



Aspects of Akan Oral Literature Genres on the Social Construction of Masculinity

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Abstract

The paper examines how the Akans conceptualise masculinity as a social construct through language. The paper hinges on the theoretical framework of Language Ideology that comments on how people's language and culture are manifested and rationalized based on their social constructs and philosophy (AUTHOR 2024a 132). It discusses Akan masculinity using, Akan proverbs, idioms, panegyrics, surrogate language, folksongs and hunters' songs. We will see that masculinity is enshrined in the Akan, language, culture, past social experiences, worldview and the past wars. Emphasis is put on the patriarchal nature of the Akan society. Even though some literary expressions on Akan masculinity highlight on male supremacy and dominance, other expressions put unnecessary pressure on men to act beyond their physical, mental and financial capabilities.

Key terms: *language ideology, masculinity, proverbs, panegyrics, surrogate language, hunters' songs*

1.0 Introduction

Language and gender have been widely researched, discussing how language is used to comment and delve into the social and behavioural patterns of men and women in different societies. Rothwell (2000: 36) opined that "Sex is biological (female –male),

and gender is social role behaviour (feminine–masculine). Gender is a manifestation of what culture makes out of the “raw material” of biological sex”. AUTHOR stated that

Gender has complex meanings, behaviour, social interpretation, and assessment. In most societies, men want to control and dominate women, while the women struggle to emancipate themselves. There ensues gender conflict, especially in African societies where the feminine gender wants to rub shoulders with the male in modern societies (AUTHOR 2010:168).

AUTHOR (2010:168) postulated that “Some societies base their gender stratification on the militaristic nature of men in the past. Men had used their warrior roles and economic roles in their families to reinforce the social devaluation and oppression of women.” (See AUTHOR 2016 ; Kottak 2003: 178). Other societies cite the biological differences, the sociocultural and political perceptions including chieftaincy.

This paper will contribute to masculinity studies by African and Ghanaian scholars. Most studies on masculinity relied only on proverbs and not much on other oral literature genres. This paper therefore examines other oral literature forms including, idioms, panegyrics, surrogate language, folksongs, and hunters’ songs to help understand the cultural ideals of Akan masculinity. This paper considers the synergy among gender studies, oral literature and ethnography of communication. It emphasizes that Akan masculinity is deeply rooted in sociocultural constructs.

The paper postulates that masculinity is currently challenged by contemporary sociocultural changes. There is “masculinity crisis” based on westernisation, women empowerment, western education, urbanisation, economic and financial growth of femininity (Itulua-Abumere 2013:44). The paper demonstrates that even though power is a prominent characteristic of masculinity, not all men are powerful enough to construct power in different ways in their sociocultural setups (Kiesling 2007: 659,660).

1.1. The Akan Language and People

The word “Akan” refers to the people as well as their language (AUTHOR 2024a: 138 - 139). Akans are considered from both ethnographic and linguistic perspectives. The ethnographic Akans encompass the linguistic Akans plus the Achantas, Aowins, Nzemas, and Sehwis, who do not speak Akan as a first language, but as a second language, and share cultural similarities with the Akans. The linguistic Akans speak Akan as their native language and are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. In the 2021 national population census, 47.5% of Ghanaians was linguistic Akans and about 44% of

the rest, speak Akan as non- native speakers. The linguistic Akans occupy the greater part of southern Ghana.

Akan is spoken as a native language in nine (9) out of the sixteen (16) regions in Ghana, namely Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western, and Western North. The Akan speaking communities in the Oti Region are surrounded by the Ewe and Gur language communities. The Akan language comprises 13 dialects: Agona, Akyem, Akuapem, Akwamu, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwawu, Twifo, and Wassaw. There are some Bono speakers in Côte d'Ivoire. Akan is studied from primary school up to the university level (AUTHOR 2024a:139). The names Bono and Asante, refer to the people, the dialects and the regions they occupy in Ghana.

1.2. Methodology and Data Analysis

The study uses qualitative methods, including content analysis and hermeneutics, to interpret and analyze the various collected data on Akan masculinity (see AUTHOR (2024a:142) The greater portions of the data were collected from published papers, books and Akan dictionaries on proverbs to have a wide range of proverbs from different sources. I consulted dictionaries by the following authors, Adu Gyamfi (1999), Akrofi (1958), Appiah & Appiah (2000), Offei-Ayisi (1966) and Rattray (1941). Other major sources on oral literature genres were from Nketia (1978a, 1974, 1973). A content analysis of the genres on masculinity and their applicability in contemporary Akan society due to urbanisation, modernisation and western education was done. The hermeneutics method was used for the interpretations of the data and the proper understanding of Akan masculinity.

The proverbs, panegyrics, drum language, and folksongs were collected by concentrating on expressions on masculinity. In analysing the literary genres, the literal and superficial meanings were first examined. The content and the context under which the expressions are used, and their extended meanings based on the Akan language ideology were discussed.

I further did a content analysis of the oral literature genres with renowned scholars and retired broadcasters.¹ They provided some proverbs, panegyrics, folksongs, and drum language that relate to Akan masculinity, and gave their comments, interpretations and suitability for the current generation. The proverbs are categorised into thematic areas discussed and analysed in section 5.

