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What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society? Masculinity and Women's Empowerment in Akan, Ghana

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Abstract

The definition of ideal (hegemonic) masculinity has shifted over time and across social contexts. This study explores narratives of the lives and experiences of the Akan people in Ghana through an ethnographic lens for their changing understanding of masculinity. Akan communities are matrilineal in structure but embedded with patriarchal values. Focusing on concepts and practices of masculinity across generations within this context of matrilineal patriarchy, the research examines how people perceive changes in ideal masculinity and the relation of these evolving ideals to gendered power relations within the family and to women's empowerment. In Akan matrilineal society, traditional fatherhood and motherhood remain central to gendered identities and as institutions that sustain patriarchy. To capture multiple social dimensions that reinforce and reproduce patriarchal power, this study adopts an intersectional framework. Through an ethnographic journey, the research provides a realistic account of masculinities and everyday life in Agogo, Ghana.

While some findings may appear critical of Akan men, they reflect the lived realities of matrilineal communities as another expression of patriarchal society.

Keywords: matrilineal society, masculinity, women's empowerment, intersectionality, Ghana

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Résumé

La définition des masculinités idéales (hégémoniques) a évolué au fil du temps et selon les contextes sociaux. Cette étude explore le récit des vies et des expériences du peuple Akan au Ghana à travers une perspective ethnographique. Les communautés Akan ont une structure matrilinéaire, mais des valeurs patriarcales y sont ancrées. En se concentrant sur les pratiques et les notions de masculinité à travers les générations dans ce contexte du patriarcat matrilinéaire, la recherche examine comment les gens perçoivent les changements dans les masculinités idéales et leur relation au pouvoir genré au sein de la famille et à l'autonomisation des femmes. Dans la société matrilinéaire, la paternité et la maternité traditionnelles demeurent centrales en tant qu'identités genrées et en tant qu'institutions qui soutiennent le patriarcat. Pour saisir plusieurs dimensions sociales qui renforcent et reproduisent le pouvoir patriarcal, cette étude adopte un cadre intersectionnel. À travers un parcours ethnographique, la recherche offre un récit réaliste des masculinités et de la vie quotidienne à Agogo, au Ghana. Bien que certaines conclusions puissent sembler critiques envers les hommes Akan, elles reflètent la réalité vécue des communautés matrilinéaires comme une autre expression de la société patriarcale.

Mots-clés : société matrilinéaire, masculinité, autonomisation des femmes, intersectionnalité, Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

Ideal (hegemonic) masculinity depends on social context and shifts across generations. This research focuses on the matrilineal Akan people of Ghana, examining how notions and practices of masculinity are constructed within families and how they change over time for both men and women. Using an ethnographic approach, the study investigates the factors that influence these changes and their impact on everyday social life, including power relations within families and women's (dis)empowerment.

The largest ethnic group in Ghana, Akan society is structured around a matrilineal kinship system and

is sometimes incorrectly described as matriarchal. In general, matriarchy refers to female dominated societies based on matrilineal family systems - the inverse of patriarchy. There is also a widespread assumption that matrilineal and matriarchal societies empower women at the expense of men. However, societies with matrilineal kinship systems should not be confused with matriarchy, and women's empowerment is not necessarily a feature of matrilineal societies (Diop 1989, Awusabo-Asare 1990, Amadiume 2005).

Akan families are matrilineal. By customary law, traditional property succession passes through the mother's line, but inheritance prioritizes male relatives (from the same mother) and nephews before women are considered. Although Akan inheritance is matrilineal, it does not privilege women as heirs; rather, it privileges men within the mother's lineage. Daughters belong to the lineage and transmit it, but they rarely inherit because customary law prioritizes male authority for managing lineage property. When daughters become mothers, their sons automatically belong to their maternal lineage, making them the next generation of eligible male heirs. In this way, women sustain the lineage biologically, while property rights remain vested in their sons, brothers, and maternal nephews, ensuring that inheritance stays within the matrilineal line even though women themselves are typically bypassed. Women are the last resort if there are no possible inheritable males. Although there are state laws regarding succession and inheritance, most Ghanaian families still follow customary laws and cultural practices. In this regard, there are many female-headed households and widows who experience economic hardship and poverty (Awusabo-Asare 1990). Matriliny, then, while sometimes interpreted as enhancing women's authority, in this instance often reproduces women's subordination, marginalization, and dependence on men. In this sense, Akan society remains patriarchal despite its matrilineal basis.

