

# NEGOTIATING MARRIAGE: QUESTIONS OF MORALITY AND LEGITIMACY IN THE GHANAIAN PENTECOSTAL DIASPORA

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## ABSTRACT

Among the many immigrant groups that have settled in the Netherlands, the recently arrived migrants from Ghana have been perceived by the Dutch state as especially problematic. Explicit measures have been taken to investigate marriages of Ghanaians, as these appeared to be an avenue by which many acquired access to the Dutch welfare state. While the Dutch government tightened its immigration policies, many Ghanaian Pentecostal churches were emerging in the Ghanaian immigrant communities. An important function of these churches is to officiate over marriages; marriages that are perceived as lawful and righteous in the eyes of the migrant community but nonetheless do not have any legal basis as far as the Dutch state is concerned. This contribution explores why the Ghanaian community attributes great moral significance to these marriages that are taking place within their Pentecostal churches. It investigates the changing meaning of the functions of Pentecostal churches in Ghana and in the Netherlands by distinguishing civil morality from civic responsibility. It seeks to explore how, in both contexts, legitimacy is created as well as contested in the face of prevailing state-civil society relations. Through this exploration, it will become clear why, in both situations, Pentecostalism is unlikely to develop into a civic religion in the full sense of the term.

## *Introduction*

There is a growing body of literature in North Atlantic academia that explores the importance of religion for immigrant groups in western states (Vertovec 1996, 1998, 2000, Sanneh 1993, Werbner 1997, 2002, 2004). Based on an older literature that studied processes of integration in 1960s American society and concluded that immigrants tend to privilege their religion in the public domain, this recent corpus of studies again underscores the dialectic of the public versus the private. While western states commonly acknowledge religion in terms of the private identity it offers to their citizens, immigrants are seen to enjoy

the group membership that religion offers as a way of promoting self-awareness in the public domain and as a way of negotiating processes of integration and assimilation. Immigrant religion is thought to be Janus-faced in the sense of acting on the one hand as a bastion against state projects of nationhood, while simultaneously promoting a positive image of the migrant community's moral standing in the host society. By emphasizing the uprootedness of migrants in alienating situations, some authors propound normative views of the ways in which religion caters to the needs of immigrants in such situations (Sanneh 1993, Ter Haar 1998). Habermas for instance writes:

In an age of secularization and scientification religion remains a major factor in the moral education and motivation of individuals uprooted from other traditions . . . In an age of accelerating homogenization and simultaneous manufacturing of difference . . . religions are articulated as the last refuge of unadulterated difference, the last reservoir of cultural autonomy. (Habermas 2002: 1)

Yet, this normative function of religion being the last resort, the bulwark against assimilation and loss of identity, may create tensions and suspicions on the side of the host societies' power structures: anxieties that may concern the degree of loyalty of immigrant religion towards the nation-state and the nature of the civic responsibilities and civil morality these groups proclaim. While the civil virtues these religious groups put forward may be well respected in the host society, the political function of these organizations in terms of the civic power they may wield over their followers usually turns into a bone of contention.

This debate on the relationship between civil morality and civic legitimacy has emerged from Robert Bellah's writings on the status of civic religion in the United States, but has become particularly relevant in the study of state-civil society relations. In processes of state formation, civil society organizations have come to represent forms of interaction and contestation—generated by actors and institutions—that share and negotiate certain interests within the context of the social and political economy. The term civil society therefore refers to labour unionism, political activism, social movements, journalism but certainly also the activities of religious organizations as they too are generally perceived to be in a position to give voice to certain group interests in the context of the nation-state. Two dominant lines of enquiry have evolved. One investigates the functioning of civil society in terms of the contentious politics social movements generally are involved in and how these movements 'frame' the activities and motivations of their members (see Tarrow 1998, Meyer and Tarrow 1998, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Of crucial importance is the question to what extent

these movements are able to generate civic legitimacy for their actions (the right to strike, for example) in the civil milieu and the extent to which this legitimacy is questioned, if not denied (see for instance Kopecky and Mudde 2003 on the 'uncivil society' in post-communist Europe). The other line of enquiry focuses on the civil morality of non-state actors and institutions and specifically explores the generation of social capital in contemporary societies (see Rotberg 2001, Putnam 2002, Hoghe and Stolle 2003). Here a major question is how civic institutions contribute to general trust within society and between various players in the national domain and how this reflects on political processes such as the development of democracies. While both lines seem to suffer from the same bias, namely that civil society negotiates state power—in the African context discredited by some as an outright 'western fairy tale' (see Markovitz 2002)—the lack of attention to the religious in understanding civil society is also remarkable. Not only is it a recent development that religious organizations have come to be studied as social movements (see for instance Cristi 2001, van der Veer 2000) competing for space in the civil realm, increasingly the political is also understood and analyzed as an expression of religious meaning and thought (see for Ghana, for instance, Meyer and Nugent 2001). This generates questions about the extent to which civic legitimacy and civil morality are produced and negotiated by religious thought, possibly as one of the many expressions of such ideas in a contested field inhabited by other players such as labour unions, political parties, civil rights movements and the like.

In the Netherlands the distinction between the *civil* and the *civic* is also crucial for understanding the position of immigrant religion. For long, Dutch civil society was segregated along religious lines, the so-called religious 'pillars', whereby each religion, Protestantism and Catholicism in particular, organized social life and took on civic responsibilities, for example in the foundation of schools and hospitals (see Post 1989 on the pillarization of Dutch civil life). Recently, however, heated public debates have erupted about the establishment of Islamic schools and the nature of their educational programmes. The constitutional freedom of religion in the Netherlands also implies a right of freedom of education in the sense that religious groups are allowed to establish their own schools, thus assuring parents that their children will be educated in an environment that reaffirms their religious principles. Islam is the second religion in the Netherlands and adhered to by the largest immigrant communities in the country, Moroccans and Turks. The emergence of primary schools for children from these communities

has led to public debates, not so much about the civil virtues being taught by these schools, but about the civic responsibility constituted in them to establish state-sponsored educational institutions that seem to unsettle the 'natural' bond between Christian education and nation-state formation in the creation of a Dutch citizenry. A leading question in these public debates was and still is: while they certainly promote civil morality, do these Islamic schools use their civic power to create and implant ideas of Dutch citizenship in the minds of their pupils or should questions be raised as to their loyalty towards the Dutch nation-state?

In addition to the formation of large communities of Moroccan and Turkish labour migrants, which started in the mid-1960s, the Netherlands has also seen the arrival of numbers of immigrants from its former colonies in the West Indies, Surinam in particular, and from other Third World countries. Among the many immigrant groups that have settled in the Netherlands over the past two decades, migrants arriving from Ghana have been perceived by the Dutch state as especially problematic. In addition to the measures taken to curb immigration, specific restrictions have been designed to deal with the largely unregulated influx of Ghanaian migrants, an estimated 40,000 by now. Explicit measures have been taken to check and control marriages of Ghanaians, as these appear to have been an avenue by which many Ghanaians acquired access to the Dutch welfare state, often through a system known as the 'contract marriage'. While the Dutch government was putting in place checks and balances on what it perceived as a loophole in its immigration policy, many new Ghanaian Pentecostal churches were emerging in the Ghanaian migrant communities of larger Dutch cities, consisting now of approximately 30 different denominations. These churches have an average membership of 250 adults, including members from the second generation of Ghanaian immigrants, usually making for a youthful following. An important function of these churches has been to create a context of morality and legitimacy in which marriages can be officiated, marriages that are perceived as lawful and righteous in the eyes of the migrant community, but which nonetheless do not have any legal basis as far as the Dutch state is concerned and are therefore not recognized by Dutch law. In some cases these marriages involve so-called illegal Ghanaian immigrants who do not possess the necessary documents to cover their stay in the country.