¹ They included Mr. Bosie Amponsah, Agya Koo Nimo (a folklorist), Mr. Banning Peprah an Akan M. Phil holder and Mr. Sarfo Kantanka, an Asante cultural and royal historian at the Manhyia Place in Kumase.

Research Questions:

1. What is the social concept of masculinity from the Akan perspectives?
2. What sociocultural practices are reserved for the masculine?
3. What literary expressions show evidences of Akan constructions of masculinity?
4. How does the concept of masculinity put challenges on Akan men?

2. Theoretical framework

The paper uses the theoretical framework of **Language Ideology** to discuss masculinity from the perspective of Akan anthropology, culture, language and communication.

2.1 Language Ideology (hereafter LI)

Language Ideology is a versatile framework for analyzing aspects of Akan cultural practices including, the family, poverty, gender and power and it is ideal for discussing masculinity in Akan (AUTHOR, 2024a, 2016, 2010). Ideologies are shared and predictable beliefs and ideas of a people that are real and implicit in their everyday life situations and social worlds within a period of time (Kroskrity 2006:498).

In ideological studies, to understand people's behaviour in social interaction, it is better to know their socio-cultural, environmental, political and historical backgrounds. The lack of these brings misunderstandings in intercultural communication including discourse about masculinity. The synergy of masculinity, social behaviour and the literary expressions used are strongly based on the people's language and cultural ideology. Makus (1990) stated as follows:

Ideological representation cannot be explained by the inclinations of individuals, nor can the motive of trickery be necessarily assigned to it. Ideological formulations remain largely unconscious to both their speaker and their receivers. Consequently, although rhetors may choose what they will say, ideology theory maintains that these choices are determined within the common sense of the culture (Makus 1990:500).

The above testifies that ideologically, culture, society, the environment and linguistic practices have absolute power on the individuals (AUTHOR 2024a:140; Makus 1990:503). AUTHOR (2024a:139) postulated that "A society's ideological concept on any aspect of their life including gender, make them see the concept as socially-owned, having'

inner-perspectives, shared phenomenon, unchangeable, inevitable, indispensable, real and natural. And that is why they will always justify and rationalize its existence.”

Silverstein (1998:123) posited that “Language ideologies are sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” AUTHOR (2024a:140) thus remarks that “Language use and its interpretation are based on the linguistic and cultural ideology of the group”. Akan concept and expressions of masculinity are hence rationalised and justified by the people, especially males. This confirms Verschueren’s (1999:198) assertion that “language ideologies are habitual ways of thinking and speaking about language and language use, which are rarely challenged within a given community.” However, with the dynamism in language and culture, plus western education, women empowerment and globalisation, certain aspects of Akan masculinity have been challenged, especially by women.

Rumsey (1990:346), asserted that “linguistic ideologies are shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world.” LI effectively coordinates between languages, cultural systems, politics, concepts, worldview, people’s intellect, psychological behaviour, morality and sociocultural world (AUTHOR, 2016, 2010; Irvine 1989: 255). AUTHOR (2024a: 14) stated that ‘LI provides a sociocultural understanding and interpretation of the political, cultural, economic law, and religious processes, that are justifiable by the language community Again, LI affects people’s way of life and their local beliefs about language and culture.’

LI also discusses language policies in multilingual societies and the choice of language for education, politics and judicial systems and its justification (AUTHOR 2024a:141 Kroskrity, 2001:413, Silverstein, 1998:126). Irvine and Gal (2000:35) posited that “linguistic ideologies refer to the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them.” In this view, AUTHOR (2024a: 141) emphasized participants in the linguistic environment and performances as pivotal to LI.

To Fairclough (1989:2) “Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour.” The multiple functions of LI make it an ideal framework for analysing Akan literary expressions on masculinity. LI helps the

Akans to justify masculinity as part of gender behaviour and practices (AUTHOR 2024a:142; Van Dijk, 1998).

3. Definition of Masculinity and Literature Review

This paper argues that masculinity is not inherently biological, but it is ‘performed’ based on sociocultural practices, roles and norms. Itulua-Abumere (2013:43) looked at masculinity from the theatrical metaphor perspectives and posited that “masculinity is a performance, a set of stage directions, a ‘script’ that men learn to perform. In Akan, a man is recognised by performing the prescribed sociocultural defined masculine activities, in ‘masculinity cultural space’ (Hoffman et al., 2005). The Akan proverb, *barima wɔye no ɔko ano*, ‘man is made at the war front’, implies that a man should be resilient and brave.’ Men must not show ‘feminine’ emotions such as admitting to fear or pain, and are ridiculed for being effeminate if they are not aggressive (Adomako and Boateng 2011; Diabah and Amfo 2018, 2015; Hussein 2005:60; Mariwah, et al 2022; folksongs *ibid*).

