pursuit of contextualization has also included a review of relevant literature, particularly on Pentecostalism. I should state, however, that my use of the contextualized life history is limited in its scope and depth. While I elucidate certain parts of Emmanuel’s life history in order to inform the analysis, I devote considerable more attention to his ethical reasoning than to events in his life. These limitations aside, I believe it’s apt to try to place the contextualized life history in relation to different variants of the life history approach employed in the discipline of anthropology, as well as to address relevant critique of the methodology.

In their “The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process”, Peacock and Holland provide a review of various life history approaches – or life story approaches as they prefer to call them. Certain of the variants they bring up can be dismissed as incompatible with my own approach. First, I can state that the subjectivist approach, in which the life story is treated “as an expression or projection of the subject’s psychological dispositions and dynamics” (1993:369), is not what I employ. As stated earlier, the anthropology of ethics does not have its ground in the individual, and is thus not a psycho-analytical endeavour. Second, I should clarify that I do not use a story-focused approach which “gives primacy to the form of the narrative itself” (1993:369). For as will become clear in upcoming chapters, I do not engage in an analysis of stories and their meanings, but am rather interested in what my informant’s accounts have to say of his ethical reasoning.

Of the various variants that Peacock and Holland bring to the fore, the life-focused approach most closely resembles the methodology used in this thesis. That is an approach “concerned less with the story as such than with some reality external to the story but which the story is presumed to mirror; analysis of the story is a means toward grasping that reality-the "life" narrated” (1993:368). The life-focused approach can also be seen as a factual approach – that is one that “treats the life narrated as a window on the objective facts of historical and ethnographic events” (1993:369). The resemblance I identify with Faubion’s approach resides in his premise that “the normative tissue that defines the organization of the subject and the normative tissue that defines the organization of its social environment must always be something of the same cloth.” (2011:70). Hence, the idea that an analysis of an individual can say something about his/hers social and cultural environment is apparent in both of these approaches.

Relevant critique of the life history approach has been offered by the anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano, who states that:
The life history is seen as "portraying" or "illustrating" culture or some aspect of it. To have value as such it must be truthful and come from a "typical" individual—one, at least, who can be socially located. But what does it mean to be socially located? And is there ever an individual typical of a culture? Would his-her--life (were he, in his typicality, to recount it) be more revealing of his culture than any other life? … Behind this notion of being typical is a peculiarly homogeneous (in my opinion, distorted) view of culture, society, and the individual. [1984:954].

To respond to this critical point, I retort to a discussion of underlying premises in Faubion’s theory, which I believe disarms Crapanzano’s critique quite effectively, as well as explains in what way the contextualized life history differs from the life-focused approach.

First, one could simply respond that Faubion’s approach does not treat the individual subject as “homogenous” with her environment. As I will return to in chapter six, his approach stresses an attention to the idiosyncrasies of the ethical actor, perceiving such unique attributes an important, if not necessary, part of an analysis based on a contextualized life history. Second, as already stated, his theory recognizes a potentiality for human freedom in relation to its environment, which renders homogeneity between the individual and her environment anything but a necessity.

In light of Faubion’s theory, Emmanuel is not approached as a typicality of his environment. Rather, he is perceived as a free ethical actor subjected to unique circumstances, but whose ethical formation is inevitably influenced by his socio-cultural environment to a certain extent. I stress free here to clarify that he is not fully determined by the structures that surrounds him, and thus not their reflection. Hence, the contextualized life history differs from the life-focused approach in that the former leaves the question of whether culture is revealed by analysing the individual, or vice versa, redundant. The anthropologist inquiring into the formation of ethical subjectivities must simply “be methodologically prepared to shuttle back and forth between phenomena of a relatively more collective and phenomena of a relatively more individual order.” (Faubion 2011:121), which the reader will also find me doing in proceeding chapters.

### 3.4 Reflexivity

I stress again that my objective is not a normative one. On the contrary, I actively seek to avoid imposing my own moral disposition into the analysis of Emmanuel’s ethical identity. Abiding by the prerequisites Didier Fassin sets up for an anthropologist who enquiries into the ethical
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domain, I strive to do so by making my own moral positions explicit when possible and relevant, and to try to retain a critical distance towards them. Fassin writes:

> Since value judgement is the most commonly shared attitude toward the social world, the anthropologist cannot avoid and should not elude the moral position he or she adopts, either explicitly or implicitly, either by excess or by omission. [...] It is thus epistemologically but also politically crucial to consider moral reflexivity as part of our research activity, in other words to question the values and judgements that underlie our work [2008:341]

In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, Fassin stresses this point further by arguing that moral anthropology must be as much a reflexive as descriptive endeavour considering that human beings who study other human beings cannot completely detach themselves or avoid all forms of involvement, especially when inquiring into moral questions (Fassin 2012:4-5).

However, one also needs to acknowledge that keeping a critical distance towards one’s moral dispositions is a matter of attempting to do so, and not one of succeeding. As Howard Becker ([1967] 2013) has convincingly shown, a researcher investigating human social conduct will always do so from a position that is biased in one way or the other. Gloomy as such an observation may seem, Becker stresses that it should not discourage us from regarding our research or results as valid, but rather encourage us to always clarify the limitations and boundaries of what our findings can explain. This includes among other things to acknowledge that taking the perspective of particular groups or individuals is a particular vantage point that does not provide the whole picture. Given the soundness of Becker’s and Fassin’s arguments I shall in this thesis aim to make explicit whose perspectives I bring forth, and make my own positions clear whenever I find it suitable to do so. Before moving on to the analysis, I want to provide the reader with a sense of Apam, and subsequently offer an outline of chapter five, six and seven in which I build my argument.
4 A Sense of Apam

On a clear day I lean against the parapet of the old slave fort in Apam. Overlooking the blue ocean and the tranquil town, my eyes sweeps over the water to find rest on the shoreline, where lazy waves roll in with the breeze. I stare for a moment at some young fishermen on a big canoe who strain their muscular bodies in pulling up a long net from below the surface. Stories tell that women were also fishers in the past, but that they have learnt to fear the sea. Apparently there was once a boat that turned in a storm, throwing its female crew into the wild ocean, where they transformed into fishes.

Beneath me, the old settlement lies stretched out in the sun. Robust concrete structures, old mud houses, and shaky wooden sheds are clustered together along the two major, paved streets of Apam. Between them run pit filled side streets of gravel, on which goats and chickens search for food until the darkness settles. From my high position I overlook the main market area in
the settlement, where one can buy fresh fish, fruit and vegetables from women and girls sitting behind wooden tables in the shade of a rusty tin roof. Piles of tomatoes, pyramids of melons, and hands of bananas await the customers, anxious to be bought before they rot in the pressing heat of the dry season, while coconuts wait indifferently to be chopped for customers bearing thirst.

Proximate to the market place stands a statue of bronze, serving as the centrepiece of the axis in Apam. It takes the form of a muscular man holding a net over his left shoulder, with proud eyes soaring over the onlooker’s head. On the smooth block of stone on which he stands it is written that he is given “in appreciation of the unheralded fishers, whose toils keep Apam and the entire Nation healthy“. Honouring their efforts, the statue offers little comfort to the men of flesh and bone who pass his way. For less certain than the persistent gaze of the fisherman of bronze, is the future for the living harvesters of the sea. On several occasions I was told that usage of unconventional methods, such as dynamite and lighting, have in recent years reduced catches severely. And though there are loose plans to build a cold store and a harbour in the area, which could expand the business, residents seemed more concerned than hopeful about the state of their major source of income.

Beholding Apam from the fort, I feel that the view before me has become familiar. The beautiful shore, the rolling green hills in the distance, the poor shape of the old mud houses, and the rotten boards on the wooden sheds no longer catch my attention. Neither do the TV-antennas, or the large house on the hill with a big swimming pool, or the information centre with its computers. I have become accustomed to the contrasts, as my numerous walks through the town have revealed that its appearance is changing.

The most notable transformation in recent decades is undoubtedly numerous of churches that have been raised in the settlement, which was sparked back in the 1980s. I was told that there are currently 31 churches in the small town, not mentioning the many ongoing constructions that can be spotted here and there. According to Rijk Van Dijk, Pentecostalism has since the 1980s “become a social force of unimaginable power in many African countries, particularly Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia” (2012:91). Apam makes for no exception to this development. The Pentecostal churches are, to use the words of the Chief of Apam, “spreading like wildfire” in the area, and have come to exercise immense influence on the lives of its residents.

The Apostolic Church, of which Emmanuel and Vero are members, and which I visited the most, has indeed spread effectively. Currently they have four churches in the town and the construction of a bigger church on the way. According to Emmanuel, it established itself in
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Apam sometime in the mid-1980s, following the Methodist Church. But the history of the Apostolic Church on the continent goes farther back. Birgit Meyer states that the church has had its place on the African Christian scene since the 1920s (2004:452), and as such it belongs to what she has referred to as “the older type” of Pentecostal churches (1998:320).

Passed the structures of Apam, beyond the salines, and the reach of my gaze, lies the District Assembly, through which I acquired a profile on the district. Interesting to note from the statistics is that women make up the majority of the population in the district, with a ratio of 45,4% men and 54,6 women, (MLGRD:63-64). One can further read in the profile that women are generally poor and lack formal job opportunities, and are thus to great extent engaged in informal menial occupation, such as fishing processing, and petty trading. It also declares that women, aside from their income-bringing occupations, are generally considered to be the main caretakers in their families. In light of these conditions, it is then stated that:

The Assembly will design programmes aimed at leveraging the plight of women […] We will institute social enhancement programmes, income generating projects, capacity building programmes, etc. to support women in the district [MLGRD:64]

Proximate to the district assembly one finds the CHRAJ, which, like the district assembly, is a governmental institution, but that operates independently of the other. The CHRAJ has three major mandates: Human Rights, Administrative Justice and Anti-Corruption. Like the District Assembly they have also a clear objective of improving women’s conditions in the area. As the Human Rights officer at the CHRAJ told me: “as a human rights institution we can’t do away with gender equality”. While I will make no further mention of the District Assembly, the CHRAJ will resurface in our discussions later on.

Further along the only road leading away from the coastal town lies the headquarters of NLF. Their office consist of a small house of four rooms, of which one holds a few computers. Indeed a small organisation, comprised of merely three employees during the time of my stay, NLF has since its inception in 2003 actively built a transnational network, and has established collaboration with bigger NGOs in Ghana, such as IBIS Ghana, as well as Denmark’s international development agency, DANIDA, who has among other things helped them to develop their organisational structure and to formulate their objectives. On a local basis their strongest collaborator is, according to the Executive Director of NLF, the CHRAJ.

Having thus introduced Apam, I shall now provide an outline of chapter five, six and seven in which I build my argument.
4.1 Outline of Chapters

In chapter five I explore local understandings of male headship and female submission in Apam. I discuss how Christian residents perceive a contrast between traditional and Christian understandings of male-female relationships – I should clarify here that the term “traditional” is approached as an emic expression and not as an analytical concept. Further, I explore how a good Christian family head should act according to my interviewees’ perspectives. And in the end of the chapter, I also address how NLF, and the CHRAJ, approach the notion of male headship in Apam. The chapter has two objectives. The first is to provide insight to what it means to be a good head of one’s family, and also what it means to be a proponent of secular initiatives working towards gender equality in Apam – thus providing an understanding of the subject positions that Emmanuel is striving towards. The second objective is to explicate that there is a pervasive narrative of development in Emmanuel’s environment, as ideas of change and progress are apparent in both secular development initiatives and the Pentecostal movement in Apam. This latter point is important for understanding how Emmanuel is able to accommodate his two different commissions in developing his ethical identity.

In chapter six I explore Emmanuel’s life history and present life-situation. The first objective in the chapter is to establish that Emmanuel’s sense of responsibility towards his family constitutes a fundamental motivational force in his ethical self-formation, which is an important point in relation to the overarching research question, as it establishes an order of priority between his ethical subject positions. The second objective is to elucidate how Emmanuel relates to different ethical discourses in his environment, which is interesting in relation to my wider question of how an individual may navigate between Pentecostalism, tradition, and secular development initiatives in contemporary Ghana.

In chapter seven I address Emmanuel’s mode of judgement, and provide a more deep-reaching exploration into his ethical reasoning. I also address the issue of value conflict between Pentecostal gender ideology and secular development discourse of gender equality. The main objective is to elucidate how my informant accommodates these ethical discourses in his ethical judgement, and to argue that it is a process marked by negotiation, rather than the achievement of coherency between different values.

These three chapters serve to substantiate my conclusion that Emmanuel’s strive towards the ethical subject position as an agent of change is nested within his ambition to shoulder the headship of his family. The term nested marks here a commonality as well as an order of priority.
between his commissions. While I recognize that the two ethical subject positions are both connected to the idea of better life for himself and others, I argue that his ethical regard is first and foremost directed to his family, and second extended to certain groups in his society – such as women. Important to point out is that the term nesting does not imply a perfectly harmonized relation between the subject positions towards which he strives.
5 Male Headship in Apam

“The subject position […] is always socially, culturally and historically specific”

[Faubion 2011:36]

The central question that guides present chapter is what defines a good Christian man in contemporary Apam. Or more precisely, how a man is, and becomes, a good head of his family. The purpose is also to provide the reader with an understanding of the complexity of meanings attached to the notion of male headship and female submission, and how NLF and the CHRAJ approach these notions. I begin, however, from the understanding of male headship that I initially formed in the field.

A Wedding at the Apostolic Church

In the morning sun I walked through Apam, heading towards a wedding ceremony which was to be held at the Apostolic Church. Vero had graciously invited me, and given me an opportunity to wear the suit and tie that I had packed just in case. My hope of looking my best was however mercilessly dampened, as the tropical heat made it impossible to wear my clothes with any ease or style.

Reaching the church I spotted Vero’s smiling eyes in the crowd, and sat down beside her in one of the back rows. From our seats we then witnessed a wedding which progressed much like the Sunday Services that I had attended earlier. There was dancing, singing, and extensive worshipping and offering. The main difference was, of course, that a considerable amount of attention was given to the wedding couple, and to their respective responsibilities in the institution of marriage. The most captivating speech to my keen ears was doubtlessly delivered by an older pastor in a grey suit, whose forceful voice overtook the hall.

The theme of the pastor’s talk was leadership, and he began pointing out that good leadership can only be found in the church. Supported by this observation he then declared that “the man is the head of the household as Christ is head of the church.”, and leaning over the
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seated couple his authoritative voice announced that “the wife should be submissive and humble towards her husband, not just halfway, but in all!” Then adding that the woman should also allow her husband to fulfil his sexual needs, apart from her responsibility of cooking.

Feeling provoked by the sermon, though conscious about not letting it show, I looked to detect signs of disapproval in Vero’s face and gestures. But to my disappointment I couldn’t even sense discomfort in her voice as she helped me understand the final parts of the speech, in which the pastor told the groom to take responsibility and love his wife. In my daily reflections from my notebook I write about the wedding:

The wedding today was quite an experience. I am surprised over the fact that Vero seemed so unaffected by the talk about women having to submit to their husbands. It seems strange to me that she can be so devoted to gender equality and not react at all to these values that are obviously not fair from a gender perspective…

5.1 Pro-feminist Suspicions

My recognition of a patriarchal atmosphere in the church would find its support in the field of studies that explores masculinities and religion in Africa. According to Adriaan Van Klinken there is a tendency among scholars within this field to perceive male headship as a “patriarchal symbol that reinforces male dominance” (2011:111-112). One such example is found in Ezra Chitando, who clearly connects male headship-discourse with the manifestation of male rule (2007:112-127). Van Klinken argues, however, that recent studies on religion and masculinities relying on the conceptual framework of patriarchy and pro-feminist suspicion have constrained insight into the complex meaning of male headship in local contexts (2011:119-120).