This paper aims at demonstrating why the Ghanaian community attributes such great moral significance to the marriages that take place within the Pentecostal churches by exploring first of all the contested

cultural meaning of marriage in Pentecostalism 'back home' in Ghana. Many migrants are aware of this cultural contestation when they arrive in the Netherlands, only to find that this is once more compounded in the context of the tough immigration policies adopted by the Dutch state. In the second part of the paper, the changing meaning of the civic functions of the Pentecostal churches in Ghana and the Netherlands is investigated by looking at marriages taking place within the migrant community and the way in which legitimacy is created as well as contested in the context of this western nation-state. It will become clear why in both situations this kind of Pentecostalism is unlikely to develop into a civic religion in the full sense of the term in the host society, unlike its present status in Ghana.

### *Contestations of marriage*

There is a limited literature on the meaning of African marriage systems in a globalizing world (see Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, Masquelier 2004), a lacuna that is remarkable given the increasingly transnational nature of the ways in which marriages are arranged in African communities. This certainly applies to the Ghanaian migrant communities that I have been studying in places such as The Hague (the Netherlands, van Dijk 2001b, 2002a) and Gaborone (Botswana, van Dijk 2003), where most arrangements for a wedding involve multi-stranded relations with people 'back home', and in a variety of other places around the world (see also Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 1998, Manuh 1998).<sup>1</sup> In Ghana there is a great attraction in marrying somebody who has been able to 'make it' abroad, often in the hope of being able to join the newly wedded spouse and thus leave Ghana. It is important to note that in this process of increasing transnationalization of marriage relationships in Ghana the recently established Pentecostal churches are playing a crucial role. The rise of Pentecostalism in Ghana and in other African countries has a significant transnational element to it (see van Dijk 1997, 2000, 2001a, 2004, Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001, Englund 2001, 2003, de Witte 2003). Many churches have been eager to establish congregations outside Ghana and have been able to do so in Europe, particularly in large cities such as London, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Brussels. Many Ghanaians are attracted to these newly emerging Pentecostal churches because of their extensive international relations and cosmopolitan outlook, in addition to their ideological messages of success, prosperity and deliverance from evil powers. Whereas they strongly proclaim ideas concerning the Christianization of society

and the Ghanaian nation-state, and also hold promises for the creation of a modern 'born-again' personhood, these ideas imply the critical valuation of 'custom' and 'tradition' as well.

The embrace of a globalizing world, in which Pentecostalism offers a trajectory for creating and sustaining a specific identity in other social contexts, is conjoined by a critical attitude with regard to cultural practices. These Pentecostal churches often place themselves on this basis in opposition to what are referred to in the literature as prophet/spirit healing or African Independent churches (AICs), which emerged in great numbers in the early decades of the twentieth century. While the two groups of churches share a cosmology inhabited by a variety of spiritual powers, deities and ambiguous forces, the healing churches (in the vernacular known as *Sunsum sorè*, lit. 'spirit-churches') combine in a syncretic manner elements of missionary Christianity with healing paradigms and practices that derive from African historical religious traditions.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of the Pentecostal churches, true Christianity should be purified from syncretic elements as they may signal the presence of ancestral and other powers Pentecostalism usually qualifies as being 'demonic'. The presentation of a modernist and dichotomist world-view, leaving no middle ground for powers that may ambiguously work for good or for evil, means first of all that healing is exclusively defined in terms of prayer-healing and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the charismata, such as speaking in tongues, the laying on of hands and deliverance. It also means, however, that an ideological tension is created related to other forms of cultural life where the presence of an ancestral past can be suspected as well. Pentecostal rhetoric tends to make its followers aware of the demonic dangers that may lie hidden in practices that are otherwise viewed as 'custom'. Most Pentecostal leaders desist from and reject a practice such as that of pouring libation (*nsa*) to honour ancestral deities and to invite them to come and drink in exchange for bestowing their favours on the living.

Whereas this iconoclastic stance of Pentecostalism certainly impinges on family and communal ritual, for instance in the context of ceremonies related to birthing, marriage and most specifically funerals, it also has a profound bearing on the ways in which they perceive Ghanaian nation-state cultural policies. Various postcolonial Ghanaian governments have been proactive in promoting a cultural policy calling for the protection and rejuvenation of pre-colonial traditions. The Ghanaian state has developed all sorts of initiatives for the enunciation of a national cultural heritage policy, among them the formation of a subsidizing

body known as the National Commission on Culture. The most important Pentecostal churches in cities like the capital Accra have remained ambivalent if not hostile towards this project aimed at the creation of a non-Christian national cultural identity. Great was their outcry, for instance, when, on an official visit of the then American President Clinton, a pouring of libation to the gods took place on his arrival, televised for all to see as an expression not only of welcome but of authentic Ghanaian cultural roots. The Pentecostals' disrespect for local cultural traditions has in some communities led to occasional incidents of violence, a situation which the national government finds it difficult to contain (see van Dijk 2001c on the issue of the Pentecostals' violation of the bans on drumming and noise-making that some ethnic communities announce during certain periods throughout the year).

It is in this context of a Pentecostal contestation of culture and custom that the issue of marriage has also become a matter of debate (van Dijk 2002b). In many of the Pentecostal churches an explicit discourse has developed on marriage, evidenced by the many booklets, brochures and pamphlets that circulate extensively in Pentecostal circles dealing with notions of the true Christian marriage. A large part of this literature has been written by the leader-founders of these Pentecostal churches and is based on the statements they have been delivering from the pulpit. Both these messages and their writings on the subject may strike us as being 'western' in orientation and as emphasizing a kind of bourgeois morality in matters of choice of partner, sexuality and family authority, coming across as typically middle class. As this literature usually tells very little about the actual, local and everyday practices relating to these issues, but instead often deals at length with how matters *ought* to be arranged and how family relationships *ought* to look, it reveals a distancing and estranging point of view with regard to lived-in culture; it makes the common look peculiar and vice versa. Lengthy discussions can be devoted in church meetings to issues such as 'the good wife' or 'fatherly authority' which appear far removed from mundane realities and only seem to represent a deliberate attempt of dissociation from the world of their followers. The picture this draws of the Christian marriage and family life seems to instigate in their followers the need to seek marriage enrichment, as it is often called, through the mediation of Pentecostal leaders.