Itulua-Abumere’s (2013:45) postulated that “the understanding of masculinity has demonstrated that masculinity is not ‘natural’. Instead, it is seen as a gender identity that is socially, culturally, historically and politically constructed.” Masculinity represents the sociocultural interpretation of maleness through engagement and participation in the society. Itulua-Abumere stated that

Masculinity consists of those behaviors, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine. So masculinity exist as both a positive, in as much as they offer some means of identity significations for males (Itulua-Abumere 2013:42).

Keisling distinguished between masculinity and men as follows:

Men and masculinities are different things, and while they are connected, all things that men do are not masculine, and all things masculine are not necessarily done by men. Men are the corporeal beings identified as such, usually ultimately based on genitalia and body; however, maleness is also socially constructed. Masculinity is a quality or set of practices (habitual ways of doing things) that is stereotypically connected with men (Keisling 2007:655).

Masculinity thus concerns the critical study of men, their behaviours, practices, and values based on specific cultures and society. Masculinity is dynamic, thus the Akan masculinity

in the precolonial times is different from the 20th century. Women are now in politics, education, military, police, fire service, etc. and some men are midwives and nurses.²

It is uncertain what the Akan masculinity and social construct will be in the next century due to globalisation, technology, modernisation, western education and women empowerment. Economic, political and religious power are sources of male domination and sociocultural construction of hegemonic masculinity especially in African and Asian male dominated societies. Itulua-Abumere (2013:43) affirmed that “Masculinity is thus viewed as a set of practices into which individual men are inserted with reference to upbringing, family, area, work and sub-cultural influences.” Kiesling (2007: 658) posits that “Dominance is the identification of masculinity with dominance, authority, or power; to be a man is to be strong, authoritative, and in control, especially when compared to women, and also when compared to other men.” Let us briefly consider some literature on masculinity especially from Ghana. Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2011) postulated that

Hegemonic masculinity is described as the dominant form of masculinity in a society and pertains to the relations of cultural domination by men. In addition to being oppressive for women, hegemonic masculinity silences other masculinities in such a way that the values expressed by these other constructions of masculinity do not have currency (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng 2011:42).

Most African men normally communicate with confidence to maintain and sustain their social and political status in the social hierarchy by putting women in subordinate positions. Men have cultural traditions, linguistic evidence, and oral literature genres to prove their hegemonic masculinity, supremacy, greater legitimacy and acceptance in society (Diaba & Amfo 2015, 2018, Hussien 2005:73).

Hussein (2009) discussed gender (in)equality in Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia cultures using proverbs and noted how African societies use systems and structures to dominate females due to their patriarchal situation.³ Ghanaian scholars like Asimeng-

² Ghana has produced the first female (an Akan) Vice-President of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the 2024 general election. She is Prof. Jane Naana Opoku Agyeman; she was the first female Vice-Chancellor of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast (Ghana).

³ Hussein (2005: 67, 72) stated that “In Africa, proverbs play an important role in reinforcing the cultural ideal of masculinity such as competitiveness, dominance, forcefulness, endurance, confrontation, self-reliance, and willingness to take risks...they associate maleness with respect, firmness, or strength, while associating femaleness with meekness, indignity, inconsistency, and powerlessness.”

Boahene (2009), Diabah & Amfo (2018) and Gyan et al, (2020) focused on Akan proverbs that depict the inequality in gender, and men's frequent domination on women.

Despite men's domination, Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2011: 42) recorded that Ghanaian men who are unfit into Ghanaian cultural ideals to perform duties deserved of hegemonic masculinity are humiliated as "female-men" (Diabah 2015, 2018). Kiyimba's (2010: 49) asserted that "Although the notions of masculinity that emerge from folktales and proverbs promote male dominance, they also pose enormous challenges for the male members of society." Males whose physical and emotional stature, do not allow them to live men's expected life, find it extremely challenging (Mariwah et al 2022:13).

Mariwah, et al (2022) discussed twelve proverbs on Akan masculinity and stipulated that:

While some proverbs portray masculine superiority, such construction of masculinity, ironically, tends to subject males to pronounced risks in trying to live up to the expectations of society. Implicitly, these proverbs restrict the socio-cultural space for men to express their socially constructed ordeals (Mariwah et al 2022: 1).

Mariwah et al (2022) stated further that:

Gender stereotyping does not only benefit males and hurt females; it also benefits females and hurts males as well. Thus, while some proverbs are literally interpreted as representing males as superior, such proverbs reveal enormous societal expectations of men which may put them in dire and risky situations (Mariwah et al 2022:13).

Fiaveh et al., (2015) posited that in most African societies men are expected to exhibit extraordinary bravery even in the absence of their physical and psychological power to endure difficult challenges. Additionally, men have no social space to complain when they suffer domestic violence from their spouses or other females, because they are expected to be the prey rather than the victim (see Adomako & Boateng 2011, Hussein, 2005). Asare-Opoku (1997:45) noted that "The Akan associate men with bravery and hard and dangerous tasks and they are expected to face difficulties with equanimity."⁴ Let us now turn briefly to proverbs.