Van Klinken’s position would find its squire in cultural anthropologist Saba Mahmood. In her celebrated Politics of Piety she argues convincingly for the need to move beyond pro-feminist assumptions in studies of religion. Through an excellent ethnographic account of urban women’s mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood elucidates the analytical terrain that opens up if one does not on beforehand assume that the values and practices embodied in Islamist movements stands in stark conflict with women’s interests. She sheds light on how feminist researchers have cling to the notion of resistance, and suggests that this tendency may impose a teleological progressive politics that makes it difficult to identify and understand “forms of
being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms” (Mahmood 2005:9).

In retrospect I would hold myself guilty of the fallacy that Mahmood identifies – that is to have let my own pro-feminist suspicions inform how I viewed my informants’ attitudes and objectives. The impression I had of patriarchal rule within the Pentecostal movement made me inclined to expect a resistance among my informants against prevailing structures that reflect my own sentiments and value-positions – that is a rejection of male headship in favour of gender equality.

An important part of my research has thus been to recognize my inclination as a stumble block in the process of analysing and making sense of my material. For I concur with Mahmood that it becomes difficult, if not to say impossible, to attain a nuanced understanding of the people one studies through the lens of one’s own political and moral dispositions. Therefore, while I don’t dismiss Chitando’s observation that definitions of masculinity within Pentecostalism are “rooted in the paradigm of the male as the leader’ and uphold ‘the myth of male headship” (2007:122), I recognize that one should not overlook the complex, contextual meanings assigned to the notion of male headship by the followers of the religion. The ambition in this first chapter is, then, to explore what it means for my Christian informants to live up to the subject position as head of the family. More specifically, to address the responsibilities, virtues, values, and expectations that are attached to this position. Doing so I proceed from a revealing observation I made during my field work, and which has been observed by many researchers before me, namely the prominence of a discourse of “breaking with the past” within Pentecostalism.

5.2 Breaking with the Past

Much research on Pentecostalism have emphasised the strong incitement on its followers to make changes in their lives. Allan Anderson, for one, observes that the movement is notorious for its aggressive forms of evangelism, in that evangelism means to “go out and reach the ‘lost’ for Christ in the power of the Spirit” (2004:214). Or as a pastor put it in one of the Sunday services I attended: “We must abandon the old way of living, which is dragging us down, and accept Christ as our saviour”
Male Headship in Apam

Birgit Meyer, who has done substantial research on the Pentecostal movement in Ghana, argues that the notion of rupture provides a key to better grasp Ghanaian Pentecostalism in the present. Elaborating her point she states that: “The appeal to ‘time’ as an epistemological category enables pentecostalists to draw a rift between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘now’ and ‘then,’ ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’” (1998:317). She argues further that Pentecostal churches offer an individualistic ethics that allows their members to liberate themselves from traditional extended family bonds, and to take up a pursuit of succeeding in life more independently (1998:320).

Meyer is not alone in recognizing rupture as a central aspect of Pentecostalism and how the religion influences the lives of its followers. Joel Robbins, whose major research on Pentecostalism has been conducted in Papua New Guinea, goes as far as to suggest that “a full understanding of the globalization of Pentecostalism requires the development of an anthropology of discontinuity” (2003:222). His point being that these movements bring about dramatic changes which undisputedly introduce real discontinuities into people’s lives, among other things by introducing “discourses and rituals of disjunction” (2003:224).

My own research from Apam confirms that these notions of rupture and disjunction carries analytical significance in relation to followers of Pentecostal churches. The Christians I spoke with would either actively disassociate themselves from what they call “traditional” practices, believes, family bonds and social structures, or appear disinterested in talking about such issues. In relation to those who pursued the subject, I could also note that they not only separate themselves from traditionalists in temporal and social terms, but also spatially.

The serine seaside of Apam, and the old settlement in its proximity, represent to several of my Christian interlocutors a set of traditional practices, believes and attitudes that are considered backwards or unwanted. “The seaside is the problem, I don’t like this place”, as one young woman told me, while pointing towards the bank of litter running along the beach, and disapprovingly noting the lack of education among the traditionalist fishermen and their families who live and work at the spot. Regarding my main informants, Emmanuel, Vero and Christy, I could not identify an exception to this tendency of disassociation, which is quite evident in the excerpt from one of my interviews below, where Emmanuel offers his view:

[Is it desirable to be identified as a traditionalist?]

No, it's not desirable, because of their dressing and their behaviour. Their behaviour does not show much decency, and the fact that the traditionalist are polygamist, they marry so many women, it doesn't matter, take two wives, three wives. For all we know he's just giving the babies to the women, not taking care of them, it's a problem.
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As the quote indicates, Emmanuel was also explicitly reluctant to identify himself with traditional understandings of manhood, which he considered to mark a less committed responsibility towards the family – (referring here to the nuclear family and not the extended).

As I will return to Emmanuel’s personal views later on, we may continue with a wider discussion of these matters. In general my interlocutors’ disassociation from the traditionalists at the seaside could partly be explained by Meyer’s observation concerning the notion of rupture:

The emphasis on rupture serves very much as a temporalizing strategy - a ‘denial of coevalness’ (Fabian 1983), so to speak - through which persons with whom one actually shares time and space are represented as backward, as not deserving a place in the modern world and as hindering one from becoming fully born again and modern. [1998:329]

While it was certainly the case that Christians perceived an engagement with traditionalists as a hindrance of one’s personal development – especially when speaking of children’s involvement in traditional practices and lifestyle – it was however not the case that my informants claimed that they are “not deserving a place in the modern world”, or that one should
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avoid all form of engagement with them. The modern world is, in other words, not considered to be closed off from traditionalists, but rather waiting to embrace them through conversion and education. As such, I believe that the “denial of coevalness” amongst Pentecostal followers in Apam should perhaps not be understood in such harsh terms as they come out in Meyer’s article. Further, it’s important to point out that Christians and traditionalists are not to be seen as clearly separable and distinct groups in the complex socio-cultural landscape of the coastal town. As a local man told me:

> It’s a boiling pot, from the little that I have seen, anybody can cross the carpet. I mean there are Christians who go to church and confess their sins, and the next day they are at the oracles cursing and trying to kill another person or taking somebody’s wife or taking somebody’s husband from him or her, or try to belittle a teacher or try belittle another person through oracles or other spiritual devices, it’s happening daily. So I can’t say that … yes there are people who like to stay on one side, like ‘I’m a traditionalist and I would not like to enter into the church-room.’ … But as far as Christians are concerned, very few of them can really say that they are Christian and that they don’t float into those areas either in thought or in practice

This insight is important to keep in mind as our discussions proceeds. For the distinctions I make between Christians and “traditionalists” are more based on my informants’ expressed views than a reality in Apam. And again, I use the term “traditionalists” as an emic expression used by my informants, rather than an analytical concept. Having said that, I will in the following section elucidate how the negative portrayal of traditionalism by Christian residents is also evident in local conceptions concerning characteristics of “Christian” respectively “traditional” male-female relationships.

5.3 “Christian Men Here are More Developed”

My own attempt of engaging with traditionalists at the seaside was admittedly an unsuccessful enterprise as my ambition to interview persons who had not yet converted was effectively dampened by the language barrier. The only English-speaking persons I encountered at the seaside would already be “saved”, and my gained knowledge of the traditional way of life was thus derived from the views of converted Christians – my interview with the Chief of Apam of course being an exception. This was however not entirely unfortunate as it proved to be a fruitful way to explore what distinguishes a Christian and a traditional man in the eyes of the former.
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In one of my excursions to the seaside I was guided by a young Christian fisherman named Eric, whom I had met during one of my lengthy walks in the area. He had suggested that I meet up with him so that he could give me a tour of the fishing business, which I had gratefully accepted. On the day of our venture, we began by crossing a field of trash in the outskirts of town, heading towards a place along our path where the fish is smoked. But as we approached what was supposed to be the first stop of our excursion, my guide didn’t take any notice of the wooden smokers, or my curious look at them. He was much too caught up in describing the traditionalists and their way of life. To my surprise, Eric spoke very openly and in a bantering manner about the people who, I guess, were walking all around us.

With men sauntering in front of us, and women passing us by with pans on their heads, and small children running behind our backs calling for our attention, Eric repeatedly said “the old ways are fucking with our minds”, and claimed that the traditionalists are in need of salvation. His outlook for the future was however positive from his perspective:

In this modern stage that I’m talking to you now, the Christian people, they are more than traditional people. Right now it’s about 70% Christians and 30% traditionalists. But here on the beachside it’s the opposite, here most of them are traditionalists. That’s why if you pass the market over there, you will still see that they are preaching the word of God. So every day they will stand there and preach the word of God, and you pass there, you pass there and you pass there, then ‘oh!’ you will have a change of mind, and you become a Christian man.

One evening, I myself observed the active practice of conversion that Eric spoke of. In the light of a small fire that penetrated the dense darkness, I saw the contours of a man standing on a small stool, calling out his Christian message over the serine seaside through a megaphone. While this was a captivating sight to me, Emmanuel, who accompanied me at the time, said that it was a normal activity for him to witness.

As my guide Eric and I continued to tread sand, avoiding litter and chickens running at our feet, he pursued the topic of conversion, emphasising its importance in terms of personal development: “Cause you know these traditional things are fuckin with our minds. So you know the Christian men here are more developed.” Intrigued then by his remark I asked him to elaborate what he meant by “developed”, and he replied:

Sometimes they preach about adultery and every woman here is jealous. If I am a woman and I have a husband, and the husband go for another woman I will be jealous. So they preach the word of God, that a man who do adultery and a man who takes more wives is no good. So the woman will try to take her husband to the church and hear the pastor preach, and the pastor is touching the man’s heart. So the woman will convince the man to go and to listen to the word of God, and
the moment you get there, the pastor will preach about adultery, and that preaching will affect the 
man. So then you see that the woman sitting by her husband will feel happy. So always, they 
prefer to be in the church, so that whatever her husband is doing he will have a change of mind 
in whatever he was doing before. He will be closer to the woman.

As one observes, Eric’s account of why Christian men are more developed speaks to a 
transformation through conversion that makes men more faithful and come closer to the woman, 
which results in the increased “happiness” of the latter. This account is in line with arguments 
brought forth in research on gender and Pentecostalism which suggest that the religious 
movement transforms men’s attitudes and practices in ways that are benefitting women. Bernice 
Martin writes:

In an entirely literal sense, Pentecostal men have been “domesticated,” returned to the home. An 
unresolved tension remains between the de jure system of patriarchal authority in church and 
home and the de facto establishment of a way of life which decisively shifts the domestic and 
religious priorities in a direction that benefits women and children while morally restraining the 
traditional autonomy of the male and the selfish or irresponsible exercise of masculine power. 
[2001:54]

Martin is not alone in making this type of claim. Several researchers have drawn on the 
discrepancy between the discourse of male headship and actual practices and gender relations 
of Pentecostal followers to conclude that Pentecostalism achieves a transformation of men’s 
attitudes and practices that are resulting in more gender-equitable relationships in the domestic 
sphere (see Robbins 2004:132-133, Smilde 1997:343). One should however acknowledge that 
it’s not only men’s attitudes that bring about more gender-equitable relationships within this 
movement. Anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco, for one, argues that the common attribution of 
spiritual gifts to women within Pentecostalism gives them increased influence and authority in 
the domestic sphere (2010:81).

My own research suggests that both men and women regard a break with the past as 
something positive for women, and several of them emphasised the positive outcomes of the 
going shift from extended family to nuclear family living promoted by the churches. A couple 
of seamstresses, (“O” and “J”), in the outskirts of Apam were particularly clear on the positive 
effects Christianity has had for women in the domestic sphere – despite the remaining 
legitimacy of male authority. Discussing with them the role of the man in the nuclear family 
below:

[But what do you think of the man’s role as a head?]

O – And I being the helper
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[Are you satisfied with it?]

O – Yes, cause now, if I’m in the house, if I’m washing he can join me, we wash together, cook together in the kitchen. We used to bathe the children, and help them go to school in the morning. So the man is supposed to help me in other ways. So if I’m going to work…

J – But if you live in the extended family, the women will say that you will make the man tall again. Meaning that you have made the man your house helper. If you’re in extended family and you want your man to help you, his sisters will say that you make him taller.

[And the man won’t like that?]

O – No, he won’t like it, they will laugh at the man. So if the man wanted to help you when you’re in the extended family, he won’t do it.

One of the women also stressed that in a Christian marriage: “if things are not going right, and are going wrong, you are supposed to say it. It doesn’t mean when you are the head of the family that you are supposed to do everything you a man like. No!”

These women’s perspectives of the behaviour of the Christian respectively traditional man provided a clear contrast. For regarding the latter they were in consensus on the following statement one of them made: “Those men will just be out at sea, and on Tuesdays, when they don’t fish, they will just sit on the beach, drinking palm wine. They don’t hardly see their wives. […] They won’t let their women have a say in important matters”.

As one notes, the contrast concerns, among other things, the power that men exercise over women in male-female relationships. Though there’s no doubt that men, at least symbolically, attain a position of authority over women in Christian marriages, some of my interlocutors would point out that the Christian understanding of male headship rejects male domination, and one explicitly suggested that it marks a distinction to traditional understandings of the notion. Domination here is not necessarily reduced to the physical aspects that Rekopantswe Mate highlights when she writes: “the use of brute force associated with male domination is not God-ordained, because God gives men wives as a favour” (2002:556), but has a more pervasive enticement. Jane Soothill, who has done substantial research on the Pentecostal movement in Ghana, argues:

male headship does not mean that men are superior to women, or more precisely that the husband is superior to the wife. The concept of superiority of the man over the woman is presented as an African traditional belief. […] definitions of male headship within born-again Christianity tend to be contrasted with what are perceived to be “traditional African values” about men and their masculine identities. […] In born-again Christianity, then, the concept of male headship is
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redefined in terms of “love” and “sacrifice”, and the primary focus of a man’s life shifts from self to partner [2007:191-193].

Summarising this section, we have established that local Christian residents in Apam tend to make a distinction between Christian and “traditional” forms of male-female relationships. That is, they tend to portray Christian marriages as more gender equitable than traditional partnerships. In the following section I will explore what kinds of virtues and competencies a Christian man in Apam is incited to cultivate in his pursuit of being regarded as a good head of his family.

5.4 A Good Head of the Family

While Soothill states that male headship is “redefined in terms of “love” and “sacrifice””, Van Klinken claims that male headship is “re-framed in a “modern” global Pentecostal discourse of responsibility and servant leadership” (2011:18). In light of my own material I find myself inclined to lend a pair of the notions they bring forth, namely “responsibility” and “love” and elaborate on them. The reason for restricting myself to these notions is partly due to the limited space at hand, but also motivated by the prominence of these notions in my interlocutors’ accounts of male headship.