On the basis of this ideology many churches engage in marriage counselling. It is in fact one of the most complicated domains of interaction of the churches and the individual lives of their members. This complication arises from the coming together of the stringent Pentecostal

ideology, the actual marital status of those engaged in the process and thirdly the fact that civic authority has been vested in pastors to officiate at weddings and certify marriages, making them legally binding if and when these pastors are ordained. Ordained pastors can certify marriages by signing marriage certificates of the couples that have entered into holy matrimony in their churches. This element of the pastor's civic authority is well respected, fully acknowledged by the state and the Registrar's office, and most pastor-leaders that I included in my research indeed claim to make every effort to perform their duties in this regard to the best of their ability. This entails among other things a careful investigation of the background of the prospective marriage partners and the conditions under which a marriage takes place. Marriage counselling is a euphemism for a method through which the pastor assures himself of the genuine motives of the partners, inquires about their previous relationships (also about any children that may have been born out of these relationships), looks into the moral standing of the partners (religious affiliation, criminal behaviour), scrutinizes the relationship with the respective families and family heads so as to acquire confirmation of their consent, and discusses the ways in which the couple will establish their household.

Most churches have counselling committees that assist in such an investigation, often composed of the most prominent and well respected members of the congregation. The authority of the pastor is such that he will even contact the heads of the respective families to ask questions that otherwise would be considered inappropriate. Inquiries are made about the terms of the marriage—terms that usually are negotiated between the families and often involve a kind of bride wealth to be transferred from the family of the husband to that of the wife at the time of *kokooko*. This is, literally, the time of 'knocking at the door' of representatives of the husband at the house of the bride's parents; *kokooko* representing the sound of the tapping of fingers on a wooden door or gate. Commonly the *kokooko* implies a prestation of many luxurious gifts and money to the wife's family, all of which takes place in a festive atmosphere with invited guests being present to witness the occasion. There is a politics of signification here as the Pentecostal leaders tend to refer to this occasion as being nothing but an 'engagement', that is a preliminary stage to the most important event that should still follow: the 'white' wedding in church when the marriage certificate will be signed. The Pentecostal leaders, however, fully understand the cultural significance of the 'engagement' and all the negotiations that are held between the families on the terms of the marriage. Only then will



the marriage carry weight and be seen as legitimate with all the responsibilities this implies. Non-Pentecostals often refer to the *kokooko* as the wedding proper because in their eyes conducting the customary exchange of lavish gifts and the payment of sums of money grants full legitimacy to a couple's marriage. Marriage certificates issued by an ordained minister or the Registrar's office do not help constitute the rights and obligations of marriage partners, they feel, because these are sufficiently embedded in the common understanding of what the two families have agreed upon. These arranged marriages stand in contrast to marriages by elopement which, though they can still be acknowledged in formal terms (for instance where inheritance is concerned), usually involve not much more than a couple appearing before a chief or another traditional authority that can grant them permission to live together, thus securing the acknowledgement of the children from this relationship.

The minute inspection of the conditions of the *kokooko* by the pastors also implies that they perceive their authority to be above that of the family heads, and they proclaim that they have the final word in approving the union. There is an element of suspicion with regard to these family heads, in the sense that pressures on the couple from their families may run so high that they are in danger of giving in to practices that jeopardize Pentecostal standards and are likely lead the couple into sin and temptation. These may vary from the use of alcoholic beverages to the pouring of libation or the domain of sexuality particularly where it concerns the 'testing' of the wife's procreative capacity in the period before the marriage takes place. Pastoral inspection can turn into intervention leading to a direct involvement of the pastor with the marriage affairs of the families, which often overruns if not replaces the authority of the family head. Some Pentecostal churches, particularly the well known International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) or Lighthouse Chapel International, have developed aggressive strategies in this regard for couples who have indicated that they are interested in marrying in the church. In such cases pastors may even participate in the negotiation between the families, dictating the ways in which the *kokooko* is to be conducted and doing all they can to shift attention to the 'white' wedding so as to turn that occasion into the primary event. The ICGC for instance makes sure that its marriage counselling committee has at its disposal beautiful clothes to lend to the couple for their white wedding in church and operates a nicely decorated house in one of the middle-class neighbourhoods in Accra where the couple can spend their wedding night, all under the watchful eye of one of its prominent female members. In these ways the churches are capable of not only replacing

traditional authority but also of shielding the couple from the kind of influences for which they hold the family and its customs responsible.

Pastors also tend to make an explicit effort by being present during the actual *kokooko*. This usually complicates matters further and is often the source of barely concealed tensions. The point is that the pastors are well aware of the fact that, whereas the couple may have indicated their desire to marry in Pentecostal fashion, most of their families may not be born-again Pentecostals and may not be inclined to acknowledge the authority of the pastor. I have witnessed a number of instances where verbal abuse occurred, directed against the presence of the pastors. On one such an instance an elderly man, belonging to the husband's party presenting gifts to the relatives of the prospective wife, rose to his feet demanding in an authoritarian voice that 'we must maintain our customs; there should be alcohol!'. Pointing at the refreshments that were distributed to the guests, he appeared to be angered by the fact that instead of the customary alcoholic beverages soft drinks were being handed out. He then continued by pointing at the pastor of the Harvest Ministries International who represented the church of the couple and who in his view was directly to blame for this infringement of cultural values. The embarrassing situation got out of hand when in reaction to his anger people began to shout at one another, risking ruining the ceremony which should have been the pinnacle of successful marriage negotiations. Friends of the couple quickly took action, escorting the man to a distant corner of the compound and offering him some beer, out of sight of everyone else. On another occasion matters became complex because one of the 'fathers' of the bride (FABRO) happened to be a *ohene*, a chief, who was to be respected for his office particularly when he appeared in his full paraphernalia. Ritual gin (the so-called Schiedam Schnapps) was offered to him, something the couple, being confirmed Pentecostal believers, did not want to be involved in. Matters were resolved by offering the chief a place of honour in the house where the meeting was being held, and offering him some alcoholic beverages there, again out of sight of anybody else (chiefs are, in fact, supposed to consume food and drink out of sight of the public).

Once a marriage has taken place, most Pentecostal churches continue to engage with a couple by stressing the formation of the kind of conjugal relationships that keep the 'backward' family obligations at bay. One aspect of this ideology relates to the investments that a man and wife will make for their old age. The Pentecostal churches tend to stress that true Pentecostal couples should keep no secrets about each

other's income and that savings and investments should be for the benefit of both partners and their children. This ideology follows closely some of the laws the PNDC-Rawlings government<sup>3</sup> has been implementing in the last decade that affect customary family inheritance rules. These PNDC laws 111-114, generally known as the Intestate and Succession Law, were accepted by parliament in 1985 and were meant to implement and validate rules of inheritance which make it possible to prevent the matrilineage from taking hold of a man's property at death (see Awusabo-Asare 1990). In many of Ghana's predominantly Asante matrilineal family systems, inheritance would follow the line of the mother's brother. A person would inherit from his mother's brother and not from his own father. The new laws, however, have put in place a 'defence' for any man to ensure that his own children, and not the nephews from the mother's side, inherit his property on his death. In other words, these laws strengthen the conjugal relationship against the interests of the extended family. Pentecostalism has taken this up and carried it much further as an ideology to control expenditure. Each conjugal 'unit' is expected to spend one tenth of its net income on the church (the biblical law of tithing). Only when tithing has been closely adhered to can the Pentecostal believer rest assured that gifts to his wider family can safely proceed.