⁴ Adomako-Ampofo & Boateng (2011: 42) posited that "Male characteristics that are approved or encouraged include virility, strength, authority, power and leadership qualities, the ability to offer protection and sustenance, intelligence and wisdom, and the ability to bear physical and emotional pain." (See Mariwah et al (2022:11

4. Definition and Functions of Proverbs

Proverbs are concise sayings that convey general truths and principles based on people's experiences, life, philosophy, sociocultural concepts, and the environment (AUTHOR, 2024a, 2012:11, 2005:9). Hussein (2005:61) used proverbs as indispensable artistry weapons in African languages to discuss masculinity. He noted that "In Africa, proverbs about men and women have long been reproduced irrespective of the potential psychological and political battering which their utterances cause to the recipients."

African oral literature scholars like AUTHOR (2024a, 2005), Finnegan 2012, Hussein (2005:61), Oluwole (1997), Okpewho (1992), Ssetuba (2002) and Yankah 1991, 1989) have researched extensively into proverbs (AUTHOR 2024a:143). In Akan indigenous communication, proverbs are seen as interpretations of traditional wisdom, and marks of communicative competence, conveying cultural beliefs, values and indigenous knowledge (AUTHOR, 2012, Yankah, 1989).

AUTHOR (2005:10) posited that "In the Akan context, there are adages such as *ɛbɛ ne ɔkasa mu abohemmaa*, 'the proverb is the most precious stone of speech', *ɛtwa asem tia*, 'it curtails matters', *ɛnka asem ho a*, *ɛnwie dɛ yɛ*, 'without it, a speech does not acquire its sweetness.' Akans perceive the proverb as an indispensable aesthetic device that is vital in speech, and as the "salt of a language", without which the real taste of the "language dish" is not felt (see Ssetuba 2002:1; Finnegan 2012:380). Oluwole, (1997:100) recorded that "proverbs are the analytic tools of thought, when thought is lost; it is proverbs that are used to search for it". Finally, Mommoh (2000) discussed African proverbs from a philosophical point of view:

For anything to be known it has to be put into proverbs and for anything to be unknown it has to be removed from proverbs. Proverbs represent the last authority on the communal or public aspect of a people's beliefs or philosophy on any concept or issue. In short and in summary, for the traditional African, to be is to be in proverbs and not to be is not to be in proverbs Mommoh (2000: 362).

Mariwah et al (2022:11) recorded that some Akan proverbs depict men as courageous and capable of coping with tough circumstances, and are even expected to die to prove their masculinity (Adinkrah, 2012; Asimeng-Boahene, 2013; Diabah and Amfo, 2015, 2018, Gyan, et al 2018, Hussein (2005).

5. Data and Analysis of Proverbs, Maxims and Idiomatic expressions

This section discusses Akan expressions on masculinity, dwelling on proverbs and other oral literary expressions. They are mostly based on the warrior and patriarchal nature of men, dominance, control and support for women. Since masculinity connotes bravery, coward men are mocked at.

The themes of masculinity on Akan proverbs that emphasize masculine traits are:

(1) masculine power and indispensability, (2) militaristic proof of masculinity, (3) resilience as mark of masculinity, (4) men as women's protectors and supporters, (5) men's superiority and dominance, (6) overly expectation of masculinity

5.1 Power and Indispensability of Masculinity in Society

Certain Akan proverbs highlight the recognition and indispensability of masculine power in the society. They depict the emptiness and the void created in society in the absence of men; the proverbs include the following:

1. *Mmarima nni kurom a, na akyakyafɔɔ tu mmirika kyere mmaa.*

'If there are no real men in town, the hunchback runs off before women.

(A weak man swaggers when he knows there is no one to challenge him (Appiah et al., 2000: 72, no. 237).

Proverb 1 connotes men's support for women, children and the vulnerable in society.

2. *Mmarima mu ne ketewa.*

Among men there is no inferior (Despise no man for all men are equal (Appiah et al., 2000: 72, no. 235)

In Akan, in terms of bravery, no male should be underestimated, especially when there is danger, a disaster, scary things, etc. The women around the environment, no matter their ages will scream, *mmarima mmra o!* 'men should come!' Their life therefore rests on the presence of men in the environment.

5.2 Militaristic Proof of Masculinity

Among the Akans, masculinity is recognised by the proof of men's worth through their masculine behaviours and practices in the society. They include men as warriors, especially during the periods of tribal wars.

3. *ɔbarintwereboɔ a ne ho bɔn atuduro.*

‘A warrior who smells of gunpowder.’

‘If an expert spends all his time using something, he shows it.’

4. *Barima befrɛ ne ho katakyie no, na wafa nkoden mu.*

‘For a man to call himself a brave man/warrior, he should have endured a lot of terrible things.’

5. *Bekoe dinfata no a, yehu no wɔ akono na enye nkwankwaannuase.*

‘If the warrior's name befits him, he should be seen at the war front and not under a shady tree for resting and entertainment.’

The above proverbs depict the militaristic and warrior nature of Akan men as people ready to protect their societies from enemies.

5.3. Resilience as a Mark of Masculinity

Some Akan proverbs and other oral literature genres speak about men and their absolute resilience. They should not be afraid of debts; they must borrow money to fend for their wives, parents, children and family. Men must boldly embark on investments, irrespective of the risks; relying on the Akan maxim, *wosuro a, wonni*, ‘if you are afraid you will not win.’ They should steadfastly fight to save people from death, floods, fire outbreaks and disasters even at the peril of their lives.