This contradiction is striking. Matrilineality does not have the same effect on women's status as patrilineality has on men's. While men in patrilineal societies typically consolidate authority through descent and inheritance, Akan women do not enjoy equivalent advantages under matriliny. Instead, matriliny structures both kinship and gender relations in complex ways: it influences inheritance rights, bloodline membership, and the organization of everyday family life. As a central cultural factor in kin relations, matriliny also shapes identities and gender roles for both men and women.

Although masculinity is often assumed to be uniform across patriarchal societies, this research begins from the premise that different dynamics of masculinity emerge in matrilineal contexts. That is, in Akan society, men must navigate responsibilities divided between their conjugal families and their natal, matrilineal kin. This division can generate tensions and conflicts, particularly between husbands and their wives' matrilineal relatives, over control of children and resources (Adinkrah 2012).

My own interest in masculinity in matrilineal societies was sparked by conversations with women in rural Ghana during a project on maternal health, a long time ago. Many women complained that the matrilineal system, rather than empowering women, enabled men to evade responsibility for their conjugal families. For instance, 'runaway men' (men who father children outside of marriage) often abandon the women involved, leaving them to raise children alone without legal support. At the same

time, men themselves argued that matriliny imposed heavy burdens. They were expected to provide not only for their own children but also for their sisters' children. These divergent perceptions reveal that women and men in Akan families and society hold contrasting understandings of manhood, fatherhood, and male responsibility, areas central to the Akan notion of masculinity. Not only do women and men perceive masculinity differently, these perceptions shape women's everyday experiences in significant ways.

Although I lived and worked in Ghana for about four years, I remained an outsider. While I regarded the matrilineal system as distinctive, Ghanaians themselves saw it as ordinary, and some found it unusual that I attempted to deconstruct their traditions and culture. To better understand these practices and meanings as they are embodied in society, I employed an ethnographic approach which combined participant observation with interviews. This allowed me to engage closely with people's daily lives and to situate my interpretations within their own cultural context. I hope this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes of gender construction in a specific social setting, as well as across different contexts.

Research Questions

What are the ideals and practices of (hegemonic) masculinity in matrilineal Akan families, and how do they shape gendered power relations and women's empowerment? These questions lead to several sub-questions:

1) *What does it mean to be a family man and a father to Akan people?*

This question explores how fatherhood and masculinity are perceived within Akan matrilineal families. Being a 'family man' is not only about being a father; more especially in matrilineal society, it includes the roles of uncle and brother, each carrying distinct responsibilities and burdens. Through ethnographic research with two nuclear and two extended families, I examined the norms, expectations, and ideals associated with these roles, as well as men's and women's perceptions of masculinity in the family.

2) *How do men and women experience and perceive changes in roles, relationship, and expectations of men across generations within the family?*

This question investigates how generational shifts and social conditions shape roles, relationships, and ideals of masculinity. Moreover, it also addresses how notions of masculinity and its practice in reality are different. Life-history and conversational interviews focused on men in intergenerational contexts — fathers, sons, brothers, and uncles — to see whether notions of hegemonic masculinity are shared across generations. Observations and interviews with three generations within extended families helped to capture both continuities and transformations in these ideals.

3) *How do notions and practices of masculinity in matrilineal family impact on female-male power relationships in the family and women's (dis)empowerment?*

This question address the consequences of masculinity within matrilineal families,

particularly its relationship to women's (dis)empowerment and its reproduction over generations. Interviews probed how men and women evaluate matrilineality, whether it advantages women, what empowerment means in practice, and how men and women perceive changes in power relations within the family.