Pentecostal pastors are inclined to boast about these confrontational practices that stand in clear contrast to those of the ministers and pastors of the established and mainline Christian churches, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist. The ordained ministers and pastors of these churches officiate at marriages as well and claim a long history of their churches being at the vanguard of Christianizing marriage practices on the West African coast. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Pentecostal churches, this effort has been nothing but 'superficial' and 'lukewarm', and has not effectively altered 'traditional' practices, but instead accommodated them in forms that are nothing else but 'performance'. The Pentecostals perceive of these marriage practices in the established churches as a 'thin layer' of Christian culture, *de facto* leaving unaffected what goes on in a much more cultural understanding of marriage relations, faithfulness, marital responsibilities and the authority of the husband. A second element of this moral contestation is that the Pentecostal leaders tend to define marriage relations in terms of the conjugal bond as a consequence of the ideological project they are engaged in that promotes the nuclear family over the extended family. In their view, the established churches are much more

in favour of maintaining, emphasizing and underscoring extended family relations, confirming—in their eyes—the prototypical structure of African family life. In the Pentecostal rhetoric, however, the extended family is a liability to any newly wedded couple, something that may jeopardize the frail conjugal bond between husband and wife, and something that may tie the couple in all sorts of reciprocal relations over which they so easily run the risk of losing control. Marriage counselling therefore consists of lengthy discussions of what gift-giving means, what reciprocal obligations entail and how they should be dealt with in defence of the socio-economic ties within the nuclear family.

And last but not least there is the hotly debated issue of alcohol. Wedding parties of couples marrying in the established churches usually involve ‘boozing’ as the Pentecostals call it, mostly because none of the parties involved have misgivings about it. For the Pentecostals the issue is not only drunkenness or other forms of indecent behaviour, but the entire world of ancestral veneration that is related to the use of alcohol in ritual practice. Alcohol conjures up a world of ambiguous supernatural relations and sanctifications, which in the Pentecostal view are of sheer demonic quality. Ancestral deities are the accomplices of none other than the Devil, forces whose existence should not be denied but should be reckoned with, with all the precautions and countervailing powers a true Christian hopes to rely on. The established churches do not seem to entertain specific ideas about the dangers of alcohol and often do not move against its use. However, while the Pentecostals reject the mainline churches’ moral laxity, they know they stand accused of having to accommodate the use of alcohol. When non-Pentecostal family members demand alcohol during wedding ceremonies the pastors tend to negotiate a strict solution for the couple, telling them to give money to those family members that want to buy and consume alcoholic beverages. In this way the couple can be seen to give money, thereby increasing the respect they receive from their family members for being so considerate about the family’s need, while they themselves can still pretend that they have no knowledge of what these members have in fact done with it. Although the Pentecostal wedding has gained popularity because of its moral prestige and the common idea that it is less costly because of the absence of expensive alcoholic beverages, in reality expenses on drinks can still be considerable.

What the Pentecostals do share with the mainline churches is the civic nature of their marriages. For both Christian groupings it is clear that the customary marriage, in terms of the *kokooko*, is a crucial but

nonetheless 'traditional' step towards a fully officiated and acknowledged marriage. Both groups view the *kokooko* as an engagement to be followed by a public ceremony in church where the marriage will be formally recorded on paper. The civic process is two-pronged: on the one hand the acknowledgement and recording of the marriage as a formal arrangement is taken away from the domain of social memory. Customarily marriages were only 'recorded' in memory, but the recording by the churches contributes to the bureaucratic recording of the relationship and enhances the public legitimacy of church and wedding simultaneously. On the other hand the churches' ritual practice becomes an instrument in the nation-state project of the state's vested interest in knowing and controlling its citizenry. In terms of Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996, see also 2000) the churches play a constitutive role in turning their members away from the status of African cultural subjects in view of their customary rulers and authority structures, to that of the citizen entertaining individualized rights and obligations in the context of a liberal state. Failing the creation of an effective civil service and an efficient registry and taxonomy in terms of recording identities and civil relations, the state embraces the function performed by the churches, although it usually has no means of assessing the status of the pastors that claim to have been ordained.

The enormous proliferation of churches over the past decades has complicated matters and although newspaper reports appear occasionally on cases of fraudulent activities of some pastors, the Ghanaian state has thus far only welcomed the contribution these churches have made to this element of state formation. For the Pentecostals who usually have little internal regulatory power to deal with fraudulent cases (most of these churches are of the one-man type and therefore are not included in umbrella organizations with vested powers of control and inspection such as is the case in denominations) the prestige their marriage practices acquire in Pentecostal circles is predominantly based on what they perceive as an emancipation from the claws of cultural history and memory. Their discourse of control and inspection of marriage relations is based more on the cultural aspects than the elements of citizenship that are also contained in it. While many genuine Pentecostal leaders find fraudulence in the 'paper work' of marriages damaging to their status and prestige, and tend to proclaim that there are always rotten apples in any basket, they are usually much more concerned about the cultural implications of the relationship. The paper work is an effective means of contesting social memory and cultural obligations, an important reason for them to embrace the state-like model of 'fixing'

identities in signed and sealed papers. However, in the diaspora the opposite appears to be true, as the cultural aspects of the marriage relationship become prominent again.

### *Ghanaian marriage in the diaspora*

Since the arrival of large numbers of Ghanaian migrants in Europe, and particularly in the Netherlands, following the crises that deeply affected Ghana's economic and political stability in the 1970s and early 1980s, marriage has been a critical issue. Although Ghanaians perceived of migrating to Europe as a highly individualistic affair, the need to create and establish social bonds often became crucial immediately after arrival. The settlement and growth of the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands, now totalling an estimated 40,000, was certainly based to a large extent on marriage relationships. The reason why marriage became so important for immigrant groups like Ghanaians in the Netherlands was and still is precisely its civic nature and the 'papers' attached to it. Marriage became an important 'entry ticket' for many migrant groups into the Dutch welfare state and over the last two decades has acquired a highly contested significance in the context of Dutch immigration and identity policies. In that context marriage became a matter of investigation for the Dutch police and a range of special measures were taken, making marriage an important element in a tightening of identity politics in the Dutch state.

The history of this toughening of identity politics began with the post-World War II reconstruction period, which saw an ever-increasing demand for labour power in Dutch society (as elsewhere in western European society in the 1950s and 1960s, see Cohen 1987: 111-137). From the early 1960s, labour recruitment began to take place in regions immediately bordering on western Europe where labour was still reasonably cheap and readily available. A newly styled multicultural society was born. Recruitment teams were sent out to, among other countries, Morocco, Greece and Turkey, to enlist young men to work in specific Dutch companies or sectors, for example greenhouse horticultural production.

The so-called 'free recruitment' of labour was officially halted in 1973-1974 as a consequence of the tightening of the economic situation in the Netherlands (and elsewhere in Europe for that matter) which followed the oil crisis. Towards the end of the 1970s the Dutch labour market, however, showed shortages again, but this time no organized recruitment of labour from elsewhere took place. Instead groups from

other parts of the world saw chances of benefiting from the very attractive Dutch labour market. In some cases, such as in the Ghanaian case, this coincided with economic crises in their home countries. Towards the end of the 1980s a massive and forced expulsion of Ghanaian labour from Nigeria had taken place (some records speak of more than a million people) and many of these Ghanaians were looking for opportunities elsewhere in the world. Ghana's economy was rapidly deteriorating, aggravated by a deep political crisis, and a *coup d'état* in 1981 brought to power Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, who ruled the country thereafter for more than twenty years. For many, returning to Ghana was not an option, while Europe appeared to be a place of stability and prosperity. Migration focused not only on the former colonizer Great Britain, but particularly on countries such as Germany, Italy and the Netherlands where immigration was relatively easy. Sizeable Ghanaian migrant communities emerged in cities such as London, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Milan, Naples and Amsterdam.