6. *Barima nsu,*

‘A man must not weep.’

Men must be steadfast, and capable of withstanding all forms of crises irrespective of the situations and the circumstances.

7. *Barima bepeɛ din na wammɛpe onyinkyere.*

‘A man was born to make a name but not to seek longevity.’ (Adu Gyamfi (1999: 45 Proverb 392)

Masculinity is revealed in a man’s ability to make a name in all fields including building houses, fighting for his people, and engaging in wars. In Akan masculinity, having a longer life without any achievement is meaningless. Heroes are forever remembered especially, martyrs who died at battle fields.

8. *Barima na ɔnom aduro a eye nwono* Adu Gyamfi (1999: 45 Proverb 393)

‘It takes a man to swallow a bitter medicine’

In proverb 8, a man must be resilient even in bitter and precarious times, and swallow a bitter pill. Unexpected circumstances may occur in a man’s life, but nonetheless, he must be ready to face problems as a mark of masculinity.

9. *Etuo pae/bene a, esi barima bo.*

‘When the gun bursts/is hot and ready to be triggered, it rests on the chest of the man. Appiah et al., 2000: 1101, no. 6397)

In Akan, in times of war, it is men who should fight to save the people. A man is obliged to cope with the situation, however bad it is.

10. *Barima nsuro ka.*

‘A man should not be afraid of incurring debt.’ Adu Gyamfi (1999: 45 Proverb 395).

11. *Barima nsuro wuo*

‘A man should not be afraid of death.’ Adu Gyamfi (1999: 45 Proverb 396)

12. *Barima na ɔwuo,*

‘It is the man that dies.’

Proverbs 10-12 indicate Akans' perception of masculinity, men should not be afraid of anything including debts, they should risk to invest, ensuring that they will recoup later. Again, in the Akan social construction of masculinity, men should not be afraid of death.

Hussein (2005:68) noted that "Men are not only inculcated with masculine ideals; they are also encouraged to exercise those ideals in heroic deeds." He cites the Oromo proverb, "*A male person is dead from his birth*", and explains that it inculcates fearlessness, as a masculine self-fulfillment; whether it is for good, or for trivial cause, a male should not fear death.

13. Barima nsi nsuo mu ansa na waham. Adu Gyamfi (1999: 27 Proverb 238)
'A man does not step in a river before sizing it up.'

In Proverb 13, Akan masculinity behooves men to be extra resilient in everything. Men should be fully prepared before embarking on any venture; a man does not step deep into a river and then takes a long breath and decide to retreat.

5.4. Men as Women's Protectors and Supporters

Akan, women, because of their physical and emotional weaknesses, are scared of dangerous things; they need men as their backbones, formidable pillars, protectors and active supporters as in these proverbs (Adomako Ampofo, Okyerefo & Pervarah 2009, Diabah & Amfo 2018).

14. ɔbaa a ɔni barima no nayebo no yi akyea.

'It is a woman without a supportive man, who is beaten and her afflictor swaggers and boasts.'

15. Woboro aberante yere a, woko ntakwa prenu.

'If you beat a young man's wife you fight twice.'

The Akans think that every husband should support his wife, financially, psychologically and physically. No matter how coward a man is, he should always defend his wife, hence if one beats a young man's wife, he must be ready to face the husband in another fight.

5.5. Men's Superiority and Dominance

Africa proverbs instigate men to power and dominance based on the concept of hegemonic masculinity that legitimises “the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (see Diabah & Amfo 2018, Schippers 2007: 94). It is viewed that becoming lax towards women and allowing them unmeasured freedom is disadvantageous to men (Hussein 2005). There are Akan proverbs that reinforce men's domination over women. AUTHOR (2010: 173) recorded the following:

16. *ɔbaa tɔ etuo a, etwere barima dan mu.*

‘If a woman buys a gun it is kept in the man's room.’

17. *ɔbaa tɔn nyaadewa na ɔntɔn atuduro.*

‘A woman sells garden eggs but not gunpowder.’

18. *ɔbaa twa bɔmaa a, etwere barima dan mu.*

‘If a woman carves a drum, it resides in the man's room.’

19. *ɔbaa ho beyefe a, na efiri ne kunu.*

‘The beauty of a woman is attributed to her husband’.

(Appiah et al., 2000: 2, no. 19) (Adu Gyamfi 1999;127)

Men and women have been brought up to behave differently; the problem is more sociocultural than linguistic. Languages themselves are not sexist, but the society and culture employ language, especially proverbs to achieve certain sociocultural, political, economic, and religious purposes to strike masculinity and femininity. Diabah and Amfo (2018) noted the vulnerability of Akan women is based on certain proverbs as follows:

whoever she is and whatever she has are under the man's care and authority. This emphasises the point that men are indispensable in the lives of women. Examples largely reflect the hegemonic inclinations of the Akan/Ghanaian society, as they portray the power of men over women (Diabah and Amfo 2018:188).