Responsibility

A good head of his family in Apam will indeed be measured against certain criteria. My interviews revealed that he must abstain from drinking alcohol, smoking, womanizing, control his temper, not be too proud, etc. The obedience to these prerequisites could however be grouped under the virtue of self-control, which Ruth Marshall argues is highly important for Pentecostal followers to develop (2009:131). While I recognize that ideas of self-control did surface in my interviews, I will not elaborate on the matter here. In order to make room for a discussion on the virtue of responsibility, I shall be content with pointing out that the cultivation of self-control is part of a Pentecostal man’s development into a good head of his house.

My informants’ views revealed that a failure to live up to one’s responsibilities towards one’s closest family constitutes a major source of distress for men in the area. These
Male Headship in Apam

responsibilities primarily consist in providing income to one’s household – “chop-money” as they called it – and to see to the welfare and schooling of one’s children, as well as providing moral guidance to one’s family. I found, however, that the obligation to provide materially for the family was the most apparent worry for my male interlocutors. Which is perhaps not surprising given that poverty and lack of job-opportunities are characteristics of contemporary Apam.

Why then do many men accept and strive to take responsibility under these challenging conditions? I would argue that part of the answer resides in the strong Pentecostal discourse on men’s primary and fundamental responsibility for their families. In accordance with Van Klinken, who has also made this point (2012:226), I argue that Pentecostal men tend to view their responsibility as “higher” than that of women. Emmanuel makes for no exception. In the excerpt below from one of our group discussions, one can observe how he, despite his inclination to promote co-operation and joint responsibility, stresses this point. The excerpt begins with a hypothetical scenario I posed for my informants to discuss:

[One of your female friends has applied and been accepted to a very attractive education. But she has a child and her unemployed husband, which is her only family in the area, refuses to take care of the child when she travels back and forth to school. What should she do? Can she demand that the husband take care of the child? What are her options?]

Emmanuel – In fact, it’s their responsibility to take care of the child, both of them. So as her condition will not permit her to have more time, so in fact it would be best if she convinced the man to take care of the financial aspect of the child and she can give the child to her mother, if the mother is there, so that the mother will be taking care of the child. But the financial support will be from the man, that the man will give chop-money.

[But let’s say that he is the only one she’s got]

Emmanuel – Well then there’s no way, the man will have to try to accept.

[If it was the other way around, that the man had this offer and the wife refuses to take care of their child if he decides to go away]

Emmanuel – Well I don’t think that any mother would do such a thing, because women are compassionate. They know child birth, consequences in child birth, as they have suffered through months of pregnancy.

Vero – They live with it

Emmanuel – Yes, and the labouring, how hard the labouring is. So if you’re just struggling. But here the man in turn, after furthering the education, will come and support you. So I think it would be in the woman’s best interest to give in and then try to be in agreement with the man. Because,
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though it’s both of their responsibility, come to think of it, the man’s responsibility in the future
is higher and more than that of the woman, so she cannot you know… refuse that much

Emmanuel also stressed this “higher” responsibility in more personal terms, by how he perceives his relationship to his sisters. Picking up on Vero’s train of thought, as she argues that a son should be given priority over a daughter in pursuing higher education because the son can then come back and then lead the family, Emmanuel continues: “Yes, for the family system here, okay, my sisters they will rather follow me, I cannot follow them. But it’s hard, at times I ask them for what I need. But mostly they ask me.”

Future Commitment

When analysing my material from the group discussions, I have observed that my main informants’ way of reasoning, and defending male prerogative to lead the family, tend to be motivated by a conception that it is the best way to “bring women up” given current conditions in Apam and the country at large. To put it more clearly, they argue that it is a good investment to prioritize the man, to give him education, and give him the position as head, because he will have greater opportunity to draw on his education to help his family. Women, they argue, are susceptible to become impregnated during their education, which will force them to drop out. Further, they claim that those women who manage to acquire their education will face greater difficulty in their careers than men.

The prioritization of the man requires, however, that he uses his gained position in the right manner. In an interview with Vero she told me of the bad moral character of a young man at her church, who had furthered his education in Accra, and then returned to Apam:

there is another boy there, who just completed university and come to the church, and when he speaks with you he won’t even speak the Fante. So you see, people starting talking on him, are you not a Fante? Why are you doing this? So we had a debate, the week you came we had a debate on equality, both men and women. What should we do, should we all do the same? If you’re educated, if you’re higher than me, what should we do? And one person said, and I was very happy to hear: “The fact that we are all human beings, we must be at the same level, it doesn’t matter where you have been educated or if you are a man, we must all respect ourselves on the same level. If you are higher, you bring others up”

As one observes, attaining education, and gaining a higher position, is a privilege that ought to benefit others and not only oneself – at least if one is to be considered to be a good person.
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This is the case for a family head as well. In occupying that ethical subject position, one’s primary responsibility is not towards oneself, but toward one’s family. And importantly, it is a responsibility that extends beyond the here and now. As Emmanuel put it “One is to help them prosper in the future”. This point is important to bear in mind in relation to my main informant, as his sense of a future commitment towards his family reveals a conscious motivational force in his ethical self-formation.

In light of my informants’ reasoning above, I must admit that my pro-feminist suspicions, and my inclination to project my own understanding of gender equality onto their views, made me uneasy with their acceptance of a higher responsibility exclusively anointed to the man – (not to say that I’m currently at ease). But I believe that these sentiments of mine may have been intensified by an initial lack of attention to the limitations of the man’s authority, and the humbleness that comes with his position, which I address by exploring the connotations of the notion of “love” in male-female relationships.

Love

If one looks at the notion of love within Pentecostalism, which is often accompanied by such terms as partnership, co-operation and mutual understanding, one will recognize a clear incitement on men to abstain from exercising dominance over their spouses and children. Below I offer a statement which I believe exemplifies this point well, and which eloquently captures what seemed to be the core values of local understanding of male headship in the Christianised Apam. It was given by an older man whom I interviewed at the seaside:

As for Christians, they believe that a man and a woman should be equal, just because the Bible says that God created man and a lady for the man, as she grew out of his ribs, created her for him so that there be a companion, and a companion should not be a slave. A companion is someone you have to hear and talk with, share ideas with, and even be motivated to help her with whatever she want to do. So there’s no need to get the fear of being as a slave or servant. Though the Bible says that as a man you are the head of the house, and as the head of the house you have to be honest, you have to share ideas with your household, because it is said or written that you shouldn’t be god in your own eyes. Sometimes, as a companion God created for a whole, women are moulded by God and have wonderful thoughts if you share ideas with them. They can give you ideas, sometimes when you are wrong you may not see, you think what you’re doing is right but they question you, and when they question you and you give head to their advice so that they can make it alright
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This quote reveals the man’s responsibility is marked by humility and respect towards his spouse. Hence, it is not only the woman who should be humble towards her husband, as the pastor declared during the wedding I attended, but also the other way around, which is also noted by Soothill (2007:193).

To further stress the importance of these notions of love, partnership, co-operation, and mutual understanding, I can also bring forth an illuminating example from one of the group discussions with my main informants. In the particular case I had presented a scenario in which a husband has been refused sex by his wife for three months, and then asked my informants how they think that the man should behave in the situation. After some discussion, they jointly came to the conclusion that it would indeed be wrong for the man to force his wife to have sex with him, after which Vero declared: “If you know the problems of your wife that is when you connect with her and do whatever you should do”. Her remark summarized the main point of my informants’ line of reasoning on this matter, which had established that a good man will know how to communicate with his wife, and thus know how to handle the problem in a fair way. Together with the longer quote above, one can note that a good male head in Apam should not neglect to consult his wife in decision making or problem solving within the family, and furthermore that he should be attuned to the interests and problems of his spouse.

Important to clarify, I’m not suggesting here that women’s partaking in decision making and influence in the domestic sphere is dependent upon men’s grace towards their wives. The conversations I had with Christian men and women in Apam revealed a clear consensus that women exercise a lot of agency in male-female relationships. My findings on this matter reflect what anthropologist Judith Casselberry has described in her study of Apostolic Pentecostalism in America. By exploring the notions of male headship and female submission in a particular church, Casselberry elucidates how women’s submission to their husbands takes place on “negotiated terrain” which is recognized by women as well as men (2013:80). She argues, more precisely, that the women in the church do not consider themselves subordinate to their husbands, or of inherently lower status, despite adhering to the doctrine of submission within Apostolic Pentecostalism (ibid). Likewise, my informants’ support of the prevailing gender order did not reflect a value-judgment that men are more important or worthy, or exercising more agency than women. Rather their perspectives indicated that the roles of men and women are seen as complementary. Further, Peterson et al, have also pointed out that women within Pentecostal movements will often understand the discourse of submission as ultimately meaning a submission to God, and not to men (2001:36).
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In addition to above discussion, I also want to highlight that a man in Apam is likely to receive praise for helping his wife with her attributed responsibilities. As I was told by one of my interlocutors:

It’s nice for men, that when someone comes to your house and see you helping your wife it gives you respect. When someone see you in that way, the person may be thinking you understand what is married. Marriage is not for a woman alone to suffer in the house, so men can help, so when your wife is doing the washing you can help her in the kitchen, you can help, it’s nice. And that too brings co-operative, it brings love, peace, and it brings joy in the house.

I feel obliged here to end this section by stating that there are also examples from my interviews that contrasts the ideal of male headship provided in the quote above. To offer one example:

[How should you divide household work if both partners in a couple are working?]

That one, when you go to work, you the female, you have to come back to the house early, so you prepare whatever, you prepare the meal, so that when the man comes he makes himself comfortable.

This view was expressed by a young Christian man, who in general had a different take on male headship than the understanding which has been established thus far in this chapter. The point that individuals will form different understandings of what notions imply is a valid one to make, and an important one to bear in mind.

5.5 Male Headship and Development

In this section I discuss how NLF and the CHRAJ relate to male headship and female submission in their ambition to promote and contribute to increased gender equality and women empowerment in Apam. I begin by shedding light on the elusive use of concepts as gender equality and women empowerment within international development. Subsequently I identify how NLF and the CHRAJ seek to empower women, and work against male supremacy in the local context of Apam.

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The pervasive focus on gender equality and women empowerment within NLF’s operations can partly be traced to prevailing trends within international development. As the Executive Director explained to me:

Like most of the civil society organization and activities in Ghana locally, our activities are regulated to seal the millennium development goals, and the achievement of the millennium development goals. You understand, so those ones also direct whatever you are doing. So you have woman empowerment, so whatever you are doing it is also going into the achievement of that millennium development goal.

The outspoken allegiance with the UN development goal should, however, not lead one to assume that the understanding of women empowerment adopted by this local NGO in Ghana is equivalent to more general or established interpretations of the goal. Analysing the development goal pertaining to gender equality and women empowerment, Nalia Kabeer states that is perceived as “an intrinsic rather than an instrumental goal, explicitly valued as an end in itself rather than as an instrument for achieving other goals” (2010:13). While the men running NLF would sometimes express views in line with such a perception, they would also be inclined to bring forth arguments that highlight the instrumental value gender equality. They, for example, stated that gender equality will be beneficial for the country’s economy in a long-term perspective. It is however not surprising that concepts may be used and interpreted differently at different levels of the international development chain.

In the introductory overview to Deconstructing development discourse: Buzzwords and fuzzwords, Andrea Cornwall emphasises that the language of development is as important as it is confusing. Observing that the vocabulary of development is constantly undergoing changes, she states that: “In the lexicon of development, there are buzzwords that dip in and out of fashion, some continuing to ride the wave for decades, others appearing briefly only to become submerged for years until they are salvaged and put to new uses.” (2010:3). (“Buzzwords” refers to words which are widely used and particularly influential at a given time. In present development discourse one would find “empowerment”, “gender” and “accountability” to be such words, to offer but a few examples.)

Addressing the concepts of gender and gender equality specifically, Ines Smyth observes that gender-talk has become a lingua franca in international development, and argues that terms have been emptied of meaning (2010:144-145). Further, she notes that “Perhaps the most
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confusing of all terms is that of gender itself” (2010:147), arguing that the word has often come
to be synonymous with “women”, and that it “pops up in the most inappropriate places and
manners” (ibid). Her argument is basically that gender has been parted from its original
meaning in feminist theory, and that this might be harmful to the achievement of equality
between men and women. My intention here is not to discuss Smyth’s argument, but merely
point out that the concept of gender, as well as gender equality and women empowerment, and
the use of these terms in the field of development is elusive and contested. In other words,
different users in different contexts will find different meanings in the gender-talk currently
pervading the field of international development.

It is, however, important not to draw the conclusion from Cornwall’s, and Smyth’s points,
that gender-talk has become a subjective affair. Faubion stresses that “discourse of even the
most obstreperous lack of consensus and short of complete collapse must still defer to a matrix
of the justification of the use of its terms; otherwise, it would not constitute a discourse of any
sort at all.” (2011:69). My experience from the fieldwork confirms Faubion’s point. For despite
our sometimes differing comprehensions of such concepts as gender equality and women
empowerment, my main informants and I were at least able to communicate our positions on
these matters. Regarding the public sphere we even seemed to reach consensus on the meaning
of gender equality and women empowerment. We, for example, agreed that women should have
the same opportunities as men to occupy leading positions in political parties, etc. However, it
was certainly the case that our positions sometimes differed, and that I struggled to understand
the rationales behind their views, as they surely did when contemplating mine. It was, as already
indicated, when we discussed male-female relationships in domestic sphere that our
conceptions of gender equality seemed to be particularly incompatible.

A Social Construction and a God-given Order

As stated in the introduction, I encountered early on a seeming conflict between the Pentecostal
gender ideology in Apam and the gender equality discourse pervading NLF and the CHRAJ.
During the first week of my fieldwork the Project Manager of NLF had handed me a training
manual on human rights, which was produced by the CHRAJ, and used by NLF in their
trainings of peer-educators in the area. Glossing through the manual, I discovered that it had a
section on gender equality, in which male headship was declared to be a “myth” – that is a common conception which is not necessarily true. It stated the following:

Myth: Women graduates should regard themselves as housewives and mothers at home and professionals only at place of work … The husband is the head of the family. [CHRAJ 2012]

To display the contrast with Pentecostal gender ideology, one can look at a particular bible quote that was recited to me by several Christians to explain the relationship between husband and wife:

22. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the saviour of the body.

24. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

25. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her

[ Ephes 5]

While one may draw the conclusion that the instruction in the manual seeks to undermine the Christian gender ideology that comes to the fore in above bible-quote, I argue that this is not necessarily the case. My interviews with representatives of NLF and the CHRAJ indicate that they perceive unjust female subordination in the Ghanaian society to be mainly the result of attitudes, values, etc. that are reinforced by traditional customs and structures. In other words, the God-given gender order manifested in Christian ideology did not seem to be the main target of NLFs and CHRAJ’s objective to change the social constructions that have unjustly given women an inferior position in relation to men in the public and the domestic sphere.

To exemplify the tendency of pointing out how traditional norms, believes, institutions, etc. have excluded women from exercising power and influence in society, one can look at how the Human Rights Officer at the CHRAJ reasons on the issue of education and gender:

[In terms of gender, what changes would you like to see in Apam?]  