By 1995 it was estimated that more than 12 percent of the entire Ghanaian population was living abroad (Peil 1995: 345), and that, after cocoa and gold, migrant remittances had become the third main source of income in Ghana.<sup>4</sup> In the course of just a couple of years the Ghanaian migrant community in Amsterdam had grown to tens of thousands, concentrated particularly in the low-cost housing area in the south of the city, which rapidly came to be seen as a ghettoized area. Ghanaians found all sorts of low-paying odd jobs and many began working without the required permits. The increase in numbers of migrants not only from Ghana but from other parts of the world in unregulated employment and without formal status of any kind soon led to policies concerning the containment of 'illegality' in the Netherlands. Towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, Africa came to figure as a force largely responsible for undercutting the efforts of the Dutch state, which had been developing techniques to control access to the common goods of its welfare society.

From the 1980s onwards, a widely shared, public concern with 'illegality' (in Dutch *het illegalen-vraagstuk*) developed. Wild guesses began circulating in Dutch politics about the total size of the illegal migrant labour population and the extent of the damage perceived to be done to the Dutch economy. From the late 1980s, this concern also focused on Ghanaian migrants as police officials initiated a public debate about the number of illegal Ghanaians supposedly living in such low-cost housing areas of places such as Amsterdam, and suggested a link between the numbers of illegal Ghanaians and the rising crime rate. In contrast with other ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, disproportionate atten-

tion was focused by Dutch officials on the West African community. It was soon estimated that the number of 'undocumented' West Africans was likely to double, if not triple, official figures of Ghanaians (see van den Broek 1992). West African identities came to occupy the centre of the public's concern with 'open borders' of the Netherlands.

The Dutch government began introducing a series of laws aimed at curtailing illegal immigration and with the hope of enhancing the state's effectiveness in supervising civic society (see Staring 1998, van der Leun 1998). Among these laws and measures were the introduction of the so-called SoFi number in the early 1980s, a fiscal code given by the Dutch state to every citizen at birth making it possible to keep track of a person's income, tax status and social security claims, and a law making it compulsory to be able to prove one's identity whenever asked at one's place of work (*Wet Identificatieplicht*). This trend culminated in April 1996 with the publication of yet another government ruling, which came to be known as the '*Problemlanden circulaire*' (the Circular Letter on Problem Countries). This circular blacklisted five countries, Ghana in particular, for having a notorious record of producing fraudulent identity documents. In addition to the normal procedures for migration and documents, from now on another instrument would be added to control immigration from these countries, 'verification' (*verificatie*). It implies that for any identity document required by Ghanaians in the Netherlands (passport, marriage certificate, birth certificate etc.) the Dutch government is entitled to investigate the person's identity in the country of origin in whatever way the authorities feel necessary. Such investigations, carried out by Dutch officials in Ghana, usually with the help of local informants and detectives, involve the interrogation of relatives, friends and colleagues, researching school, church and hospital for any further information on the person.

The impact of these measures on the Ghanaian migrant community have been important, particularly as they were related to the prevention of a particular type of marriage—the contract marriage. A law that sought to prohibit contract marriages (*Wet Schijn-huwelijken*), aimed at limiting the possibility of using marriage to gain entry into Dutch society, did not deliver the desired results. Although the law allowed investigations by police officers into the true nature of any marriage with a foreigner, it appeared towards the end of the 1980s that Ghanaians and other immigrants had been using the contract marriage as a loophole for gaining entry into the Netherlands. In interviews I conducted in the Ghanaian community in The Hague it became clear that men had been spending considerable sums of money on arranging contract marriages with Dutch nationals, particularly persons of Surinamese



descent. Sums of money spent on these marriages sometimes could be as much as \$10,000 or more and were often the subject of exploitative relations in which illegal marriage brokers played a part. Any marriage to a foreigner is expected to last for three years before a foreigner is allowed to settle in the Netherlands independently of his/her spouse, provided that he or she has been able to secure employment. A contract marriage therefore had to exist for at least these three years, making sure that it would meet all the appearances of being a real marriage of two people *de facto* living together and sharing the same bed. In the case of any suspicion regarding the true nature of a marriage, police officers were and are allowed under the law '*Schijnhuwelijken*' to make investigations, and, as a popular joke would have it, to 'count the number of toothbrushes in the bathroom'. Proof of guilt would result in the deportation of the foreigner back to his or her home country and a lawsuit against the Dutch citizen, once a contract relation was discovered.<sup>5</sup>

'Marriage' quickly became a sensitive matter in the Ghanaian migrant community, leading to many complexities in the various types of relationship any person could be involved in. As far as men were concerned, these relationships could easily consist of four types simultaneously. The first would be the relationship with the wife still residing in Ghana or elsewhere to whom the person was married to according to formalized law in Ghana. A second relationship could exist in the form of a customary marriage because the statutory marriage does not exclude the possibility of being married according to 'custom' in addition to a 'White' marriage (this is true less for women than for men). The third relationship concerns the one in the diaspora relating to the partner of a contractual relationship, which one may need to be able to stay in the Netherlands. While this usually implies not living with that contractual partner in reality, most men would therefore also be living with a woman (usually a Ghanaian) 'who is cooking my food', as it is euphemistically referred to, thus forming the fourth type of relationship. The apparently simple question, 'Are you married?', which I initially used to ask my interlocutors during fieldwork interviews, quickly proved to be a domain of confusion, embarrassment or evasive answers. The term 'marriage' could be interpreted to mean very different things depending on context and situation, and the answer to the question could also jeopardize the status of the respondent living in the Netherlands if it brought to light the fact that the person was involved in a contractual relationship as well.

The increasing pressure related to the police investigation of marriage

relationships, particularly those of Ghanaians, made matters worse. After all, the contract marriage was basically perceived by Ghanaian men as a costly but temporary affair. Many of the migrants had hoped to be able to marry prospective partners in Ghana or to bring their spouses to the Netherlands; an outcome which in the course of the 1990s became virtually impossible as all sorts of 'verified' documents were requested which proved very hard to come by (birth, marriage or 'bachelor certificates'). Back home in Ghana, questioning by local detectives of relatives, friends, church leaders and others about personal identities became a nightmare leading to confusion, intimidation, suspicion and family rivalries.