5.6. Overly Expectation of Masculinity

Men are to be self-sufficient and self-dependent and not to be overly reliant on women.

20. *ɔbarima a ɔdi mmaafodie na ɔsoa bokiti.*

‘It is the man who follows women too much that carries a bucket (If you are subservient to women. they will make use of you to do their work) Appiah et al., 2007: 68, no. 213).

21. *ɛnye barima ne barima, barima ne deɛ ɔkɔtie bɛse.*

‘It is not every man who is a man, a man is the one who is able to move out, enquire and come to report.’

22. *Akoayiyɛ barima mua (wɔɔbɛɛma)*

‘This man is a real man.’

An Akan man who cannot perform masculine duties is emasculated. He brings shame instead of protecting his masculine ego. Some men rather express their masculinity, negatively, through peer pressure even where they do not have the physical capabilities to do so. Diabah and Amfo (2018:193) used the term “marginalised or subordinate” masculinity for men who are downgraded, based on their exhibition of qualities contrary to valued hegemonic masculinity. Such men protect themselves using the Akan proverb:

23. *Akyekyedɛ se ɔbarima mfɛre adwane.*

‘The tortoise says “a man should not feel ashamed of running away from danger. (Adu Gyamfi 1999: 27 Proverb 238).

It is prudent to run to save your life and be called a marginalised masculine.

5.7. Idiomatic Expressions on Masculinity

There are certain Akan expressions that indicate social expectations of masculinity based on the social construction and expectations from men. They are expected to be resilient, rise up to occasions and be physically bold. They include examples 24-27:

24. *Pini wo tirim na woye barima.*

‘Be resilient and stand firm for you are a man.’

25. *Ma wo homene so na woye barima.*

‘Be up still and stand firm, for you are men.’

26. *Kasa se barima.* ‘Speak like a man.’

27. *Barima na woye ohufoɔ saa.*

‘How can you be a man and be coward like that.’

In example 27, the Akans do not expect a man to be overly coward, it is against masculinity.

28. *Woye barima mua, wonim to.*

‘You are really a man; you know how to shoot’.

In Akan, being potent and bearing children is the proof of masculinity (virility). Being impotent was a target of insult and a verbal taboo to be mentioned plainly. Virility therefore connotes two cardinal issues (a) being a real/complete man (masculinity) and (b) the ability to literally shoot, kill and bring something home; to increase the population.

6.0. Masculinity in other Oral Literature Genres

This section discusses masculinity in panegyrics, surrogate language and Akan folksongs

6. 1. Masculinity from Panegyrics and Surrogate Language

Among the Akans, masculinity prevails in their oral artistry like *amoma*, ‘panegyrics’, and *ayan*, ‘drum language’; especially those about kings and warriors.

This section provides such texts.

Excerpt 29. Panegyrics: (Source Poem 35 Nketia 1978a)

Ono no!

Osɛe Tutu wo ho asem merete merete

Wo ho asem te se

Onyinatan mmiensa so ahahan awisi

Alas, here he is!

Osɛe Tutu, I constantly hear about you

Issues about you are like

The leaves of three mighty oak trees

<i>Wo ho asem merete merete.</i>	I constantly hear about you
<i>Owuo na esi aso</i>	It is death that can make one dumb
<i>Mete a, mete no ko so</i>	I hear it about battles
<i>Mete no mmarima so</i>	I hear it from your manly prowess
<i>Mete no akatakyie so</i>	I hear it from warriors' perspectives
<i>Okyerefa-nim-ako a wannane ko</i>	The victor who did not leave the war
<i>Anto mpanin ne mmofra so,</i>	As a burden to elders and the youth
<i>Okontonkurowi a ada amansan kon mu,</i>	The moon that encircles round our necks
<i>Na amansan nkommɔ ayedie ne Osei Tutu!</i>	All the conversations are on Osei Tutu

In Excerpt 29, the narratives about the king are comparable to all the leaves on three mighty oak trees, implying that he is very famous. The poet highlights the areas of the king's popularity in terms of bravery, industriousness, dexterity, and his personal interest in wars, by joining the army at the battlefield (AUTHOR 2024b:91). Here is another panegyric by Nketia (1978a).

Excerpt 30

<i>Ono no!</i>	Alas, here he is!
<i>Ankaadudwane a</i>	The lime full of thorns
<i>Mmofra ko asee ayetu nnɛɛɛ</i>	That children tread cautiously under it
<i>Na Osee Tutu da asee rebu mfumpaa no oo!</i>	And Osei Tutu is wrestling under it

AUTHOR (2024b: 92) argues that the bravery, resilience, and endurance of the chief is compared with his agility and wrestling skills under a lime tree that has many thorns, especially when it has been pruned. Children and people walk carefully and slowly under it to avoid being hurt. Ironically, the wonderful king rolls himself bravely on the thorns. Masculinity in Akan is clearly depicted in their panegyrics about kings.