The aim of my research is to explore the meaning of a variety of ideal masculinities through investigating men's and women's lives in matrilineal Akan society and how different social categories and contexts intersect through their power relations. An ethnographic approach allowed me to engage closely with daily life in Agogo, moving beyond description to interpretation. Rather than simply interrogating participants as an interviewer, I observed what was happening, asked about meanings, listened carefully, and sought to empathize. Through this orientation, I aimed to understand the significance of people's routines and experiences within their cultural context, and how these meanings have shifted over time. Alongside participant observation, I also conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with family members. Since there is relatively little recent ethnographic research on gender relations in Ghanaian matrilineal societies, this study contributes to addressing that gap by offering further insights into the complexities of gender in a particular context and underscoring the need for continued research on matrilineal societies.

I conducted fieldwork in Agogo, a small town in the eastern Ashanti Region of Ghana with a population of about 100,000, where agriculture is the main source of livelihood. I stayed there for one month (July–August, 2017), followed by ten days in Accra. A Ghanaian friend, Asamoah, introduced me to his cousin, Mr. Okyere, who initially hosted me. However, because his household lacked reliable water and electricity and was often empty during the day, I later moved to a hostel associated with a Presbyterian church, arranged with his help. Through Mr. Okyere and his wife, I was introduced to three families: his own family, which included his mother-in-law; his wife's cousin Mabena and her children; and another woman, Salome, and her household. Later, I also met Ernest, who volunteered to participate. These individuals and families became the focus of my ethnographic work.

During the first two weeks, I spent my days with them—sharing meals, observing routines, and practicing Twi, which I had studied beforehand. Although English is the official language of Ghana, many people in Agogo, especially women and the older generation, spoke little English. Initially I arranged for a translator, but I realized participants were uncomfortable discussing family matters in front of someone from their own community. Instead, I worked with younger family members who could speak English and assist with translation.

In the first week, I explained my research and asked each family to draw a family tree. Most began with themselves, then listed their mother's relatives. When asked about their father's family, many admitted they did not know names or details, especially when relations were strained. This underscored the strong orientation toward maternal kin.

After spending several days with the families, I noticed that fathers and husbands were largely absent, except in Mr. Okyere's household. Surprisingly, this absence was rarely commented upon, as though it

were normal. Initially cautious, I found participants willing to share stories of strained relationships, abandonment, or hardship. Being an outsider unfamiliar with their traditions gave me both distance and access: people were willing to befriend me, perhaps because they did not expect judgment.

I also reflected on small acts of reciprocity. I brought cookies as tokens of appreciation, worried that people might ask for money, but no one ever did. Instead, they offered me food and fruit, and sometimes confided their financial struggles. This created an ethical dilemma: I felt the responsibility of privilege and questioned whether I should do more, though participants never raised such expectations directly.

From the third week onward, I conducted formal interviews. In total, I carried out 20 individual interviews (14 men and 6 women) and one unplanned group discussion with eight men at a local bar. Younger men and women were usually interviewed at the *abusua fie* (family house), while I often met with older men in churches, workplaces, bars, or while traveling[1]. Although I used guiding questions,[2] most conversations were open-ended and conversational, shaped by participants' own responses. This flexible approach enabled me to capture intergenerational perspectives on masculinity, fatherhood, and family life.

My Positionality and Ethics: Being an Obroni

Acknowledging positionality is an important step in the beginning of ethnographic research, as it shapes both fieldwork and interpretation and even identifies power dynamics between researcher and participants (Crossa 2012:115). In Ghana, I was defined as *obroni*, meaning 'white person' in Twi (Akan language). Being *obroni* in Ghana is privileged. Although I do not define myself as a 'white person' in other contexts, such as in the Netherlands, in Ghana my relative 'whiteness' conferred both privilege and visibility. Rather than granting authority, this positioned me as a naive and curious outsider, someone forgiven for asking personal or unusual questions, since I was not expected to judge by local standards. Sometimes I had subtle feelings that I should do something for them as compensation because they might have expected it.