Within the Ghanaian community in The Hague these measures were increasingly being perceived as insulting and a blow to dignity, respect and self-esteem, unlike the perspective of Dutch officials for whom the exercise of verification and investigation of marriages represented a 'technical' response to the failure of attempts to tighten access to the Netherlands. Many Ghanaian men and, to a lesser extent, women were facing an investigation into their existing or prospective marriage relations by Dutch officials, while they were also faced with the problem of the moral standing of their relationships from the perspective of their families and the social control of the wider community. Families back home did not always understand the nature of contract marriages or the nature of the investigations that Dutch officials were making of their son's and daughter's identity and civic status. Wives in Ghana complained bitterly about the moral status of their husbands in the diaspora, and in many cases hopes were high regarding the prospect of being able to leave Ghana and join their lawful husbands in Europe. Pressures increased on the Ghanaian men in the diaspora, expecting them to be sensitive to their (prospective) spouses' desires to be fetched from Ghana, pressures from which the men found it hard to escape. In some cases they also had to face occult threats, resulting from the fact that families in Ghana entertained extremely high expectations of what it would bring them if one of their daughters would marry or join a partner living in Europe. I met men who for this reason had become fearful of travelling to Ghana, anxious as they were to meet members of the family of the women they were supposedly married to or engaged to, and to whom they could not fulfil the promises they once had made. Families back home would hear gossip about men having affairs with other women while in Europe, the loose morals that European societies displayed and the disrespect for customary practices and morals there. These rumours were once more strengthened when

stories emerged in Ghana of Ghanaian women becoming involved in prostitution circles in Europe, even when they had lawfully wedded husbands living in Ghana, Europe or elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

This touches upon a further aspect of the perceived vulnerability of marriage, the increasingly transnational nature of marriage arrangements of couples living in the diaspora. They have become 'triple-sited' in the sense of involving partners or families living 'back home', living in a European country such as the Netherlands and living elsewhere, usually in the USA. Consultations between families are increasingly circling around these various locations, while the actual wedding often requires the involvement of people from these various locations to make it all work. I have witnessed marriages where the husband or the wife lives in the Netherlands with the partner living in Germany, England or the USA but at the same time involving family representatives from Ghana or from other places around the world. While this may be true for many other migrant communities in the Netherlands and elsewhere, the point is how these communities perceive this in moral terms and how they subsequently deal with or determine the status of the marriages concerned.

An important development that has taken place in response to the contested nature of marriage relationships in the Ghanaian situation is the establishment of Pentecostal churches in the community. They have proved to be capable of forging a status model for the arrangement of marriages within the community which, though not being *civic* in nature, has in fact helped to rebuild elements of dignity and self-esteem for those involved.

### *The Pentecostal marriage in the diaspora*

The following story elucidates some aspects of the way in which the Pentecostal churches in the diaspora play a role in restoring elements of the civil nature of Ghanaian marriage relations, even if the marriage will never have a civic status in the host country.

A Ghanaian friend of mine informed me that his eighteen-year-old stepdaughter was going to get married, 'although', as he said, 'she shouldn't be here'. He and his Ghanaian wife were living in The Hague and belonged to the Ghanaian migrant community there, which comprised an estimated 4,000 individuals. Although his wife had a residence permit for the Netherlands, and he had applied for one some time ago, he had not been granted one. His stay in the country was therefore *de facto* illegal, and so was that of his stepdaughter, who had been born long before his wife migrated to the Netherlands and the two had met. His stay in The Hague and that of his adoptive daughter were in constant jeopardy, risking

deportation back to Ghana. She had joined his household a couple of years ago, coming directly from Ghana.

After settling in The Hague, he had become a prominent and widely respected member of one of the eleven Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the city. Knowing that by marrying his wife, who had a residence permit, he would not only qualify for a permit as well but would also become the subject of obtrusive investigations of the nature of that marriage, he quickly arranged for the wedding to take place under the auspices of the newly established Ghanaian Pentecostal church to which they belonged. The pastor did all he could to ensure that he was not going 'to put together in holy matrimony that which is unholy in God's eyes' and thus had been making extensive inquiries into the couple's background and their families in Ghana. The wedding had subsequently indeed been held in church in Pentecostal style ('expensive clothing!' my friend particularly emphasized) and for the local community the status of their marriage had become unquestionable. The church wedding also helped to underline his genuine motive and 'love' for his Ghanaian partner, although a civic marriage could still not take place.

Now it was his daughter's turn. The worries were that her illegal stay in the country was going to be noticed by the authorities. In addition there were concerns about what my friend termed 'the weak morality of Dutch society', by which he specifically meant sexual permissiveness and free relations between adolescent boys and girls. An increasing urge was felt to secure both her residential as well as her moral position in the community. Soon a suitable spouse was found in one of the other Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the city. The two pastors discussed and agreed upon the matter and it appeared that the young man was in possession of a residence permit. Things could not have been better and although the girl was only eighteen years old the two pastors moved swiftly to mediate the marriage between the family representatives of the couple in The Hague, and between The Hague and Ghana. The 'white wedding' took place in the husband's church and was attended by a large section of the Ghanaian community. The festivities as well as the pastoral blessings all underlined the moral standing and legitimacy of the marriage, despite the fact that no formal law in the Netherlands or in Ghana would recognize it. Nevertheless, this timely marriage saved the family and particularly my friend's status from embarrassment regarding both possible investigations and community gossip about the things adolescent girls can get themselves involved in The Netherlands, even under the very eyes of their parents.

This example demonstrates that, although the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands cannot pursue a civic marriage as a kind of strategy for countering 'culture' in the way their partner churches in Ghana are doing, the similarity is still striking in the way in which marriage remains a domain of contestation. The cultural complexities the Pentecostal churches in the diaspora are dealing with are manifold. On the one hand they face the same difficulties as the Pentecostal churches back home in Ghana. Some Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe operate as branches or satellite congregations of larger churches that have their headquarters in Ghana. Important examples of these transnationalized churches are the International Central Gospel Church of Mensa Otabil, the Lighthouse Chapel International of Dag Heward Mills and the International Word

Miracle Church of Charles Asare. Similar to the more denominational Pentecostal churches, such as the Church of Pentecost or the Assemblies of God, these churches run their international connections and overseas branches in accordance with strict rules and regulations set out by the overall leadership of the church. The overseas branches are expected to follow whatever guidelines their headquarters have laid down, particularly on such important issues as marriages, funerals or outdoor ceremonies.

At the time fieldwork took place in The Hague, out of the six Ghanaian-led churches that were established in the city since the mid-1980s, three were satellite congregations of Ghana-based churches, namely the Church of Pentecost, the Christian Outreach Mission International and the Global Revival Ministries International. The other Ghanaian churches have been established in the diaspora, have their headquarters in one of the European cities and started satellite congregations in places such as The Hague while also establishing branches 'back home' in Ghana. While the other three were of this type, carrying names such as the Acts Revival Church International, one of them, the Rhema Gospel Church International, made an explicit effort to begin a satellite congregation operating from The Hague in Accra in one of the latter's newly emerging suburbs known as Mile 7. Each of these churches has a membership of 150-250 adults on average in a community totalling an estimated 4,000 Ghanaian nationals. Because of the growth in numbers of Ghanaian churches in The Hague (I counted eleven in 2001) the average number of members per church has been somewhat declining over the years, in some cases caused by the internal splits of these churches. Throughout, the churches maintained a high level of moral authority in the community as not many of the Ghanaian migrants took up membership of one the existing Dutch churches in the city, the language barrier being a factor of importance here. Overall, contact between Ghanaian and Dutch churches has remained extremely limited and usually only a few Dutch could be seen to attend the Ghanaian church services or other meetings.