Akan masculinity is depicted in *ayan*, 'drum language'. Nketia (1974: 62) recorded a drum language text about King Osei Bonsu's warrior and militaristic nature. See below:

Excerpt 31 Ayan: (no 60)

<i>Osee Bonsu oko-kyere-ahene</i>	Osei Bonsu the captor of chiefs
<i>Boafo ako-ako</i>	Boafo the everlasting fighter
<i>Boafo ako-ako</i>	Boafo the everlasting fighter
<i>Bonsu oko-kyere-ahene</i>	Bonsu the captor of chiefs

<i>Ɔsee Bonsu ɔko-kyere-ahene</i>	Osei Bonsu the captor of chiefs
<i>WokumAdinkraKwadwoKosompire</i>	You have killed Adinkra Kwadwo Kosompire
<i>WokumAkwas Nyirenyire</i>	You have killed Akwasi Nyirenyire
<i>Woreko asaase akɔsoyi</i>	You are fighting to the end of the land
<i>Bonsu ɔko-kyere-ahene</i>	Bonsu the captor of chiefs
<i>Obiara gye wo akyinnye a,</i>	If anybody argues with you
<i>Twa ne tiri ara tan</i>	Cut off his head
<i>Bonsu ɔko-kyere-ahene</i>	Bonsu the captor of chiefs
<i>Boafo ako-ako</i>	Boafo the everlasting fighter
<i>ɔbanin twerebo a ne ho bɔn atuduro.</i>	The flinter man who smells of gunpowder
<i>Bonsu ɔko-kyere-ahene</i>	Bonsu the captor of chiefs
<i>Yebɔ wo din a, yento wo so</i>	The mention of your name casts no doubt
<i>Bonsu ɔko-kyere-ahene</i>	Bonsu the captor of chiefs
<i>Yebɔ wo din a, yento wo so, ɔkɛsee</i>	The mention of your name casts no doubt, the Almighty

In another text about King Agyeman Asaamu, Nketia (1974:66) recorded these lines:

Excerpt 32.

<i>Woye barima</i>	You are a man
<i>Woye Katakyyire</i>	You are a Warrior
<i>Woye ɔbarima dada</i>	You have been a man for a long time
<i>Woye Katakyyire</i>	You are a Warrior
<i>Katakyyire a ɔfua tuo ne afena beko</i>	A warrior who holds a gun and sword to fight
<i>Kaa wo nko a, pɛ sɛ yereko</i>	Left to you alone, we should be fighting

In the above panegyric drum texts, some of the lexical items and imagery indicate the king's masculinity. These include *Boafo ako-ako*, 'captor of chiefs', *Boafo* the everlasting fighter, you have killed *Adinkra Kwadwo Kosompire*, you have killed *Akwasi Nyirenyire*, (two great chiefs). "You are fighting to the end of the land, the flinter man who smells of gunpowder; if anybody argues with you, cut off his head." All these, indicate the masculinity expected from kings.

In showing the king's masculinity, names of the captives and enemies killed in wars are mentioned. Other expressions are: "you are a warrior, you have been a man for a long time, you are a warrior who holds a gun to fight, left to you alone, we should be fighting." If one holds both a gun and sword to fight simultaneously, he is unconquerable. The slot "left to him alone there should be a battle, implies that he is a great warrior. Nketia's (1974:99) masculine expression *ɔbanin ko, ɔbanin nnwane*, 'a man fights, a man

does not run away’ instill in Akan masculinity a warrior and a resilient nature. A warrior must fight till victory, and does not retreat.

6.2: Masculinity in Akan Folksongs

Masculinity is evidenced in most Akan popular folksongs such as *adowa*, *adenkum*, *nnwonkorɔ*, *abɔfodwom*, etc. The sung texts depict the major characteristics of men, like *bravery*, *warriors*, *supporters*, etc., conceptualised by the language and culture. Below is an interlude by Alex Konadu, a popular artiste.

33. <i>Na ɔye ɔbarima; na ɔye ɔbarima</i>	‘He is a man; he is man.
<i>Barima nsoyenka no kwa yee.</i>	A man is not mentioned in vain.
<i>Asem ba a, naye hunu barima</i>	It is when there is a crisis that we see a man.
<i>Barima e, sore mia w’ani mayenka</i>	Man, be resilient, rise up and let us go. ’

Nketia (1978b: 12) recorded an Akan Adowa folksong that involves endurance of masculinity as in 34 below.

34. <i>Yee ɔbarima nsu oo</i>	‘Hei a man must not weep
<i>Owusu Sekyerɛ ee</i>	Owusu Sekyerɛ ee
<i>ɔbarima nsu oo</i>	A man must not weep
<i>Yɛayi me ayimono</i>	I have been forcefully shaved
<i>Yɛde nkwanwo afa asee</i>	They have applied hot palm soup
<i>ɔbarima nsu, na meresu maye den?</i>	A man must not weep, why must I weep?
<i>Yee ɔbarima nsu oo</i>	A man must not weep
<i>Owusu Sekyerɛ ee</i>	Owusu Sekyerɛ ee
<i>ɔbarima nsu oo</i>	A man must not weep
<i>ɔkyemmerikuku ɔrebewu ama sie adwirie</i>	The queen ant will die for the anthill to collapse. ’

The two folksong depict the theme of men’s expected resilience. A man should strive against all forms of maltreatment and difficult times without complaining. An example is where one Owusu Sekyerɛ was forced and shaved to the skull. Apart from this punishment, they applied some dirty substance from hot palm-nut soup unto his head. This was very excruciating, but he dared not weep; if he wept, he was called a “marginalised man”. He boasts that he is comparable to the *ɔkyemmirekuku*, “queen ant” whose death implies the collapse of the anthill. This fosters the indispensability of masculinity in the Akan society.