Usually we have the Akan, one of the largest ethnic group in Ghana, they have this saying that “the woman’s place is the kitchen”, so it means that even if you go up, you end up in the kitchen. So you don’t bother and educate yourself on stuff like that. So initially that was the notion, but now I think people are seeing the light through human rights and gender equality advocacy, they are seeing it, we are letting them know.
Interesting to note is that the perception on change and development apparent in my interviews with representatives of NLF and the CHRAJ, indicate similarities with the Pentecostal discourse of breaking with the past – that is a perception that one must in some sense abandon the old way of living. Others have also drawn this parallel between secular development initiatives and Pentecostalism. Dena Freeman, for one, declares that a commonality between secular NGOs and Pentecostal churches in Africa resides in their tendency to challenge established structures (2012:24). Further, it is interesting to note that these movements use similar methods to reach out to people in order to steer them away from what are perceived as traditional practices. I was for example told that local churches, as well as the CHRAJ, have arranged screen shows at the seaside of Apam in order to convince locals to change certain established customs.

In relation to the remarks above, I should clarify that the stance towards “traditional” practices, beliefs, etc. taken by the representatives of NLF and the CHRAJ was not conveyed in condescending tone. Further, it was not the case that they expressed a will to eliminate traditional practices and believes all together. Rather, their emphasis lay on the need to change certain practices and attitudes, and to do so in a respectful manner. As the Program Manager of NLF explained to me regarding their efforts to bring in human rights and gender perspectives in their project on water and sanitation:

> Sometimes it’s hard, but again, if you do that tactfully and carefully in order not to hurt the traditional believes and practices it is better. You cannot say, now I’m talking about human rights, so if in the morning you have to fetch 10 bucket of water, the man has to fetch 5, no. But you look at another angle. For instance, if the woman is fetching water in the morning for the house, can you also be taking care of the kids or doing something, okay, yes. Or if at a point in time it becomes necessary for the woman to take care of the children or maybe do something, is it possible that you can help her by fetching the water? These issues come, especially when it comes to issues of human rights.

Having thus recognized similarities between Pentecostalism and secular development initiatives, the question of the relation between these movements should be addressed.

Interestingly, neither the representatives of NLF, nor the Human Rights Officer, would explicitly identify Christian ideology as a problem when it comes to their work with gender equality and women empowerment. Not even when I enquired into their perspectives of the churches was a critique conveyed. The only recognition of tension I could observe pertained to the issue of homosexuality. As the Human Rights Officer explained:
Sometimes, what religion would say would be in conflict with what we, human rights people, would say. So mostly religious people will be chasing us with these issues of gay rights. They say “you human rights people you are always saying that people have rights, including these gay people, things that are so evil, championing their rights.”

As this observation indicates, advocating women’s’ rights and doing the same for homosexuals in a Pentecostal setting are two different things. Regarding the former initiative I could observe that it is possible. During a meeting at Vero’s church I, for example, witnessed how my informant invited up her sister to the pulpit to lead prayer, while confidently stating that “gender equality is moving in this church”. Speaking for homosexuals in the church would however be “hard and not desirable”, as Vero explained to me.

The important point to bear in mind from this section is that both the CHRAJ and NLF seem to perceive “traditional” practices, attitudes and structures as the most problematic aspect for the achievement of women empowerment and gender equality. This was particularly noticeable during the two-day training on AIDS/HIV which I attended, where the young subjects of the training were encouraged to work against “unhelpful traditional believes”, as one of the educators phrased it. I shall return to these matters in chapter seven.
6 Becoming a Responsible Man

From a theoretical perspective this chapter is concerned with the mode of subjectiviation, and, more specifically, with what Faubion calls recruitment and selection. The former denotes “the conditions that encourage or compel an actor toward becoming and being an ethical subject of a qualitatively distinguishable sort.” (2011:116), while the latter refers to "the conditions of assignation of the subject or the subject’s self-assignation to a subject position of a qualitatively distinguishable sort.” (ibid).

The chapter is initially concerned with the assignation of Emmanuel to the ethical subject position as head, and how he is recruited by socio-cultural environment to take up this path. Thereafter focus is shifted to the ethical actor’s self-assignation and his process of selection in striving to occupy this subject position. In this chapter I also highlight certain aspects of Emmanuel’s life history which I find particularly relevant for my purposes.

6.1 “We Want Emma to Go High”

One of those sunny mornings in Apam I walked along a dusty road to the residence of Emmanuel’s mother. Twittering birds accompanied me to the top of a small hill, where her house lay hidden behind the large Methodist school. Entering her modest yard, I saw Emmanuel hanging laundry to dry over the red soil. He had told me that he regularly goes to help his mother with chores, and it seemed that this was one of those times.

His mother was sitting on a plastic chair outside her front door, tucked away in the shade of her tin roof. She signalled for me to come and sit beside her, to which I politely obliged. Her hair had strains of grey and her smile was friendly as she in a jokingly manner pointed at her son, and said “Emma is a good boy, one day he will even travel, and maybe come back with some nice things from your country”. Smiling at her relaxed prediction, I could not neglect to pick up a strain of seriousness in her tone.

Among nine siblings Emmanuel is the seventh born, and the very first to be given the opportunity to pursue higher education. Every Friday he will travel a couple of hours to the Institute of Chartered Accountant in Accra for his lectures, only to return on Saturday morning
to attend to his obligations towards the church. Though it is demanding, Emmanuel regards his educational undertaking to be a privilege, explaining to me that “because of financial problems others cannot be pushed ahead, so the concentration will actually be on one to go through.” As one can imagine, this privilege places a huge responsibility and certain expectations on Emmanuel’s shoulders. And just how great this responsibility is dawned on me when I spoke with his older sister.

I had asked Emmanuel for the opportunity to interview someone in his immediate surroundings, with the outspoken purpose of learning more about his character. Fortunately, the peculiar nature of my request didn’t stop my informant from assisting me. He offered to take me to his older sister, whom he has close contact with, and with whom he shares the responsibility for their mother’s welfare, as well as that of their younger siblings.

Out by the salines ley his sister’s house. Drawing on my memory, it had a modest appearance, like most houses in Apam. A simple concrete structure, painted in some plain colour which made it melt into the dusty surroundings. Following Emmanuel, I entered into the dark living room of the residence, which provided a sharp contrast to the dazzling sun outside. His sister was sitting on a small sofa with a baby in her arms and greeted me with a timid smile, as her brother went back out. In the dark room, where the carpets were torn and dusty, she then offered me a bright image of Emmanuel as a brother and a future head of the family. She explained:

We didn’t have any parent or uncle to help him, but we prayed to God, that God can touch somebody’s heart to help him further his education in the future, so that he become the big man of the family, or in the church, or in the country. That’s the vision our brother has. The reason we want Emmanuel to go high, so that our sister who is more educated, so Emma can help her to go high. Emma is a kind and humble boy, he cares for his sisters and junior brother.

Interesting to note is that Emmanuel attains both his mother’s and sister’s favour as the candidate for becoming their head, despite him having a senior brother. When I asked about the older brother, who is a taxi driver in Accra, his sister said: “He doesn’t have mercy for his younger brothers and sisters. But we look for Emma, Emma has a vision. When we look at him, we see that he has a vision for the future, and for them also.” The assignation of Emmanuel to the given subject position thus confirms Soothill’s observation that: “Beyond physical attributes, maleness is defined by certain qualities, which include humility, fidelity and commitment. Only a man who nurtures these qualities can claim “headship” of his household” (2007:194). My conversations with his sister and mother made it clear to me that they believe Emmanuel to have the potential to become a responsible, committed and humble man in the
near future. That is, one who will respect them and his future wife, as well as help his family members succeed in life.

That his family members recognize these potentials in him does however not mean that they are passively waiting for him to develop into the man they envision. At least in his mother I could observe an actor who plays an important part in his development of the affective and perceptual orientations, and cultivation of the virtues, that the full occupancy of the given ethical subject position requires.

**Pedagogue**

On the role of pedagogue in the formation of ethical subjects Faubion writes:

> it is one thing to be born a son or daughter, an aristocrat or a commoner. It is another thing, and something always requiring the service of the pedagogue, to develop the competencies required to be good at being a son or a daughter, an aristocrat or even a commoner as the case may be [2011:61].

Like the occupancy of the subject positions mentioned by Faubion, developing oneself into a good head of a family requires guidance. Where one finds one’s pedagogue is however another matter, and will vary according to circumstances.

Emmanuel’s father died before he could become an effective pedagogue for his son, my informant being merely ten years old when it happened. From what Emmanuel remembered, he spent quite a lot of time with his father, who made time for his son despite a busy lifestyle. But the image was, however, not stainless. With an unmistakable tone of disapproval he at one point told me that his father had four wives, and that he had consistently refused to convert to Christianity. Emmanuel’s father had, in other words, remained a traditionalist up until his death, unlike his mother who had taken up the incentive of Emmanuel’s older sister to join a congregation on Sunday mornings.

One effect of his father’s passing was that Emmanuel’s mother came to retain a prominent position in his life. In his own words: “she has been the only person, she has been my you know, who I have known for long, and advises me”. His mother would in fact repeatedly resurface in our conversations, often in the form of a guide, or one that has made him see things in new or different ways. The excerpt below illustrates this clearly:
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[Did your mother ever teach you on how you should behave towards women? Like manners? How you should speak to women?]

She used to teach me with my girlfriend that I should be more close and co-operative with her, so that when we are married there won’t be much secrets. And she used to say that if I’m not co-operative with her, or close to her, there may be some secret that she will not tell. And could you believe that last night or so, my fiancé came up to me, and discussed with me her salary and things.

[But your mother then, does she give you any advice on your relationship with your girlfriend in terms of decision-making and authority?]

Yeah. I remember a certain time my girlfriend went and laid a complaint with my mother. You see, it’s my character, at times when she makes me angry I just walk out on her. And she made the complaint to my mother that even if we are discussing something I don’t sit to listen. I get angry and walk away, and it becomes a problem to her. Then I explain to my mother that I get angry because of her. So it’s like, if I’m angry I cannot beat you, I have to leave before my temper goes too high, so that’s why I have been doing that. And my mother advised me that I should try to control my temper in such issues, because she said that I must listen to whatever my girlfriend has to say.

[But she never tells you that you should be authoritative towards your girlfriend?]

No

The above excerpt provides but one example of the influence that his mother exercises on him in cultivating the required virtues for his future position – in this case not letting his temper get in the way of his obligation to listen to his future wife’s thoughts and opinions. I should state that temper was also the ethical substance that Emmanuel would most often refer to as needing to be worked upon. This is perhaps not surprising as the incitement to control one’s anger is also included in the teen syllabus of his church, which my informant studies regularly and intensively, it instructs: “Your anger can cause you trouble; it may lead you to say or do something that will hurt others. Try to forgive and forget and let not the sun go down on your anger. Will you trust in the lord to help you control your anger?” (ACNTM :27). This instruction speaks to men as well as women, but Emmanuel pointed out to me that it is especially important for men to learn from this lesson.

Returning to his life history. At one point I explicitly asked about how his father’s passing, and his mother’s position as head of the family has affected him:

[So, when your father passed away, I assume that your mother became the head of the family, do you think that this has affected your views on the woman’s position in the domestic sphere?]
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Not so much, the only effect I think it has is the fact that as my father passed away I have not known whatever he would have incorporated in me, so that is the only problem that I’m having. Though he was a traditionalist, there are some moral lessons that he could have also taught me. So I don’t know much on it, because I cannot predict what was in his memory, or what so ever. But this in general has… as my mother has been the head for long, well it has not had much effect on me as much. Because we were all as one, doing things equally, so it doesn’t matter. Though if my father was there, I don’t think I would have been doing some of the household chores. Because mostly, I would spend more time with my father than that of my mother, so it would be like they would be mostly in the kitchen, I wouldn’t do much of the household chores. But that is the only effect I think.

One can note here that Emmanuel seems to perceive his involvement in household chores, and his sharing of certain burdens with his mother and sisters, to be linked to his father’s absence. As such one could speculate that the passing of his father has led him to adopt a more egalitarian attitude to how men and women divide the chores of everyday domestic upkeep. Certain remarks he made would speak in favour of such a conclusion, while other statements seemed to suggest the contrary. I would nevertheless argue that his father’s passing ought to be viewed as a circumstantial idiosyncrasy that has formed Emmanuel’s understanding of male headship to a certain extent. And one should not overlook idiosyncrasies in anthropological enquiry into ethics, for as Faubion explicitly stresses, they are:

likely to condition the objective possibilities that a subject has available in its particularity as an occupant of a subject position in a certain environment diminishing or enhancing those possibilities and so diminishing or enhancing the range of ethical possibilities from one case to the next. They are also likely to lend to the subject’s experiential and ethical trajectory a specificity [2011:120]

Emmanuel’s close relationship to his mother and sisters, together with the expectations they have on him, undoubtedly opens up certain possibilities to him, and limit others, as he strives to occupy the ethical subject position at issue. It is for example Emmanuel’s understanding that his relationship to his future wife ought to be characterised by the equality that has marked his relationship with sisters and mother, even though he would symbolically retain the status of head:

[When you marry your girlfriend, will you then consider to be the head of your family?]

Well, eh, no we are just the same. You know it’s just like… though I could give her instructions on what she should do, likewise she can also tell me what I could do for her, so it’s not like… Initially, people must know I’m the head, but in between us we are one. Just like I am always one with my mother and sisters.
Having thus provided relevant aspects of his past life, and his interpersonal relationships, I shall proceed to discuss how he is recruited to take up the path towards headship in his socio-cultural context.

6.2 “When Someone is Married You Hold the Person as a Man”

Given that Emmanuel could have chosen to become someone else, for example a taxi-driver in Accra who is not devoted to his family, one may ask what conditions compel Emmanuel to shoulder the headship of his family. Or to phrase the question in a slightly different way, why must people know that he is the head? as he puts it in the quote above. I hold that any answer to these questions needs to acknowledge that being the head of a family provides men in Apam an elevated status and influence in their community.

It is clear that Emmanuel’s strive to become a responsible caretaker is partly motivated by a desire for status, respect and influence. As he pointed out to me: “If you are a responsible man for your family that will give you more influence in other areas”. To build his reputation as responsible man, it is further clear that he is willing to abide by the prerequisites laid down for virtuous men within his Christian context. He declared that he never smokes, never drinks alcohol, and that he would never cheat on his girlfriend, etc. Whether or not he is obedient to these prescripts in practice is obviously impossible for me to answer, but I’m inclined to believe that he is. In other words, Emmanuel seemed to be genuinely concerned about living up to the themitical expectations within his Christian social environment, and doing so with a consciousness not only of his present, but also future social identity, and the possibilities that come with it.

His project is, however, not one that he visions to be an affair in the short run. The excerpt from one of my interviews with Emmanuel below, reveals that his path extends over some time, and that it is linked to a rising level of responsibility:

[Are there any rituals in Apam to mark entrance into manhood or womanhood?]

Well, with the entrance into manhood it's basically for us… when someone is married you hold the person as a man

[What are you before that?]
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Oh as of me, I'm not a man. I'm just… some people will call me “young man” or something, you see?

[Yes]

Here it's like entering into manhood and womanhood, though it starts from your teenage or something, but here as it is believed and known that people who are married get more experience in life than that of the experiences of those who are not married. So in a way they say going into marriage show your manhood.

[What kind of experience?]