One way in which the churches involved themselves in the lives of many Ghanaians in the city was and still is by organizing a wide variety of meetings for prayer and deliverance, for women's, men's and youth fellowships, choir practice, special 'harvests' (collections of money) and so on. While many Ghanaians are working long, hard hours commonly in semi-skilled types of employment, usually having more than one job at the same time, the church meetings also represented a form of entertainment and sociability, limiting to some extent the level to

which their members could become involved in things outside the community. Responsibility and morality in this sense go hand in hand with some level of social control, welcomed by many in a situation of persisting unfamiliarity with Dutch society. Perhaps the highest level of interaction exists with one or two specific Dutch Pentecostal communities in which it is not uncommon to have English-speaking services. This situation of relative isolation may have been more particular for The Hague as compared to the situation of the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam. Not only is the Amsterdam migrant community more than five times larger, the interaction with Dutch and other religious groups appears to have been a little more intense throughout the years, while the number of Ghanaian-led Pentecostal churches is also much larger (an estimated twenty).

In both places, Ghanaian interest groups, representing Ghanaian migrant issues to the local authorities, were and still are keener to engage in interaction with Dutch society.<sup>7</sup> These interest groups are comprised of different commonly ethnically based associations (in Twi known as *kuo*) and mediate the position of the Ghanaian community in general on the basis of minority policies the city councils are developing. Compared to the Ghanaian churches, however, these interest groups hardly represent any form of moral authority, do not maintain the kind of transnational linkages the churches appear to have, do not develop specific links with Ghana, but rather focus on the living and working conditions in the Netherlands. While their focus is local and morally neutral, they place great emphasis on their role as mediators between the Ghanaian citizens in the Netherlands and the local authorities, thus taking part in what can be considered the civil society where the representation of minorities is concerned. In The Hague the local interest group maintaining contact with the local authorities, known as Ghanatta, has a small membership of only about twenty people, reflecting the marginal status it has in the Ghanaian community. Though being perceived by the authorities in The Hague as the representative body for the Ghanaian people, and not the Ghanaian churches with their far greater membership, in reality the Ghanaian community never perceived Ghanatta as a body bestowed with civic responsibility and serving the interest of civil morality. As the organization arranged big parties from time to time, the churches were inclined to marginalize it even further by proclaiming that the body only worked for 'fun and entertainment' as one leader called it, never engaging itself in more serious issues that would involve respectability and responsibility. Being transnational in focus, the localized issues of the position of minorities in the

city were not of much interest to the churches and their following and the occasional talks with civil servants and policy-makers in The Hague about such matters usually generated a minimum of interest.

The churches' interest lies at a much wider level of interaction, not contained by the specific local circumstances of staying in the Netherlands but focused on the creation of a kind of morality that is relevant in different locations at the same time. The fact that these churches are established in the diaspora and become relevant back home and in other places simultaneously means that Ghanaian Pentecostalism and its ideas of responsibility and morality are being reproduced in many places around the world at the same time. While, in the case of marriage arrangements, this may lead to extensive processes of networking along these transnational linkages, it may at the same time produce different ideas and practices concerning the actual meaning and moral status of an important function such as a wedding. The simultaneity in the production of Pentecostalism does not necessarily imply a simultaneity in the production of meaning and moral status of such events. It is in this context that churches operating from Ghana usually find their overseas branches becoming too permissive in moral terms. Particularly in matters of marriage and relationships, they feel they have a mission to educate their overseas congregations and to keep them on the 'narrow path of salvation', as a pastor of the Lighthouse Chapel put it. Modernity is certainly no guarantee of a higher morality in their perception of western societies. This means, however, that the overseas Pentecostal churches are caught between two contesting 'cultures'. On the one hand, the Ghanaian context of Pentecostalism and the cultural critique that appears to dominate Pentecostal practices in that context is still considered relevant in the diaspora situation. As was the case in the situation of my friend's stepdaughter, the pastor of this church closely scrutinized the wedding proceedings to make sure that traditional practices could not take over the arrangements and the ceremony. No *kokoko* took place in The Hague because the required prestation of gifts from the husband's family to her family was conducted in Ghana, supervised by a pastor in Accra. The wedding took place in church and a small party was organized at the husband's parents' house, without alcoholic drinks or 'lustful' dancing, as both families involved were churchgoers.

On the other hand, overseas branches are also expected to present a cultural critique of their host society and to distance themselves from the cultural practices and styles that seem to govern western arrangements and ceremonies. To some extent, by so doing, the Pentecostal

churches and their members take pride in their African and Ghanaian style of marriage ceremonies, specifically where these concern styles of beautification, clothing, adornment and so forth, while they critically monitor what this 'Ghanaian style' actually entails. Miniskirts, extensive jewellery, wild hair styles, 'lustful' dancing are things that go beyond their religious limits and members are made aware in the diaspora Pentecostal churches of what these limits mean. Within the Ghanaian migrant community, finely tuned differences exist between marriages that are arranged and conducted in a Pentecostal way compared to those organized in a non-Pentecostal fashion. These differences may go unnoticed by an outside observer of these festivities as they both appear colourful, authentically 'African' and lively. For instance, while jewellery of all kinds is highly appreciated and people generally like to demonstrate their wealth and success in life by wearing expensive necklaces, rings and watches, in Pentecostal circles men are not supposed to have earrings, not even the earring that carries the highly popular '*gye nyame*' ('except God') sign, a symbol well known in Ghanaian popular culture. It is this kind of subtle and fine tuning of dress-codes, styles of behaviour and forms of responsibility that renders a specific civil morality to the Pentecostal form of wedding. Some members of the Ghanaian community made clear to me that many newly wed couples had increasingly opted for the Pentecostal form as it is usually less costly (no alcoholic drinks, no expensive music bands) while it has a higher moral status. 'Outside the churches anybody can marry anybody', a friend explained. Even non-Pentecostal members of the community (a minority because of the overriding dominance of the Pentecostal faith in the community) acknowledged without any hesitation the status symbol weddings have within the context of the church. Marriages outside the church easily give way to questions and gossip about the other relationships that either of the two partners may still be involved in.

These notions of responsibility and morality imply, almost automatically, that the contract marriages are hardly ever conducted in grand style with massive public attention, partying and ceremonies, and are often arranged in silence. Costly as the contract marriage is anyway, this form of marriage is perceived too much as something that is enforced upon the migrant by the political system of the country, not something to be enjoyed in a festive atmosphere.

In terms of hierarchy, the Pentecostal marriage is at the top, contesting the status of marriages arranged according to Dutch or general western styles, or those arranged in 'traditional' or Ghanaian customary fashion. It produces its own domain of civic responsibility (the



Pentecostal wedding is 'formal' in the eyes of the family and the community) while stressing a particular civil morality about it (in terms of styles of behaviour and public respect and prestige). While much of the Pentecostal involvement in the maintenance of this status hierarchy can be explained by pointing to the community's troubled external relations revolving around the issues of immigration, residence permits, Ghanaian identity in the host society and so forth, it appears that these considerations are relative when compared to internal factors of morality. The Pentecostal leaders' concern about establishing the newly wed couple as a nuclear family is similar to what leaders do in Ghana, a sense of not being incorporated in an extended family life, but in fact generating a notion of independence with regard to family obligations and responsibilities. Couples living in the diaspora are under considerable pressure to take the needs of their respective family members to heart, perhaps even more than would have been the case in Ghana. After all, in many ways getting married in the diaspora offers the certainty of being able to stay in the West, to make money and to engage in reciprocal relations with both families of the couple at the same time. Often the financial constraints become unbearable, and if reciprocal obligations whereby money should be remitted on a regular basis to relatives living in Ghana are not acknowledged, this tends to produce anxieties of a supernatural kind. The Pentecostals' claims of having superior heavenly powers on their side, the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst through which speaking in tongues, prayer healing and deliverance of evil powers becomes available for the true believer, is deeply significant in this respect (van Dijk 1999).