On the other hand, my identities intersected in complex ways. As a woman researching gender, I was sometimes perceived as an insider among women, though still marked as an outsider because of race and cultural difference. For men, I was more clearly an outsider, but still distinct from 'their' women, which created a different dynamic of openness. These overlapping positions shaped the ways participants engaged with me, positioning me simultaneously as both familiar and foreign. Thus, I, myself, am still a stranger; as Agal (1996) said, being an ethnographer is being a 'professional stranger.'

The issue of my positionality concerns ethical dilemmas as well, but these dilemmas came while

[1] In 20 individual interviews, I interviewed 6 married men and 8 unmarried men out of 14 male participant. For female participants, all 6 participants were married. Their accurate age is included in narration of interview. In one group interview, all 8 men were married and in middle age.

[2] See Appendix 1: Interview Guideline Questions.

analysing the data after field work. That is, employing an ethnographic approach enabled me to have the privilege of looking into participant's lives in great detail. However, as a researcher, I have to be very prudent with disseminating the data (Kaiser 2009:1633). During field work in Agogo, I confirmed consent multiple times, including with my Ghanaian contacts, and chose to use real names only after reconfirmation. Even then, I excluded highly personal details that participants wished to keep private. This reflexive awareness guided my decisions throughout, as I sought to balance ethnographic depth with respect for confidentiality and the dignity of those who entrusted me with their stories.

Theoretical Approaches: Intersectionality

Intersectionality plays everywhere and always. The term intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, allow us to understand the complexity of differences and samenesses within social groups based on the "multidimensionality of marginalized subjects" (Crenshaw 1989:139). Thus, employing intersectionality provides a way of understanding how gender is shaped by multiple dimensions of social categories and showing how systems of oppression operate through those categories (McCall 2005:1772). Edström argued that intersectionality is the key for recognizing how patriarchal gender inequality operates because patriarchy is a strong fundamental element in most social systems that are built in inequality (Edström 2016).

Intersectional approaches offer both conceptual and methodological tools to analyse the complexities of multiple intersecting systems and power relations within a social group, for instance, by distinguishing differences between men's lives and women's lives. Although they share the same notion of masculinity in their matrilineal system, the different Akan experiences and identities creates varying degrees of inclusion, marginalization, and discrimination within them. As a methodological tool, intersectionality can be associated with the researcher's positionality as well. As I mentioned above, I situated myself as a female researcher but during the field research in Agogo, I was situated as a 'white lady' by local people. This process helped me grasp the double standard of patriarchal ideology towards gender and, also, affected the reflexibility of information.

Aside from intersectionality as an overall conceptual and methodological approach, I employed a few more conceptual frameworks to analyse and support my research findings. While I weave those theoretical frameworks with the findings and analysis below, I introduce here some of important ones.

Theoretical approaches: Patriarchy and Matrilineal systems

As mentioned above, matrilineal societies tend to be confused with matriarchy. Although there is a 'myth of matriarchy' about them, the Akan matrilineal system does not correspond to matriarchy but rather shows the researcher an image of patriarchy. Patriarchy is generally defined as a male-dominating social system based on the subordination of women (Christ 2016:215). Male headship, moreover, is fundamental to ideas of masculinity and the role of patriarch given by the Christian Bible. Thus, patriarchal notions of masculinity and the subordination of woman are reinforced by Christianity, which also reproduces heteronormative gender roles (Klinken 2011, Ruether 1983).

According to Richard (1950), men in matrilineal societies occupy an ambiguous position between their conjugal family and natal family. As endemic cultural systems, matrilineal systems inherit their particular meanings of family and power relationships between gender and family.

Theoretical Approaches: (Hegemonic) Masculinity

The male role as the breadwinner of the family is a core part of hegemonic masculinity, especially in patriarchal ideology (Connell 1995;1998;2005). Although women's employment has increased, as has their support of their family, being a breadwinner has remained important to male identity (Thebaud 2010, Springer 2010). This can lead to men's disempowered masculinity because the position and title of male breadwinner is not only associated with his economic status, but also with his social status in his community (Wilott and Griffin 2004). Although men in Akan matrilineal society give less affection to their offspring due to their absence from the mother's household, their role in that household is more narrowly instrumental than in patrilineal society. Since they are not involved in daily care or emotional presence, their contribution is defined through what they provide, material support and resources. Therefore, boys in matrilineal societies tend to learn 'proper masculinity' not from the presence of their fathers, but rather from their relationship to their mother (Chodorow 1979). Although this hegemonic masculinity can be constructed, it does not correspond with the lives of actual men but, instead, idealized men (Connell 2005:841).