6.3. Masculinity in *Abɔfodwom*

Akan masculinity is manifested in *abɔfodwom*, ‘hunters’ songs’. Traditionally, hunters occupied prominent status in the Akan society. Despite their poverty, they played tremendous roles in the society; they knew the geographical terrains of the communities’ lands, frontiers and boundaries. Hunters were consulted during the settlement at new places; they knew the rivers that could provide constant water supply. Hunters were consulted for surveying, especially during wars; they created the war paths to avoid been captured by their enemies. Hunters were very effective marksmen during wars.

Again, hunters offered meat for the society, and killed the dangerous animals like the leopard, lions and wild snakes that tormented the people. They prided themselves as providing the animals’ hides for the drums and the horns for the chiefs’ musical groups. Hunters thus compared their status with the chiefs in some of their songs to prove their masculinity and indispensability in the society. Below are two excerpts from Nketia’s (1973) book *Abɔfodwom*, ‘hunters’ songs’.

Excerpt 35

<i>Ahantan! ɔbɔfoɔ! ahantan!</i>	‘Pride, hunter Pride!
<i>ɔhene wosene ɔbɔfoɔ?</i>	Chief are you better than the hunter?
<i>Yei sɛɛ nko wosene ɔbɔfoɔ?</i>	With this alone, are you better than the hunter?
<i>Fɛɛfɛ^{X4}, a ɛhyɛ wo nanyi</i>	The beautiful ^{X4} ones that you are wearing
<i>Mpaboa a ɛhyɛ wo nanyi, ɛyɛɛ dɛn?</i>	The footwear you are wearing, what brought it?
<i>ɔbɔfoɔ na ɔkumm ɔtwe</i>	It is the hunter that killed the antelope
<i>Yɛde ɔtwe nwoma na ɛyɔɛɛ</i>	It was made out of the antelope’s hide
<i>Wosene ɔbɔfoɔ?</i>	Are you better than the hunter?
<i>Ahantan!^{X4} Wosene ɔbɔfoɔ ?</i>	Are you better than the hunter?

In 36, Nketiah (1973:3) outlined the masculinity of the hunter through these accolades.

Excerpt 36

<i>ɔdomankoma Asiemmire</i>	‘The Almighty Asiemmire
<i>Toto atuo ma amono</i>	The shooter of gun who gives fresh meat
<i>Mmaa kunu; mperewa mpena</i>	Women’s husband and old ladies’ fiancée
<i>Katakyie ne Sereboɔ Sakyi</i>	The Warrior and a sharpening Stone Sakyi
<i>Yɛse ne so dadeɛ kɔdi aninsem</i>	That we sharpen our stones on to embark on bravery.’

In Excerpt 36, the hunter’s masculinity is manifested as a *shooter*, *women’s supporter*, and a *husband* who provides the needs of wives and old ladies by constantly providing them

with meat. The hunter is a warrior and metaphorically a sharpening stone where other men sharpen their weapons and machetes to embark on brave and masculine activities. Hunters were thus considered as extraordinary men. Having encountered more animals in the bush, they were not afraid of anything including wild animals and even death, since they could be attacked any time. Again, their masculinity was evidenced from their spirituality that made them contest the wild animals and supernatural beings; they knew herbal medicine that could treat injuries both in the bush and at home.

7.0 Conclusion

The paper has discussed Akan masculinity and provided 36 examples made up of proverbs, idiomatic expressions, panegyrics, *ayan*, ‘drum language’, highlife folksongs and hunters’ song. These examples highlight the expectations and pressures on Akan men to conform to societal ideals of masculinity. The paper identified masculinity as a social construct rather than biological; and among the Akan, a person can be born a man but may lose the male identity if he fails to attain the standard measure of Akan masculinity. We have further noted that masculinity is a manifestation of what culture makes out of the “raw material” of “biological sex” (Rothwell 2000:36)

It was further noted that metaphorically, masculinity is compared to a theatrical performance where masculinity is given a sociocultural script to perform based on the cultural norms and etiquette of the respective societies. The data for the paper was categorised thematically into bravery, resilience, support for the society, dominance and control by men, and finally the pressure men endure due to the sociocultural expectations. The paper noted that the advent of modern society, globalisation, western education, science and technology, and neutralization of jobs have challenged traditional notions of the masculinity hegemony.

Again, women empowerment has been a threat to masculinity, and the traditional dichotomy between masculinity and femininity is bridged due to family structures, and the struggle for gender equality. Akan women have some new proverbs to counteract masculine legacies, control, dominance and superiority. Globally, men’s role is undergoing several changes in areas of professions, administration and, security services. We can thus talk of masculinity crisis.

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