Like taking critical decisions and taking care of other things. At first, me for instance, I was being taken care of by my mother, as I'm now not with my mother, I'm now taking care of myself. So gradually, as someone come into to marry me, I will be taking care of that person. That means in a way that I'm getting more life-experience.

The process of getting married is indeed a challenging and time-consuming project for my energetic informant to pursue, but one that he deems necessary as it will “bring his status up”, and also make his relationship to his girlfriend legitimate. I will not provide an elaborated account of the practices and activities that must be performed in connection to the ceremony, (for such an account, see Soothill 2007:196-198), but he was primarily struggling to come up with the money for the bride price which has to be offered to his girlfriend’s family. In this pursuit, he was, in addition to his job at NLF, and his paid task of producing flyers for his church, also planning to set up a bookshop in Apam.

It is however not the case that when he accomplishes to fulfil all requirements, and is wed at the Apostolic church, that he in that instant comes to occupy the ethical subject position at issue. While marriage can be seen as an important, or perhaps necessary formal step to take on one’s path to become a responsible and good caretaker of one’s family in Apam, not all married men will be deemed as good heads. Some married men are just “lazy and no good” as one woman put it. Nonetheless, being married carries a crucial symbolic value for one’s status and prestige in Apam that Emmanuel is conscious of. On several occasions he would point out that it is difficult to even get one’s message across if one is not married:

The impediment is on the fact that you yourself are not married. The question is that when you are trying to say something for married people, it becomes hard because they will say “oh even you, you are not married, so what are you saying?”

If marriage is a formal ritual that marks entry into manhood and influence, then recognizing and living up to one’s responsibilities is how one proves oneself as a man. In relation to the
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notion of masculinity within Pentecostal movements, Van Klinken stresses an important point. Observing how researchers have suggested that the demands on young Pentecostal men to give up certain activities, such as drinking and womanizing, which in many societies – including Apam – is considered to be manly, these young men are at the risk of being labelled as ‘sissies’ (2012:221), Van Klinken states: “From my analysis I observe a different tendency, to redefine the meaning of manhood so that born-again men can consider themselves even better men than they were prior to conversion, and better than their former peers.” (ibid).

My own research supports Van Klinken’s analysis. As was exemplified through the fisherman Eric in the previous chapter, the Christian men I spoke to tended to see themselves as “more developed”, and also possess higher moral standards than those they referred to as “traditionalist men”. Further, some of them also suggested that Christian men are more apt to take responsibility for their families than non-Christian men. As already established, this view also came to the fore in my conversations with Emmanuel. When discussing the issue of whether or not traditional men help their wives with child care, he explained to me in a disapproving tone that “the man would say, ‘I should move around, suffer hard work, paddle the canoe, hammer the nail, and you the woman sit here and take care of the children.’” So they
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won’t, it’s a fact, they won’t.” Upon his comment I then asked what he thinks of traditional notions of manhood, and he simply pointed out to me that “It would be a step backward in my manhood to be like that”.

Hence, I find that Van Klinken elucidates an important insight when he argues that the transformation of male identity, brought about by the Pentecostal movement, does not necessarily entail a loss of masculinity, but can rather be seen as a step towards a more mature sense of manhood that places a strong emphasis on responsibility for the family (2012:221-222). Drawing on my interviews with Pentecostal followers, I could observe that this sense of masculinity, which gives primacy to responsibility towards the family, was also pervasively promoted and valued by the women I spoke to, young as old. As one woman told me, “A man is someone who can do whatever I, the woman, and his children need him to do”. Similar perspectives were also conveyed by Emmanuel’s sister and mother on these matters, and occasionally also Vero and Christy. Hence, one could potentially draw the conclusion that Emmanuel is not encouraged to challenge the themitical expectations concerning Christian manhood by women in his environment – (except maybe from Christy, to whom I will return in the following chapter.)

Responsibility and Blame

In the beginning of this chapter I explicated Emmanuel’s mother wish for her son to travel abroad one day and bring home nice things. Such expectations on young men are certainly not uncommon in contemporary Ghana, nor is the desire among young men to fulfil them. Van Dijk states that in Ghana “the desire to participate in the migration wave became, and still is, all consuming” (2002:180). The “migration wave” refers here to an ongoing outflow of young Ghanaian men to countries in the west, with the purpose of making money that can be emitted back home. As Van Dijk observes however, conditions are hard for young men who try to raise the capital for the voyage, and for those who finally make it to Europe, or wherever they are going, things are often even tougher (ibid). What is interesting in relation to my purposes, is to note the consequences that men who fail in this pursuit have to bear. According to Van Dijk, failure is seen as no less than a disaster considering that a huge investment is lost along with the expectations of finding fortunes in the west. Further, he points out that it is perceived as a burden on the shoulders of the family, and results in a loss of social esteem and perceived
weakness in the man’s entrepreneurial skill. Van Dijk also observes that a man’s failure in his pursuits is “predominantly explained in terms of weaknesses in personal, spiritual and protective power” (ibid). These aspects illustrate that the attribution of responsibility on men to provide for their families entails expectations on them to succeed in meeting this responsibility by their own abilities and skills. Under the poor conditions in Apam, it was noticeable that young men feel distress over the demands placed upon them. As Emmanuel stated: “In the future I must be the one who my family relies on, and I must find a way though it’s hard.” In light of this observation, I suspect that being a candidate for claiming the headship of one’s family in present-day Apam, could in many cases illustrate Faubion’s point that occupying, or striving to occupy an ethical subject position, can be an insufferable undertaking (2011:62).

Thus far my ambition has been to elucidate the influence of Emmanuel’s closest social surrounding, and his cultural environment, in assigning and recruiting him to the ethical subject position at issue. In the remaining space of this chapter I shift focus. Instead of viewing Emmanuel as a passive actor, I will address his active role in the process of recognizing his moral obligations as a future family head. Such a shift may strike some readers as ambiguous, but as Faubion’s points out, ethical practice is always both an active and passive process (2001:94).

6.3 “I Must Know More”

One day, as we strolled along the beach of Apam stepping over ropes that tied colourful fishing canoes to land, I asked Emmanuel why he hasn’t tried to find a job in Accra while finishing his studies. My enquiry was motivated by stories of young men leaving Apam for other parts of Ghana in search of job-opportunities. Emmanuel’s answer was clear: “who should take care of my mother?”

We saw earlier in this chapter that Emmanuel’s senior brother is not expected to shoulder the responsibility for the well-being of their mother, or any other of the family members. My main informant’s own view on this matter is revealed in the excerpt from one of our interviews:

[What expectations do you have on your brother?]

The elder? I think that he sometimes could give some helping to my mother in terms of money, so that he can help her financial aspects.

[But can you as a younger brother tell him to do this, or convince him?]

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Well at times, in one way or the other I use to tell him. I just call him on the phone and tell him I’m not having much money, and mommy too. So it’s in critical issues, if he can bring in something. I myself thinks that at least, my mother has you know taken care of me since childhood up to now, by now I should in turn be supporting her. If I can’t support her, I can’t be dependent on her.

The last two sentences were clearly delivered as a critique of his brother’s lack of commitment to their mother. For Emmanuel also pointed out that his brother has earlier received support from her, and should therefore send her more money than he does. In other words, Emmanuel clearly recognized a flaw in his brother’s character in light of the choices that the latter has made. In technical terms, one notes that the senior brother is clearly not striving towards the same ethical subject position as my informant, despite having grown up in the same environment.

Laidlaw makes the case that the freedom of a subject is exercised in response to practices of acceptance, rejection, encouragement, discouragement, etc. found in his/hers environment. The subject will, in other words, have a choice to form him/herself in relation to certain suggested, or imposed, possibilities of ethical life, given in his/hers historical and cultural context (2002:323). He supports his point by drawing attention to how Foucault perceives the freedom of the ethical subject to “consist in the possibility of choosing the kind of self one wishes to be. Actively answering the ethical question of how or as what one ought to live is to exercise this self-constituting freedom.” (2002:324).

This freedom implies that the ethical actor is not merely abiding by certain criteria necessary to occupy a role or status in his society, but that he is actively selecting which kind of ethical identity he is striving towards. One can observe that Faubion also attributes this freedom to the ethical actor. On the process of selection in striving towards an ethical subject position he states the following:

It is […] a process in which actors are less and less likely to have the character of molders and shapers and more and more the character of advisors. […] It is correlative to a process in which the limitations of and alternatives within the objectively possible are objects of reflection, of the conscious exercise of what measures of liberty the subject-in-becoming has available. [2011:158]

One may invoke here that the existence of liberty is simply taken for granted in above accounts, and that would in a sense be true. For if the actor’s path towards a subject position is to be explored within the ethical domain, it’s a requirement that this path be in some sense his own. If it was a matter of force it would not be a matter of subjectiviation, but rather subjection, which falls outside the ethical domain, as Faubion points out (2011:49). Further, in the specific
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case of Emmanuel, I hold that an analytical approach that reduces his practice and reasoning to blind obedience to themitical expectations within his environment will be impoverished. Hence, I will in proceeding discussion acknowledge Emmanuel as an actor endowed with a capability of making choices and reflect upon them with a certain degree of independence and freedom.

Self-development

Having thus established that Emmanuel is actively and freely taking responsibility for his mother and family, I explore below how he seeks to do so. In the proceeding discussion I will argue that his current process of becoming a good head of the family is more about an independent strive for self-development than a passive process of abiding by instructions in his social and cultural environment. I will primarily elucidate how his active strive to be an agent of change on behalf of NLF can be connected to his conscious reflection upon his responsibility towards his family.

It’s important to note that Emmanuel is much encouraged to develop himself within his socio-cultural context. First, the focus on self-development within the Pentecostal movement is well documented. Ruth Marshall, for one, points out that: “becoming born again is an event of rupture, but being born-again is an ongoing existential project” (2009:131). Second, there is a strong focus on personal development in NLF’s objective, which according to the Program Manager is to:

Help people realizing their human aspiration and human right. So in all we are looking at developing people to come out with their inherent talent in all facets of life. So the name New Life is looking at moving away from a less developed stage into a new developed stage of the human life.

Looking at their goal here, one can also observe that Damaris Parsitau’s claim about NGOs in Kenya – that they only focus on material and economic transformation, as opposed to Pentecostal churches who focus on transformation of subjectivities (2012:220) – does not befit NLF.

Returning to self-development within Pentecostalism, it is for present purposes important to acknowledge that one’s self-development as a Pentecostal follower is not reduced to religious or spiritual matters. Dena Freeman has, for example, illustrated the readiness and willingness among young Pentecostal followers to embrace opportunities and novel ideas in their
environments. By providing an ethnographic example where young Pentecostal followers in an Ethiopian village were quick to join in on an apple production project launched by a western NGO, Freeman argues that their religious undertaking had instilled in them values of independence, self-discipline and hard work, which made them more apt to explore new ideas, and to challenge the status quo in their village (2012:173).

Being himself a young Pentecostal follower, Emmanuel is likewise ready to put his energy into practice, and to embrace new ideas as they come. In his case the opportunity has not come in the form of an apple production project, but in the shape of a secular development agenda. Nonetheless, by engaging with its concepts, attitudes and perceptions, and incorporating its terms into his vocabulary, it is clear that Emmanuel has consciously taken up the possibility of making his work for NLF part of his social identity and ethical trajectory. He would for example point out to me that he has become known for his knowledge about human rights and gender equality in Apam, and that it has given him more influence on his friends’ views and opinions. One can also note how he explicitly describes his engagement in NLF as a means towards self-improvement:

I joined the organisation as I wanted to do something that could help me advance in my knowledge, my educational level, and be more skilful. And as I entered the numerous educations and programs they made me attend, and the trainings I received, they gave me much understanding on these ideas, and I’m more okay with it. You see, as I am supposed to lead and give advice and so, I must know more.

I should point out here that Emmanuel refers to his future role as family head when stressing how he is supposed to lead and give advice. Which, however, is not to say that he doesn’t also entertain the idea of himself as having a more public leader role, for example in his church.

When further reflecting upon his involvement in NLF, Emmanuel explained to me that he cannot solely depend on his mother or others for guidance. But that he must make an effort to develop himself, and “have that mentality that will push yourself ahead”. And it seemed like he is quite confident about his own ambitions, efforts and achievements in this respect. For though he often complained about the limited sources of information in Apam, he would also stress his success in acquiring new ideas and knowledge. Primarily referring to his training and his missions for NLF, but also pointing to his education in Accra, as well as his use of the social media platforms Facebook and WhatsUp.

His sense of elevated knowledge was indeed apparent in the way he relates to people in his surroundings. Concerning his mother, who as we saw earlier has been an important pedagogue in his ethical formation, he offered me the following observation during an interview:
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[Do you speak about these issues with your mother, that you should have more information sources?]

No because her educational level was, as I said, not as high as mine. So, as for her it doesn’t matter if these things are available or not. It doesn’t occur to her that having these facilities could be of help to her.

I’m not about to suggest that he displayed an arrogance with his answer above, on the contrary. I’m quite sure that anyone who met Emmanuel would recognize him to be a humble man, with a great respect for his mother. However, it was clear that he considers his current position, and acquired education, to place a greater responsibility on himself to develop his character more independently. Further, it was also apparent that he considers his abilities to place a responsibility on him to contribute to the common betterment of the community. Stating that: “People here need a lot of help. That’s why I try hard to do more, finish with my education and then build contacts with others, to bring us all together and see how we can develop the place”

Hence, it is clear that Emmanuel conceives himself as a man with both the possibility and energy to work for development – in spite of being young and unmarried. To illustrate this point in a humorous way he recited to me a common saying that he often heard while growing up: “anything a young person can see while standing on his toes, an old person can see while sitting down”. After which he pointed out that the internet has made it to be the other way around. In other words, he stressed that youths, like himself, now have the means to acquire knowledge and use it to bring about positive change in their community.

This line of reasoning was also apparent in how he relates to his church and its leadership. Several times he declared to me that his elders have a hard time adapting to change, and on several occasions he would even express a seemingly challenging stance towards them, stating for example that: “they will be wiped out quite soon, and so the youngsters are coming up with much things”. It was also apparent that he looks to new and independent Pentecostal churches in the area as good exemplars that his own Apostolic Church should imitate, pointing out that many of these churches have come farther with gender equality, and in other areas as well. In light of these observations, it is clear that Emmanuel identifies present possibilities to bring about changes in relation to prevailing conceptions, values and norms within his church. In other words, his relation to the rule within his Christian environment seemed not to be a matter of blind obedience. To offer an example of how he would claim to challenge established ideas:

I quite remember a certain day, it was in a general meeting, and we were actually trying to promote condoms, but as in the church you cannot pronounce it. You cannot say it and tell people
that their children should use condoms, you know it’s against the Bible and its teachings. But in a way, I tried to convince them in saying that we have this, that we are saying that our children should not indulge themselves in sexual activities, but we see them getting pregnant, why? So what are we doing? Should we still keep quiet, or should we talk? Then one stood up and said that in fact, we should talk about it, because you don’t always know what or where your child is. So at times it is actually acceptable to talk to the young ones.