Theoretical Approaches: Motherhood and Women's Empowerment

Mothering is defined as a "socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people." Also, it is regarded as the main vehicle through which people form their own identities and learn about their society (Phoenix and Woollett. 1991:357). Universally, mothering is associated with women because as a rule, it is women who do the mothering in families. Thus, mothering has been conjectured as women's main identity. Motherhood is often employed as emblematic of femininity and this reinforces the activities and relationships of mothering as central to women's identities (Chodorow 1979). This is seen more explicitly in patriarchal societies because men and women's roles and spheres are dichotomized into public and domestic based on male-dominant patriarchy.

In this section, I used Chodorow's psychological analysis and discussion of how motherhood is reproduced in relationships between mothers, daughters, and patriarchal ideology to describe how motherhood reinforces the notion of femininity in matrilineal societies and its relationship with women's empowerment. Also, I explored its relation to women's empowerment using Adrienne Rich's (1977) perspective of empowered motherhood.

Contribution of My Own Study to the Field

Most previous research either focuses on Akan women's status or their subordination regarding property and succession through customary law. Most traditional studies used secondary data, even though there are several recent studies about multiple masculinities in Ghana using ethnographical qualitative method and anthropological approaches. However, there is not much research about masculinity in the matrilineal context that relates masculinity and fatherhood to power and the

(dis)empowerment of women. My research is an ethnographic study with qualitative interviews of several generations of women and men in extended families. I aim to explore notions and practices of masculinity in matrilineal families regarding ideal (hegemonic) masculinity and its relation to women's empowerment.

Moreover, I want to bring new questions and arguments to the study of gender construction processes within matrilineal families and family discourse in Ghana. Few recent studies explore matrilineal society as a concept for understanding contemporary gender issues or masculinity in different social contexts in Ghana; most research on gender relations still tends to be about women's lives. It is important to analyse men's lives to address structural gender inequalities and transformation through social change. This research aims at improving the understanding of gendered power dynamics and relations through an analysis of masculinity in different social contexts and family systems.

Masculinity in matrilineal societies is a topic that deserves more attention as men in matrilineal societies have interesting positions in the family and society and the topic also relates to women's status. More generally, it is also interesting to consider the possible relationship between women's empowerment and changes in masculine roles and practices through generations of women and men living in the same matrilineal families.

Structure of the Paper
Beside this introductory section, this research article has four more sections. More precisely, sections two, three, and four are like three different but entwined essays. Each section has its own theoretical discussion with relevant literature, while the last section weaves them into a single narrative.

In section two, I discuss the contextual background of my study of matrilineal systems and its patriarchal characteristics among the Akan in Ghana. There, I address how Christianity contributes to maintaining patriarchy and reinforcing heteronormative gender roles with practical descriptions of individual family systems provided by ethnographic observation. Exploring the male position in matrilineal societies on the ground, in section three, I describe the different masculinities of Akan men as classified by their age and generation: idealized hegemonic masculinity, disempowered masculinity, and young boys' masculinity. In the subsequent section, I depict and analyse motherhood and its relation to women's empowerment in this matrilineal society. Lastly, I review my overall discussions and derive a conclusion.

MATRILINEAL SOCIETY, PATRIARCHAL REALITY

Contextualizing the Matrilineal Kinship System
Since the 19th century, there have been debates on the concept of matriarchy as a system of social structure. In the beginning, most the studies equated matriarchy with matrilineality, and both were theorized based on patriarchy by Eurocentric scholars such as Henry Maine (1861), J. M. McLennan

(1865) and J. H. Morgan (1871). The western definition of matriarchy was, essentially, 'female rule' - a mirror image of patriarchy. They simplified kinship systems into a dichotomized choice between patriarchy and matriarchy, imposing an evolutionary hierarchy in which matriarchy was framed as primordial, and patriarchy as the more advanced or "highest" form of civilization.