Gift relations with relatives in particular signal a peril of spiritual danger. Through gifting, evil powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft may present themselves in the lives of the giver and of the receiver. In the marriage counselling that Pentecostal pastors organize for those about to marry or those who have just married, these spiritual dangers of reciprocity are spelled out at length, particularly so in the diaspora situation. The community constantly feels itself besieged by dangers from within. Misfortunes due to malevolent and unseen powers may befall couples in their everyday lives. The expectations of their relatives in Ghana run high and are hardly ever fully satisfied, often leading to jealousy (*ahoye*), a state of mind that makes people easily fall prey to the forces of witchcraft. Occasionally the community is shaken by forms of physical violence, loss of money or property or the unexpected death of children, which are all taken to be signs of something wrong in the spiritual domain that the couple has entered together. Hence

the wedding of my friend's daughter to her partner was indeed something that produced all these considerations of how their 'nuclear' status could be safeguarded spiritually, how they should be counselled, what their obligations would amount to, and most importantly how by marrying in a Pentecostal church a superiority in the moral and spiritual protection of their relationship could be established. The marriage ceremony in church therefore took place in a context of religious excitement in which speaking in tongues (*kasa foforo*: literally, speaking the new language) was considered important as a sign of the benevolent presence of the Holy Spirit. The marriage was not only 'blessed' by the pastor of her husband's church, but moreover 'sealed' or 'consecrated' (*nteho*) so as to seal it off from malevolent spiritual powers.

It is in this respect that problems with the Dutch authorities concerning 'papers' and identity may overshadow or even deeply affect a marriage and a nuclear family. They can be interpreted as one of the misfortunes caused by these malevolent powers. Hence, the issue that is dealt with in the context of the churches is not so much the legitimacy of their functions with regard to the host society, but instead the morality of these functions from the perspective of communal consciousness. Questions of legitimacy—of their stay in the country, of their identity papers, of their civic functions such as marriages—become translated and experienced in discourses of morality, i.e. the control of ulterior powers, of reciprocal relations, of blessings, spiritual protection and heavenly benevolence. Therefore uncivil relations are those whereby men and women live together in an 'unholy' state, not blessed by a pastor, not covered by the churches' theology, and not investigated according to the set rules and guidelines dictated by Pentecostal ideologies. While pastors are aware of the fact that some of their members live together outside marriage, and may understand some of the reasons why, they do not cease to emphasize the need to have a blessing for those relationships; a necessity not inspired by the desire to create greater legitimacy in the host society, but inspired by the urge to establish a moral community in a web of transnational linkages moving far beyond the perimeters of Dutch society.

### *Conclusion*

The question thus remains as to whether the performance of civic functions, such as marriages, has any relevance to the issues of social respectability these churches are involved in both at home or abroad. The existing literature appears to assume that particularly in the

diaspora the emergence of so many of these Pentecostal churches in African migrant communities is related to, and should be understood by, a quest for social respectability. Ter Haar, for instance, writes about the Pentecostal faith of African migrants in Europe:

For many immigrants, their religious beliefs equip them with the spiritual strength and social contacts necessary to survive, and even to begin the long climb up the ladder of social respectability in a country which, like most parts of Western Europe, has gradually become more hostile to foreigners. (Ter Haar 1998: 43)

Exploring the civic and civil nature of marriages within the diaspora Ghanaian Pentecostal churches shows us otherwise. The extent to which these churches take western or Dutch standards of social respectability as their paradigmatic point of departure in the ways in which they structure their functions remains to be seen. A 'long climb up the ladder of social respectability', where this is basically a western ladder, is certainly not an unquestioned part of their ideology and praxis. Instead, what can be noticed is that such concepts as 'integration' or 'adaptation'—certainly when they concern important functions in the life-cycle of individual members—are hardly ever present, but indeed may even become despised or contested. The Pentecostal marriage ceremonies are not focused on 'integration' or 'adaptation' to Dutch standards but instead create a critical negotiation of western norms and practices. They are not focused on the Dutch ladder of social respectability nor do they represent an urge to climb that ladder by seemingly fulfilling Dutch or popular requirements of what a marriage should be. It is instead fascinating to note how, in the diaspora more strongly than at home, legitimacy is translated in specific ideological notions of morality. Again, these notions do not conform to those of a generally and deeply secularized Dutch society where over the last decades marriage in church has become exceptional. This quest for legitimacy in terms of a Pentecostal morality apparently stands on its own feet, so to speak, and negotiates Ghanaian cultural practices on the one hand and western notions of civiness and civility on the other.

The web of transnational relations through which Pentecostalism at home connects with Pentecostal groups and ideologies outside Ghana in a variety of other places appears to be of much higher relevance. This may reveal a kind of indigenous cosmopolitan orientation (however paradoxical the term might be) in which an outer world and all the relations this may imply is considered truly relevant for the creation of cultural competences such as the performing of proper marriage ceremonies. At the same time this orientation declares both the

world of Ghanaian cultural practices and the world of Dutch paper identities as being parochial, partially relevant and negotiable to say the least. Through the construction of ritual practices like marriages, but also funerals, and outdoor ceremonies, this connectivity to a larger world is given shape and meaning. I often noticed that feelings of empowerment were also restored in the construction of this wider-ranging legitimacy and morality of, in this case, marriage arrangements. No longer do the dictates of the family or the nation-state rule absolutely, holding sway over important aspects of this function, but avenues for negotiation and therefore for regaining control have been opened. Both at home and in the diaspora many young people find this very attractive as it signals another element of modern personhood the religious ideology of Pentecostalism brings them. It opens, after all, the possibility of being able to define for oneself what it means to be 'civic' and 'civil' in any situation, despite the fact that in situations of tough identity politics this may be nothing more than a figment of Pentecostal imagination.

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## NOTES

1. Research took place in the Ghanaian community in The Hague in the years 1997-2000; in Gaborone research started in 2002. Research in Ghana was made possible by a grant from the Dutch Organization for the Advancement of Research in the Tropics (WOTRO).

2. These may concern substances such as the use of certain herbs and concoctions for the purpose of healing, ritual cleansing through taking baths or the symbolic use of fire, candles, sacrificial blood and so forth.

3. PNDC is the Provisional National Defense Council, the council formed after the *coup d'état* that brought Flight Lieutenant J. Rawlings to power in 1981.

4. Personal communication Dr. B. Agyeman-Duah, Institute of Economic Affairs, Ghana (October 1998).

5. For Ghanaian women an additional but more complicated trajectory was available for the arrangement of these marriages that would run via prostitution networks, a trajectory that I have to omit in the context of this article.

6. A publication in the Heinemann African writers series contains autobiographical data of a Ghanaian woman who traveled to Europe (Frankfurt, Germany) in search of her husband, only to find to her surprise that her husband was involved with many other women working for him as prostitutes and that she was going to be one of them (A. Darko 1995).

7. In Amsterdam this body is known as RECOGIN, which is comprised of a variety of ethnic associations, particularly those of Ashanti, the Brong-Ahafo, Fante, Ewe and Kwahu.