I offer here but one of his many anecdotes that highlights his ability to affect or challenge the prevailing order in the church, in this case to go against conservative perceptions which consider sex to be an unsuitable subject to discuss with youths. This challenging perception that Emmanuel advocates, can however be recognized as an established view in the discourse pervading NLF. When attending NLF’s trainings of peer-educators on the subject of HIV/AIDS, I could observe that what was said in the meetings reflects the view Emmanuel offers in the above quote. Hence, it is clear that my informant navigates between different ethical discourses in his environment, and that he in practice is able to transfer ideas from one setting into another. To offer another example:

[So in your role here at New Life Foundation, do you incorporate the knowledge you have acquired in the church in your job here?]

At times, but not much. You see at times, even in the normal work we infuse some of the church teachings and other things, so that we can make the thing balanced. Mostly people accept things that are attached with biblical concepts, so in a way, bringing some of these bible-teachings helps, so that the message can go on.

Faubion’s premise that ethical discourses are not to be perceived as closed off from each other, I believe is further illustrated by NLF’s strategy for educating local youths on human rights:

We build upon what they already know in relation to the concept of human rights. No… so yes, certain aspects of traditional practices, certain practices in Christianity that also falls in line with human rights, those areas. Then some of them has also knowledge in the area of human rights, so we build upon this, because you know, there is a common place for all these three.

Having thus established that Emmanuel is capable of adopting different values and ideas in his environment, we can observe that his process of selection in becoming a good head of his family is not restricted to a specific ethical discourse or ideology.

To further explore Emmanuel’s process of developing his ethical identity, I believe it’s fruitful to direct attention to an exemplar he finds in his environment – one that he admires and identifies with.
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Exemplar

In my conversations with Emmanuel it was revealed that he perceives the founder and Executive Director of NLF as a kind of role model:

[Do you think that Edmund’s initiative to start the foundation has been successful?]

Yes. He saw these ideas of human rights, gender equality and things like this as a way forward, so that he could make something good for him and his family, but also for this area.

Finding inspiration in his employer’s ambitious undertaking, it is clear that Emmanuel also visions himself to become a man who is not merely concerned with putting food on the table and sending his children to school, but also willing to improve the society and environment that his children will grow up in. Stating that “I know that I have this education right? I can do something more for people here, that’s what I see, that we can have more of this information sources and that I can help to make the community prosper”

I’m inclined to believe that this altruistic pursuit does not reside within the themitical. My research gives me no reason to believe that there is a common expectation on men to contribute to the development of the community, or the environment in Apam. Emmanuel, for example, told me how he had tried to organize a clean-up in Apam, but that no one showed up on the day of the cleaning. Efforts to do good things for the community will however be praised. A woman I met at the post-office made it very clear to me how wonderful the Executive Director is for his work with NLF. The point is that there are certain expectations on men that are pervasive and that everyone are supposed to live up to, while others are not. Again, men in Apam will commonly be attributed responsibility and blame for the state of well-being of their children. As one man commented on the issue of adolescent daughters who are at the risk of becoming impregnated:

I think that all of this is because of irresponsibility, they are just… They don’t care if their children are asleep or not, they will just leave them and go to bed. And children are very stubborn, so the man in the house… as I’m saying, the man might be broken, the man is staying apart from the woman, so sometime they couldn’t control the children. So I always question myself, sometimes deep in the night, 1 am, 2 am, I see young girls walk in the streets […] where is the father of these children? Where is he?

I suspect, however, that fathers are not susceptible to the same degree of blame for not striving to make their daughters’ futures as bright as possible by working for change and development.
But then again, Van Klinken has pointed out that Pentecostal churches in Africa do promote that men should take responsibility for the community (2013:151). While this may be the case, I identify that Emmanuel’s strive to work for the betterment of his community is also motivated by his understanding of what it means to be an agent of change in service of a secular development agenda. As he stated: “these ideas of human rights and things will be needed here, and in fact I’m trying to make these things come up here, […] we need to have these modern ideas in place here as well”. One can then note that his views seem to respond to NLF’s expectations on him. As the Executive Director of NLF explained:

Those that are beneficiaries from our teachings, we are expecting that they will be good leaders at a community level eventually. That is what we are hoping for, and that they will also be agents of change. So they can also continue talking to other people. Because it is also easier for somebody, who has gone through a training, to talk to others to bring them on-board.

My point here is that Emmanuel’s process of constructing his ethical identity is not restricted to a fulfilment of themitical expectations within his environment, but is also fuelled by a grander vision of himself as a man and a future head of his family. My claim here connects to Faubion’s observation that “One’s duties are one matter; one’s values and the ideals to which one might aspire are often quite another” (2011:52). His claim is, more clearly phrased, that it is one thing to fulfil the responsibilities and obligations bestowed upon the ordinary citizen in a given society, but another strive to excel in some sense – a point which he exemplifies by how all free-born in Athenian men in ancient Greece were obligated to develop the virtue of sôfrosunê (see Faubion 2011:35-36), but that not all were obligated to live up to the prowess of Achilles or Hercules (2011:52). The discrepancy acknowledged here is important as it offers the actor liberty in his ethical self-formation. Commenting Faubion’s theory, Robbins (2012) emphasizes that striving towards one’s ideals, and meeting the values they represent, belongs to the realm of freedom, and as such, also to the construction of one’s identity. In light of my own research I stress however that Faubion’s distinction between duties and values and ideals above, does not preclude a connection between them. In the case of Emmanuel it is clear that his sense of duty towards his family to a great extent motivates his strive to become an agent of change, who champions gender equality, women empowerment, human rights, etc.:

[Is your position at New Life Foundation important for your family, what does your mother think of your work there?]

Sure, it’s good. You know, she knows that I work hard, so she usually say that I work too hard sometimes. But I know that if I’m going to be able to help her and everything, I can’t just like relax. So as I had this chance to work for New Life Foundation, I must take it and work hard and
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make my status come up. So I work for these things like this human rights and gender equality, and I learn more, and people know that I have this knowledge. They see that I can work for change and that I can affect people here. You see, that will be good for my mother also, and my sisters, so they can further their education.

In the words of his sister “we look for Emma, Emma has a vision”.
7 The Ladies’ Chairman

Ending a lengthy walk, Emmanuel and I sought to still our thirst in a small and scarcely populated bar in Apam, where the music was relaxed, and the bartender sat and shuffled a deck of cards behind the counter. I ordered a beer, while my companion was content with drinking water.

In what became a lengthy interview in the bar, we discussed Emmanuel’s involvement in his church. Our topic was, more specifically, the position that he has come to occupy at his church through his increasing knowledge. In a humble way Emmanuel explained that it is being recognized among his elders that he has attained trainings with “the foreigners”, and that this has given him the opportunity to educate different groups at his church. Primarily he has been giving talks for a women’s fellowship, on such issues as water and sanitation, human rights and gender equality.

While pursuing the topic with ease, I asked Emmanuel if he ever feels that it’s problematic for him to be connected to the women’s group and to these ideas of gender equality in any situation:

Well, there is no problem. I quite remember that some of my friends were joking me around with the fact that I associate myself to the women, I go there to teach them, at times with their programs I go there to sit and observe. They were just joking me around and said I am the ladies’ chairman, saying that I’m the chairman for women. But this are just for jokes. Actually there is no problem I’m encountering, it’s more positive.

[So, do you try to affect your friends who are joking, that they also should become interested in the women?]

Yes, as a matter of fact, I remember that as the women’s group were drawing their program, their program for 2013, they invited me to sit with them, and I also tried to invite other guys, so that we can all come on board. And in fact, in their programs we put in some of the guys to actually lead in some programs, helping the women to come up.

In our discussion, Emmanuel conveyed his given epithet – “The Ladies’ Chairman” – with a certain liking, which was not to my surprise. Gradually I had come to see that he actively and explicitly associates himself with his ambition to promote women. However, one may also recognize the epithet as capturing a seeming contradiction in his ethical identity. For while he clearly sees himself as working for the equal rights and freedom of the ladies, he still adheres
to a male prerogative to the leadership position in certain domains and situations – rendering the connotations of “chairman” in his epithet open to different interpretations.

This chapter explores these seemingly contradictory positions by attention to Emmanuel’s mode of ethical judgement. More precisely, I analyse how he accommodates, and mediates, the discourse of gender equality and Pentecostal gender ideology in his reasoning. Initially however, I shed light on some basic ethical principles that Emmanuel adheres to, which is important for understanding the stances he takes.

“We are All One”

When discussing different groups in Apam, Emmanuel repeatedly declared to me that “we are all one”. The meaning of this view, he explained, is that all human beings are “the image of God”, and thus worthy of equal regard. His position here is clearly in line with Pentecostal ideology, which many researchers have argued is characterized by egalitarianism. Based on research on gender and Pentecostalism in Sicily, Salvatore Cucchiari has, for example, argued that: “men and women come before God as abstract "souls" shorn of all hierarchical social identities, including gender” (1990:696). In Emmanuel’s perspective, the idea of equality before God, does not only encompass both men and women, but also extends beyond religious belonging, which can be observed below:

[When you interact with pagans, do you actively try to convert them to Christianity?]

No, I will make known to you that I’m a Christian, and that I will love if you would join, but I will not force. And as a matter of fact, we are all one, created by God. So, though you are a pagan and I a Christian, we are all the image of God. So I cannot separate myself from you, or discriminate you from myself, we are all one, just that we are serving different gods. So if you accept to come, I will talk about my Christianity to you.

At least in principle, Emmanuel’s extension of ethical regard thus appears to reflect a form of humanism, which is not to state that his ethics is necessarily restricted to human beings. As he declared to me: “Christian values have guided people in doing what is right. It acts as a guide, which will impede people from doing things which are negative, against humans and even the natural environment.” And: “Cleanness is close to godliness, so you must keep things clean”. Having noted that his ethics is not bound to humans, but also takes the environment into consideration, it is nevertheless of interest to further explore the width of his humanism. For
The Ladies’ Chairman

looking at homosexuals – who constitute a highly discriminated group in Apam – it is noteworthy that my informant entitles them regard based on their relationship to God. My conversations with other Pentecostal followers did certainly not yield a similar view as the one Emmanuel offers below:

[Would you have some understanding for the persons who are harassing homosexuals? Could you understand their motives?]

Yes, I can understand them in a way, but God also told us in the Bible that we are all one, in the bottom of the verse he told that there’s nothing like slave or servant, man, woman. The fact is that we are all equal. So therefore, we have been given our lives to do whatever we do. Or the word has been given to us to do whatever we will do with it. In the end we are going to answer to him, who created us. But to me I’m advising you so that, at least it will be better. But I cannot say stop, because I don’t know why you entered into the homosexual. But I will advise you to advise yourself. Yes, because I cannot force you to stop.

I should, however, mention that Emmanuel considers it impossible to openly defend homosexuals who are being harassed or forced to change their behaviour, as it would have severe negative consequences for himself. On this matter he pointed out to me: “They will say you are one of them, and people will then discriminate you.” Further, it was clear that Emmanuel is not in favour of homosexuality personally, in that the orientation “goes against the will of God”. Needless to say, I’m thus inclined to believe that he would not embrace an epithet such as “the Homosexuals’ Chairman” with any ease. In other words, his cautious stance on advocating the rights of homosexuality explicates a conscious awareness of what he is able to do, and not to do, while working as an agent of change in his community. I shall return to this matters in the concluding chapter, where I discuss his exercise of freedom within his socio-cultural environment.

Further, it is also important to note is that his personal stance against harassing homosexuals exemplifies a line of reasoning that resurface in his deliberation on other matters, namely that one never knows if God is acting through a person or not, and that one should therefore not force on a person to behave in a certain way. This principle then rests upon an obligation to serve God, which I argue is central in Emmanuel’s reasoning. One can note how this idea even informs how he understand the values guiding NLF:

[In my perspective, I separate these ideas of gender equality and human rights from Christian ethics. Do you see them as the same thing or?]

They are quite similar, but not the same. Because in the Christian life you will be guided by the Bible, and some parts of the Bible talks about rights. “As what you have not done to your brother,
that you have not done to your God you are serving.” So you realize that what you are doing to someone, you are doing to God. So in a way these morals, believes and practises in Christianity has some basic principles that goes in line with the human rights and gender equality issues.

As this quote indicates, God figures as a locus of Emmanuel’s ethical reasoning. Regardless of whether he uses the international development concept of gender equality, or dominant concepts in the religious discourse, my analysis suggests that his judgement tend to find the same divine source of justification.

We can thus conclude this section by observing that God figures a pervasive source of justification in Emmanuel’s ethical judgement, and also as motivation for his ethical practice. Hence, when he states that working as a peer-educator for NLF is about “rendering your service to mankind and your community”, I’m inclined to believe that it should also be understood as rendering your service to God.

“Ladies Have Always Been Despised”

While Emmanuel explicitly criticized restrictions within his own church against having female elders – again, he perceived other private Pentecostal churches as good exemplars in this respect – the manifestation of his personal stance would, like in the case of homosexuals, be restricted in practice as he imagined it:

[A woman demands that women should be allowed to become church elders during an open meeting. What would you do? Support her? Say nothing? Argue against her?]

I would not go against her, because the fact is that God in his own image at times use women to fight his battles. It is just that, based on our teachings and rules of conduct and rules of belief that most elders are males. It is in the rules, and that I cannot change, this is a critical incident. Though I cannot frown the person or go against the person. And at the same time speaking for the person, though it would be something, but you can try… but it won’t reach anywhere, even in Apam.

As the above comments indicate, Emmanuel does not consider himself to be a revolutionary proponent of equal opportunities for women, as he clearly acknowledges the constraints that the rule imposes on his ability to act in favour of such views. Which is not to say that he won’t stand up for women at his church on occasions:

[Do you ever feel that you can challenge your elders if they say something about female-male-relationship that you think is wrong?]
Yes at certain times. I quite remember a particular day during the marriage counselling session, where an issue was brought up, assuming a married couple was about to separate because the man was not performing the duties, what will be the remedy here? There was issue, and the church elder said that as the man is the head the woman must be subjective to the man. I opposed that, yes I opposed that

[Why?]

Because, though the man is the head, it’s not that the woman must be subjective too, because she is also having her rights. I opposed that and it became something, it became something.

What became apparent in the discussion that proceeded on this matter was that Emmanuel had acted because he thought that the pastor had misinterpreted male headship as the right to neglect the women’s needs and interests. This example shows how Emmanuel’s siding with women is not necessarily a matter of challenging Pentecostal gender ideology. It rather reveals that he is able to perceive himself as a champion for women’s rights by promoting his personal, and more gender equitable, understanding of Pentecostal gender ideology – one marked by love, partnership and non-dominance, etc.

However, this observation begs of further exploration into Emmanuel’s understanding of “women’s empowerment” and “gender equality”. My analysis suggests that Emmanuel’s conception of these concepts bears similar connotations as those I encountered in my interviews with the representatives of NLF and the Human Rights Officer at the CHRAJ. That is the perception that women have historically been unjustly suppressed by traditional structures, customs and attitudes, and that gender equality is about changing this prevailing order. However, Emmanuel did also point out that women have also been unjustly treated in church in the past:

at first, when you go to this, the same church in the olden days, women were not given the opportunity to even sing, everything would be done by men, but as time goes on there is different leadership, with different views and different minds, things get changed.

An important observation to bring forth here is that Emmanuel explicitly recognizes the church as an arena open to debate and change when it comes to gender relations, while equally explicitly considering “traditional” institutions to not be susceptible to such change. This will be exemplified in the concluding chapter.

Returning to his understanding of the concepts at issue. While it is clear that gender equality implies “a break with the past” for Emmanuel, one may ask what he perceives as the goal of this value, that is what gender equality actually means to him? In providing an answer, I simply
refer to the definition that he offered me: “To me it is that both male and female have the same rights and then freedom, so it’s a matter of not infringing on anybody’s rights. So it’s not looking at she’s the female and he is the male.” As our discussion proceeds to the issue of value conflict, we should bear in mind the definition of gender equality that he offers.

7.1 Value Conflict

I stated in the beginning of this chapter that I would explore the seemingly contradictory position Emmanuel occupies in being a proponent for women’s equal rights and freedom, and simultaneously believing that men have a prerogative to the leadership in certain domains and situations. In the proceeding discussion I begin by providing an explanation that attempts to clarify his value positions, and to disentangle the seeming ambiguity pertaining to them. Subsequently, I highlight that there may also be underlying value conflicts in his different positions that are not necessarily resolvable.

First, my analysis shows that Emmanuel’s views of male headship and female submission are influenced by two different explanations to men’s current prerogative to leadership positions in Apam, one constructionist and one based on an idea of a natural, God-given order. While he believes that women’s lack of opportunities is the outcome of unjust traditional attitudes, structures etc. – hence socially and culturally constructed – he also perceives women’s submission and men’s aptitude to lead in certain spheres and situations to follow from a natural, God-given order. The blending of these perspectives becomes evident in the quote below, which is taken from one of the group discussions, where I posed a scenario to discuss:

[The elder tells you to give attention to the girls. What would your reaction be?]

If it was me I wouldn't react that much, because I know the boys always have that enzyme to do, so call the boy and he will always do. But if you call the girl I would be more happy, because we know that all people don't like giving opportunity to girls. Though I will call guys too, I know that I will call guys, so I wouldn't react to him that much, because we know that ladies have always been despised. So giving them the opportunity is a way of bringing the ladies up. Because the guys already, they have the essence to lead, because we are men. So I wouldn't say anything to him that would discourage him from saying that to others, because if like I say, he is not only saying that to me but also to others, so as he said that to me likewise he is going to say that to others, and the impact would be ladies coming up. But if I tell him that “oh that's not fair boys
and girls …” Cause if it's male and female, male will dominate. So give more opportunity to ladies is better.

As one notes, men are seen to possess an “enzyme to do” and “essence to lead”, which, in accordance with Emmanuel’s general reasoning, certainly implies that men have received these abilities or virtues from God. While he doesn’t advocate that men should therefore lead in the quote above, he would do so on other occasions. His support of male leadership did primarily come to the fore when discussing male-female relationship in marriages, but was not restricted to the domestic sphere. He did, for example, state that men should lead rescue-operations when there has been an accident, because of their natural leadership abilities. Given this inclination to perceive men as naturally more apt to lead, one can ask why Emmanuel thinks that women should be encouraged and given equal opportunities?

I would answer that the primary explanation resides in his view that the subjection of women in Apam, and in Ghana at large, is unjust in the eyes of God. As was established above, Emmanuel is in principle opposed to the use of force or other forms of domination exercised to control human beings. And, as he himself puts it “traditions here in Ghana have made people treat women as inferior to men “. His stance in favour of gender equality and women empowerment can thus be understood as seeking to amend the unjust treatment of women, which ultimately is a wrongdoing against God’s will.

But Emmanuel’s positive outlook on women’s empowerment and gender equality has also an instrumental rationale, in that he perceives it to contribute to the betterment of the community and the country. He, for example, stressed that women’s empowerment will have positive economic and political outcomes for the society: “If women are free to come up with their ideas it will be better for the whole country, it will be more fair and better for economy and things if they also come up with good ideas”.

However, aside from a criticism of the “traditional system”, I would claim that Emmanuel’s advocacy of gender equality is not particularly concerned with structural issues. When discussing women empowerment and stressing the need to “bring the women up”, he rarely brought forth that there should be equal pay for equal work between the genders, or an equal sharing of household chores, etc. – in fact he would only acknowledge a value in these things as I brought them up for discussion. His personal inclination was rather to emphasize the need to help women to come out with whatever ideas they are afraid of expressing, or for other reasons unwilling to convey. More specifically, he stressed that one needs to “build up women’s confidence”, as “the courage of women has been impeded by that of men”. Meaning that men are born with natural courage and will exercise it without assistance, while women’s natural
courage has been lost, and must be developed again. When telling me the myth about the women who turned to fishes in the wild ocean – mentioned in chapter four – he explained that “Stories like this have put the fear in women”. To clarify an important point here, I should state that his views do not suggest that women can develop the same type of courage as men, but rather that they have their own courage which has been impeded by that of men.

In relation to these observations, I argue that Emmanuel’s perceptions reflect Christian complementarianism. That is the view that women and men are created as equals by God in terms of essential dignity and human personhood, but that the genders fulfil diverse and complementary functions in the Church and the home (MacArthur 2000). Which is a view that clearly goes in line with the notions of mutual respect, love, partnership that have been brought up in previous chapters.

Recognizing, however, that several of my interviewees aligned themselves with such a view, I would say that Emmanuel’s is not really diverting from the themetical within his environment by emphasising the need to build up women’s confidence and encourage them to express their ideas – even when it comes to the domestic sphere. As one man told me “I don’t want my wife to just say ‘yes’ to whatever ideas I have, what partnership is that?” The point being that he wanted a wife with ideas of her own.

Hence, I stress that an adherence to a discourse of male headship and authority does not necessarily preclude a view of men and women as having equal value, status, and agency. It is rather a matter of acknowledging different merits, functions, roles, responsibilities or what have you, attributed to the respective genders. I also stress that such a view seem to be quite common in present-day Apam.

Having said that, I have yet to address, in a satisfying manner, the seemingly contradicting positions between adhering to the principle “that both male and female have the same rights and then freedom”, and clinging to a male prerogative to leadership and authority in certain spheres and situations. I shall therefore address the question more directly as we proceed.

Interestingly, the value conflict between gender equality and male headship that I myself projected in the field was never explicitly recognized by Emmanuel. Whenever I tried to enquire the matter of gender inequalities pertaining to the gender hierarchy advocated by his church, he did not offer any criticism. He rather evoked the biblical story of Adam and Eve to justify the man’s position as leader and woman as helper, or retorted to the notions of partnership and mutual understanding in his answers. However, that he didn’t himself note a value conflict, does not necessarily imply that such a conflict does not exist.
In the group discussions with my informants there was actually an incident where tension between women’s rights, freedom and equal opportunities and male headship was apparent. This occurred when Emmanuel and Christy got into a heated discussion upon my hypothetical claim that “Women who are not able to provide for themselves are considered weak”. As it turned out, the claim led to a lengthy discussion in which my two informant’s took oppositional stances on the matter. While Christy claimed that the women should be considered weak, Emmanuel claimed that she shouldn’t be regarded as such. The position of the former built upon an acknowledgement of the possibilities for women in present-day Apam to engage in incomebringing activities, while that of the latter was supported by stressing a man’s responsibility to provide for the woman. (It should be noted that they both assumed at the outset of the discussion that my claim referred to married women. Further I should mention that Vero was temporarily absent during this part of our discussion). I will below offer certain parts from the discussion, complemented with comments to what is being said.

[Women who are not able to provide for themselves are considered weak]

Emmanuel – No, they are not considered as weak

Christy – Why? Because a woman can do anything, they can take pure water to the streets…

Emmanuel – No, let me tell you something. It is the responsibility of I, the man, to give capital to my woman. So come to think of it, at times, if my wife is going to get money from somewhere and I do not agree, she cannot work. But I have to provide for her, so if she has some means so that she can support her life and I am not permitting her. Let’s say this is my enemy, you cannot go for money from him, and then I cannot insult her that she is weak, because I am not providing for her.

The discussion proceeds in a similar fashion. Emmanuel continuously points out that one cannot blame a woman for being weak, as the man is supposed to provide for her. (Interesting to note however is that he introduces the presumption that he, as the hypothetical man, is not permitting his woman to provide for herself, which becomes a premise of his reasoning in the discussion.) Christy, however, emphasises that a woman have the possibility to provide income for herself in present-day Apam, by petty-trading and other activities, and argues later on in the discussion that she shouldn’t have to wait for her husband’s approval to do so. Eventually the discussion leads into the matter of communication and openness in male-female relationships concerning one’s financial position:
Emmanuel - Let me bring in my personal affairs. I had a quarrel with my girlfriend. Why? Because she would not let me know her salary that she was getting. Meanwhile, she knows of mine, is taking money from me day in day out.

Christy – Eyy! You are the man, you went for her! She stays with her mother, and you come “I want to take your future”

Emmanuel – You see what she’s saying? Yes, so if I ask you to stay home, so as I went for you, then I pay for you. So you understand my point?

Christy – No, no, be in the house means that…

Emmanuel – So we are sharing the responsibilities and you are taking everything from me, though I know that you are working…

Christy – Are you not the man? Are you not the head of the family? So far as you have control of the woman…

Emmanuel – Oh, so if I am the head, then my control is stay home!

Christy – No, I will not stay home!

Emmanuel – Oh… this is so conflicting you know, but it’s based on mutual understanding. When both of you come to a mutual understanding, all this will not happen.

Emmanuel’s position during the discussion appears rigid. Clinging to the man’s rights and responsibilities, he consistently argues that the man should have control over the woman’s financial activities, and that the woman is thus not to be held responsible for her failure to provide for herself. In other words, he perceives the husband as accountable for the economic initiatives taken by the wife, and her potential failure. Emmanuel’s reasoning here illustrates Laidlaw’s point that ethical subjects will engage in complex ethical terms as responsibility and blame, which cannot be seen as pertaining to solely subjective or psychological states, but part of the relational processes that the subjects are involved in (2014:197). In other words, it is clear that Emmanuel’s ethical reasoning cannot be separated from the way responsibility and blame are generally attributed and recognized within his environment.

Considering our interest in value conflict, it is clear that Emmanuel’s understanding of male responsibility in the discussion interferes with the woman’s freedom to pursue her own economic projects. Hence, it explicates a contradiction to the definition of gender equality that he himself offered – “that both male and female have the same rights and then freedom”. In light of my informant’s reasoning, one can also conclude that assignation of responsibility and blame may sometimes retain priority over the principle of gender equality.
Important to clarify, however, is that Emmanuel was not strictly against that a wife makes money for herself. It was rather a matter of him acknowledging that certain conditions must regulate such an initiative. Namely that the starting capital should come from the man, and that he should be continuously informed about his wife’s business. His perceptions thus confirm Bernice Martin’s observation concerning gender relations within Pentecostalism: “The implicit deal seems to be that a substantive shift towards gender equality will be tolerated so long as women are not seen to be publicly exercising formal authority over men” (2001:54). In light of our discussion, one may stress that this “deal” seem to also include that women should not publicly be seen to perform the man’s responsibilities.

If Emmanuel’s line of reasoning in the discussion was quite consistent, Christy’s was more ambiguous. Near the end of the provided excerpt she defends the woman’s right to keep her financial position concealed by stressing the man’s role as head. Reacting on Emmanuel’s complaint that his girlfriend enjoys his money while keeping the status of her finances away from him, Christy insinuates that he has a responsibility to be more open in these matters than the woman, as he has taken his girlfriend from her family, and taken her future – (this was at least how I understood her point, given her tone and gestures). Hence, after having refuted Emmanuel’s earlier arguments based on male responsibility to provide for his wife, she suddenly acknowledges that the man has a particular responsibility to do so, as it serves her position. What is thus also exemplified in their discussion, is what Wittgenstein would call language games. That is how language functions to evoke desired, (and undesired), responses (Shawer, under “On Wittgenstein’s Concept of a Language Game”). This also exemplifies that a person’s expressed value positions may change from one day to another, from one context to another, and from one sentence to the next, which I believe the researcher who enquires into ethics should bear in mind.

Language games aside, one can note that both Emmanuel’s and Christy’s reasoning recognize an underlying divide of responsibilities between the genders. Further, that such social structures may divert them from simply aligning themselves with views and opinions conducive towards the values that they have embraced as their own – gender equality and women empowerment in this case.
7.2 Value Pluralism and Mutual Understanding

To be clear, I’m not making the case that Emmanuel’s ethical reasoning diverts from the principle that men and women are to have the same rights and freedoms. It’s a matter of recognizing that whether or not such a principle informs his judgement depends upon context, what specific subject is addressed, and what other interests are at stake, etc. I thus align myself with Laidlaw’s critique of trying to portray ethical subjects as coherent in their moral and ethical deliberations. In further accordance with Laidlaw, I also conclude that value conflicts may be left unresolved in the lives of ethical subjects.

The latter of the excerpt above actually offers an illustration of this latter point, as my informants’ dispute ends in aporia with Emmanuel stating that: “this is so conflicting you know, but it’s based on mutual understanding”. For instead of dwelling on a debate on contradicting values and principles, Emmanuel’s simply points out that the man and the woman, as partners, must themselves reach an understanding on how their relationship should be. Thus, leaving the tension between women’s equal freedom and the man’s control of the woman’s financial activities hanging in suspense.

Further, I claim that Emmanuel’s use of the term “mutual understanding” is quite revealing of his Christian environment. For in light of what has been established thus far, I recognize such notions as partnership, mutual understanding, co-operation and love, to constitute a local discourse in the Christianised Apam, through which Pentecostal followers may approach principles of equality and a notion of male headship as part of an ongoing negotiation between men and women, rather than value conflicts needing to be settled once and for all. In response to my question if a woman could be the head of her family, Emmanuel provided an answer that supports my claim here:

There are interpersonal relationships in how to handle issues. Because I know some women who don’t do anything at home. The man will close from work, he’s a carpenter. He will close from work and do the house chores, cook, bath the children. The woman will be at the shop. So she will go at 7.30 or 8 and move, I know some people who are doing that.
7.3 Concluding Remarks

I began this chapter by declaring that it would address the seemingly contradicting positions of being a proponent for gender equality and adhering to a discourse of male headship. Initially I sought to explicate how these positions may be less contradictory than they appear at first glance. First, I established that God figures as both a primary source of justification and incentive for Emmanuel’s ethical practice and reasoning. Second, I brought attention to how his view of men’s current prerogative to leadership positions in Apam is influenced by two different explanations. One that identifies “traditional” believes and practices as reasons for men’s dominance in the society, and one that explains men’s prerogative to lead by a natural, God-given order. Importantly to note however, while the former is marked by unjust dominance which can be changed in Emmanuel’s perspective, the latter is not unjust nor susceptible to change in the same way. In light of these observations, it becomes apparent that his personal stance on male headship, which rejects male dominance, does not necessarily contradict his understanding of women empowerment and gender equality, as these concepts are understood as a strive to counter a state of dominance and unjust treatment of women in society and at home.

However, as I showed in the final parts of this chapter, in Emmanuel’s and Christy’s dispute, that there may still be underlying value conflicts pertaining to Emmanuel’s understandings of male headship and gender equality. Further it may be questioned that Emmanuel’s take on male headship is always marked by non-dominance, for as he declares in one of the excerpts above: “if my wife is going to get money from somewhere and I do not agree, she cannot work”. These ambiguities is however not problematic I would claim. As the ethical actor is not approached as an individual who manages to establish a coherent set of principles to abide by, his ethical self-formation and judgement can be seen as an ongoing process of negotiation, within himself, with others, and with prevailing and novel ideas in his environment.
8 Concluding Discussion

At the outset I declared that my wider objective was to illustrate how an individual may navigate between Pentecostal ideology, secular development discourse, and “traditional” beliefs and practices in contemporary Ghana. In this final chapter I will carry a brief discussion on this matter. First, however, I direct attention to the more specific research question that was posed in the introduction: how the actor, Emmanuel, accommodates his different commissions in the construction of his ethical identity.

In order to approach an answer to this enquiry I have first addressed relevant aspects of the socio-cultural landscape in Apam, then discussed Emmanuel’s place in his family and society, and finally analysed his mode of ethical judgement. By approaching the question in this way I have elucidated how the ethical actor must be understood within his specific environment. For while his own accounts are essential, it is only by viewing them in light of his interpersonal relationships and cultural context that one can begin to disentangle how he manages to accommodate, and mediate, the different ethical subject positions towards which he strives.

Further, I have employed some of Faubion’s, and Laidlaw’s, ideas and terminology to engage with the problem of ethical pluralism and conflicting value-positions, which the research question concerns. While this theoretical approach has offered a fruitful way to explore how my main informant is able to take up different ethical commissions in the construction of his identity, I do not consider my way of addressing this issue as the only alternative. Supporting my analysis with Faubion’s, and Laidlaw’s, thinking has opened one way of analysing and presenting my material, not the only way. Having said that, we can move on to consider the insights yielded by my approach.

I stated in the introduction that Emmanuel’s strive to be an agent of change is nested within his strive towards the ethical subject position as head of the family. Admittedly, such a formulation comes out as rather vague, and demands clarification in this concluding chapter. My claim is basically that Emmanuel is first and foremost striving to be a good man for his family, and secondly to be an agent of change, working for gender equality and the good of his community. But, importantly, I argue that this latter commission entails a similar telos as the former – to be a man working for a better and improved life for himself and others – hence the nesting. This point is clarified by looking at Emmanuel’s own words again. Concerning his
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strive to become the head of the family he states: “One is to help them prosper in the future”, and concerning what it means to be an agent of change he declares: “it’s about rendering your service to mankind and your community”. What I address here, and which I elaborate in the two sections below, is what Faubion calls the scope, structure and priority, which is defined in the introduction, on page 17.

8.1 First and Foremost a Family Head

In his Ghana’s New Christianity, Paul Gifford draws attention to the pervasive influence of Christianity. He states that the cultural impact of the religion is “incalculable” (2004:20), and highlights how the symbolic weight of one’s faith pervades all levels of the Ghanaian society. Looking specifically at the cultural landscape of Apam, I have shown in previous chapters that one’s reputation as a good man in the increasingly Christianised town is much indebted to one’s religious identity. As one woman pointed out to me “A Christian man, he will know how to treat his wife and children“.

Given these conditions it is highly improbable that Emmanuel would take up the possibility of converting to traditional religion. Likewise it is doubtful that he would consider becoming an atheist, or an agnostic for that matter – all three of my main informants would actually consider these options to be worse than believing in the traditional gods. Adhering to the Christian believe-system and leading a good Christian life is thus the tangible possibility open to my informant to take up as he strives to be a good man in his socio-cultural context. In his own word: “If I only work hard and have faith, I’m sure that I will succeed”.

To be a good Pentecostal man means that he takes responsibility, and preferably works for a better and improved life for himself and his family. In Emmanuel’s case I recognize that this obligation toward the family retains priority over any other commission, or is nested within this primary responsibility. By looking at his life history, past and present, we have seen that his interpersonal relationship with his sisters and mother is crucial for his life project. In his own words: “My mother and siblings will depend on me for things, I cannot just do things or whatever, but I have to think of them too”. My claim is further strengthened by the recognition that a fundamental motive for Emmanuel’s ethical practice is to serve God, and that he believes that God has bestowed a high responsibility on him as a man to care for his family.
Concluding Discussion

The Ladies’ Chairman – A Nested Ethical Subject Position

I argue further that Emmanuel’s practice of promoting gender equality and women empowerment can to a certain extent be seen as harmonious with his developing identity as a good and responsible head of his family, rather than diversion from that path.

First, his work for NLF generates income for my informant. Money which he uses to support his girlfriend, mother, and occasionally his siblings. Put in local terms, it generates the choph- money which he’s supposed to contribute with.

Second, we have seen that his personal understanding of gender equality and women empowerment, is not necessarily in conflict with his path toward headship as a Christian man. For it is clear that he visions his future position to entail a relationship of equality and non-dominance with his spouse, and other family members.

Third, considering that Emmanuel perceives women empowerment and gender equality to improve women’s conditions, and that he perceives his commission as beneficial to his own status and influence in his community, one can see his role as a promoter of gender equality as a way for him to work for improved conditions for his sisters, as well as a means to reach a position from which he can better help them to “prosper in the future”.

The central point I’m making here is that Emmanuel’s involvement in NLF and his strive to be a champion of women’s rights and freedom is not a matter of him becoming another person prior to taking up this commission, but rather one of developing his identity as a responsible man with the vision of leading others to a better life.

8.2 “Change is a Gradual Process”

In our conversation Emmanuel repeatedly stated to me that “change is a gradual process”. His strong focus on this idea is, however, not surprising given prevailing discourses in his society. Discussing slogans of new Pentecostal churches, Gifford observes that the term success, and words bearing similar connotations, are strikingly dominant in the discourse of these churches on Ghana’s Christian scene (2004:44-45). His point being that their followers are strongly encouraged to make changes and strive for a new and more successful life for themselves. Even though the Apostolic Church belongs to the older type of Pentecostalism, my observations indicates that this incitement is also present in the meetings and services that Emmanuel attends.
Further, I have witnessed how NLF objectives and operations are centred on a secular focus on development, and how they place an emphasis on the need for local residents to develop a new mentality. There is, in other words, a pervasive narrative of change and self-improvement in Emmanuel’s environment.

With visions of a better future being provided at churches, by secular organisations, and governmental institutions in the area, it is noticeable how terms as success, new life, development and change have become anchored in common discourse in Apam. And by talking to local Christian residents one comes to learn that these notions are about changing one’s way of thinking, about viewing things in long-term perspective, about being a modern person ready to cease opportunities as they come, and about trying to lift yourself and others out of present hardships. In light of this observation, I claim that Emmanuel’s ethical self-formation is in some sense attuned to his environment. Stating that “change is a gradual process” he is certainly not alone in entertaining a vision of a better life.

Against this backdrop, I have shown how Emmanuel navigates in the intersection between Pentecostal ideology, secular development discourse, and traditional practices and believes. I have, more concretely, elucidated his tendency to accentuate his Christian identity and his knowledge of international development concepts, while actively disassociating his person from traditions. I believe that Emmanuel’s and Christy’s answer to my question of how far they think their work with gender equality will have come in 30 years in Apam illustrates my point here quite well:

Emmanuel – Looking at the pace, I would say at church, yes there will be gender equality. But in the traditional system, no, in 30 years, no

Christy – Because at church, women can be a pastor, preach

Emmanuel – Women are given the opportunities, things are changing day in…

Christy – Day out

Emmanuel – But in the traditional system…

Christy – You will not see a lady pour libation

Emmanuel – It’s hard for them to change. It’s only the males that pour libation.

It is important to state here that I have not claimed that Emmanuel’s ethics are not influenced by what he calls traditional practices and believes. My observations have merely shown that he is actively and consciously embracing certain ideas and values and discarding others in his
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strive to develop himself, and that his selection is to a certain extent attuned to prevailing discourses in his socio-cultural context.

Further, while Emmanuel is a unique individual, with a unique life history, I believe that the analysis of his person to a certain extent reveals how Pentecostal followers in contemporary Ghana may relate to secular development initiatives in their environments. His case, for example, indicates that it is possible for members to adopt international development discourse and use it in a Pentecostal setting, and that it is possible to accommodate a role as an agent of change for a secular organisation with a Christian identity and adherence to its believe-system. Considering these observations I’m further inclined to believe that the ongoing entanglement of secular development initiatives and Pentecostalism in Africa is likely to continue.

8.3 Freedom

An underlying interest in previous chapters has been the freedom of the actor in his ethical self-formation. To avoid confusion, I have not sought to determine the question of whether or not the ethical actor is free. The ethical actor is “by analytical fiat, “free”” as Faubion points out (2011:37). What has been explored is rather the possibilities and limitations that Emmanuel faces in his exercise of freedom. Or, to put it in another way, the preceding chapters have sought to investigate how and why he is consciously embracing such an epithet as “the Ladies’ Chairman” in his given environment.

Against the apparent patriarchal hierarchy in Pentecostal ideology, one could of course perceive his embraced epithet as the expression of his creative agency, and resistance towards structures and norms within his Christian context. In the field I recall to have adopted such a perspective on the matter. Sitting in the bar with Emmanuel as he presented himself as the Ladies’ Chairman, I remember to have identified a creative champion of gender equality across the table – one who struggles to bring about change in his society with the value of equality as his lode star.

My initial perception might be explained by my reading of Henrietta Moore’s Still life prior to entering the field. In her eloquent book she argues for a more forward-looking anthropology, stating that she “want to explore the ways in which the relationship between culture and identity is creating new forms of pleasure, desire and satisfactions” (2011:35). Inspired by her incentive for detecting novelty, I set out to detect how my informants create positions for themselves in order to challenge prevailing normative structures in their society. That is, how they draw upon
novel ideas in their surroundings to shape new goals and ethical identities for themselves. The reader may recall the lines from my research proposal, which I offered in chapter three, that I would: “elucidate […] the creative agency of young individuals as moral agents”

In light of my findings I have however come to agree with Rachel Morgain’s critique of Moore, as she writes “it is not necessarily helpful to discard established ideas—or neglect established traditions—for the sake of novelty” (2013:117). I align myself with this standpoint, as I recognize that the creativeness, or the novelty, that may be attributed to Emmanuel’s ethical practice and self-formation, is conditioned by established norms and expectations on how a good man should be in his environment. As such, my analysis have come to divert from a conception of freedom, and agency, as measurements of the agent’s ability to resist prevailing structures.

I should state that this diversion is to a great extent informed by Laidlaw’s critique of how the concept of agency has been used within practice theory. He writes:

Because an opposition to structure, and therefore to existing systems of values and power, is built into its definition, this conception of agency recognizes as efficacious only actions conducive toward certain ends and outcomes: empowerment, liberation, equality and so on, these ends being imputed as values and interests to all members of the human race as such. For this reason, this conception of agency muddles rather than clarifies matters when applied to any form of life or project whose ends differ markedly from these imputed values [2014:182].

I believe that Laidlaw’s critique captures the source of the problem I encountered when engaging with Emmanuel in light of my own interests. Inclined to validate Emmanuel’s life project against my own value positions, I did indeed face ambiguity when analysing my material, as certain of his actions and views were not in line with my projected image of his objectives. Again, I’m not claiming that Emmanuel’s actions are not conducive toward gender equality, but I have come to recognize that the telos of his ethical self-formation is not equivalent to his ambition of promoting women’s equal rights and freedom. Striving for a better life for himself and others implies that he shoulders his responsibility as a man, which sometimes can make demands that stand in conflict with the principle of women’s equal opportunities and freedom. An example of this is that Emmanuel believes that it is right that he has been given priority over his sisters in furthering his education – for reasons given in section 5.4.

By employing Faubion’s theory I have sought to strike a balanced focus between creativeness and established ideas when analysing Emmanuel’s ethical self-formation. For, importantly, Faubion’s framework has the advantage of providing space for freedom,
**Concluding Discussion**

creativeness, and novelty, without neglecting or overlooking the constraints imposed on the actor. He writes:

Structural constraints and structural inertia are in the long run far more likely than not to trump whatever reformist or revolutionary ambitions concrete actors jointly or severally might have. The anthropologist of ethics cannot be saddled with the problem of reproduction, but he or she cannot be a Pollyanna about the scope of what everyone now seems fond of calling “agency” [2011:138].

The caution that Faubion endorses here is a recognition that creativity and novelty is commonly met with negative reinforcement, and thus usually not worth the effort (2011:138). I have found that this position offers a sound approach to the question of Emmanuel’s exercise of freedom. It has allowed me to recognize freedom as exercised within structures, attuned to legitimization, and susceptible to limitations, and objective possibilities available. In other words, a freedom that is not understood as a measurement of the ethical actor’s capability or possibility to challenge structures or prevailing value-systems, but as his conscious reflection on how he can form himself in relation to structures and norms, and how he can act within his environment.

**“The Ladies’ Chairman” – A Legitimate Possibility**

An exploration of the freedom that Emmanuel exercises in his ethical self-formation needs to acknowledge the existence of a prevailing narrative of development within his environment. For it doubtlessly facilitates Emmanuel’s choice to identify himself with such concepts as gender equality and women empowerment in Apam. In other words, I argue that this initiative is not particularly controversial. Surely, not all men would be inclined to identify with the epithet of “Ladies’ Chairman”, and it is highly probable that such a social identity would retain some negative reinforcement from certain groups or individuals in the coastal town – I met a few young Christian men who forcefully argued against women empowerment and the like. Noting these exceptions, my experience was however that most people were, at least in an elusive sense, in favour of improving women’s conditions and influence in the area. A telling sign of this was the pervasive use of a certain proverb in Apam, which went as follows “anything a man can do, a woman can do better”.

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Thus, I argue that Emmanuel’s construction of a social identity as a champion of women is not necessarily a resistance against prevailing structures in his society. It rather seems that his identity as a proponent of gender equality attains both formal and informal legitimacy in contemporary Apam. For, as we saw in chapter four, the District Assembly has an official objective of improving the conditions for women in the area, as does the CHRAJ and NLF. Further, I have shown that standing up for women’s rights and freedoms within a Pentecostal setting is indeed possible to do in certain ways. In other words, there seems to be a possibility for Emmanuel in his cultural context to take up a social identity as a champion for women’s rights and equal opportunities, without meeting severe negative reinforcement.

I have shed light on the issue of homosexuality in this thesis to explicate that certain social identities are more controversial than the one Emmanuel is forming. In light of dominant Christian norms in Apam, it is clear that it is probably extremely difficult to be an active proponent for homosexuals’ rights and freedom in a Pentecostal setting. The point has thus been to illustrate that certain ethical subject positions are easier than others to take up, which should be taken into consideration when analysing an ethical actor’s exercise of freedom. One should, in other words, be aware that the actor is not only forming his identity in relation to the values and ideals that he personally adheres to, but also in relation to what is themitical within his environment. To avoid confusion here, I am not suggesting that an individual’s ethical self-formation is restricted to legitimate subject positions in his environment, but rather that his conscious choices are informed by an awareness of the regnant normativity of his society.

Finally, whatever reason Emmanuel’s friends had for jokingly calling him “The Ladies’ Chairman”, it is clear that my informant made the epithet his own, and that he consciously reflects over the possibilities that such a social identity offers him in the present and the future. This is the freedom that he exercises. His freedom is not a measure of the extent to which he challenges structures or prevailing value-systems, but the ability to reflect upon structures and value-systems of his society, and recognize possibilities and constraints within them in the construction of his ethical identity.
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