From the 20th century on, an Afrocentric perspective by some scholars (W. James 1978, Diop 1989; 1991) postulated Africa as the cradle of matriarchy in which women ruled kin networks. Diop (1991) defines matriarchy and matrilineal society as female rule and female transmission of property and descent. As an ideological unit, Diop describes matriarchy as an "ensemble of institutions favorable to womanhood and to mankind in general" (1989: xviii), not just a 'female version of patriarchy.' He did not make a distinction between matriarchy and matrilineality, but, rather, defined matriliny as a characteristic of matriarchy. However, the idea was largely dismissed as invented history, a myth created by the European invasion and colonization of Africa and its imposition of white patriarchal history.

Although matriarchy is seen as a social structure where power lies in the hands of women, matrilineality is not the same as matriarchy. James (1978) describes 'matriliny' as a specific form of inheritance in which property is transmitted through female descent lineage. She dismisses the idea of power and authority for women in matriliny and suggested an alternative view of matriliny focused on ideas of citizenship and identity, status and social ties, rather than structures of power and social conflicts (Adinkrah 2012). I accept and work with James' definition of matriliny.

In Akan, Ghana, matriliny is not only a matter of property and inheritance in the family, but identifies a complex kinship network and social structure that gives security and identity to its members, while also creating conflict and insecurity. Mikell and Manuh (1997) describe how Akan women and children are subordinated by matrilineal customary law in succession and family. Specifically, although women in matrilineal systems can own land and other property, and they do not belong to the male's family (father, husband), women's property is regularly smaller than that of males because men tend to be given priority in the inheritance of property. Women, therefore, have difficulty generating their own resources to exercise any rights to property ownership and agency they may have.

As a consequence, I reiterate that matrilineal society should not be confused with matriarchy. Rather, in practice, it is a specific form of kinship systems that may still have many patriarchal traits and power relations. Akan society is no exception: it has matrilineal family structures with patriarchal values. In this chapter, I will describe traditional and contemporary matrilineal family system and power among Akan families in Agogo, Ghana. Then, I will discuss the influence of religious belief on ideas about women and on gender institutions.

Matrilineal Patriarchy Without the Patriarch

Aside from the Akan, Ghana is a fully patriarchal society. Patriarchy is often defined as a system of male dominance within family and society. However, I do not want to address the question of *what is patriarchy* and consider reasons why Akan society is patriarchal. It was not difficult to realize and feel

patriarchy in Ghana during my four years of work experience in Accra and the field work for my research in Agogo.

For example, one day, when I still appeared to be a clumsy young researcher, Mr. Okyere asked me if I was married. I said 'No, but I have a boyfriend.' Then he asked me another question with a mysterious smile, 'Then are you virgin?' I was stunned for a second and, in that second, I agonized as to whether I should answer as myself at the risk of seeming rude or as a researcher, politely and with the aim of inducing more conversation. However, I was not yet completely in the researcher role. I did not answer his question but rather asked him, 'What do you mean by virgin? Does it matter to you that an unmarried woman should be a virgin?' He did not read my sarcasm in that question, because he still kept on smiling mysteriously and said 'It is important. You have to take care of your body because you are a lady.' He did not tell me why he was curious about my virginity and I closed the conversation with an awkward smile because I did not want to argue with him anymore. But soon he added 'I am just telling you because you are like my daughter.'

Virginity, particularly women's virginity, is a patriarchal social construct that oppresses women's body and sexuality. Fatima Mernissi (1982) in her fascinating work *Virginity and Patriarchy*, states that "Curiously, virginity is a matter between men, in which women merely play the role of silent intermediaries. . . Like honour, virginity is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of some people to others deprive the community as a whole of the only true human strength: self-confidence" (ibid:183). Patriarchal control over women's bodies reproduces women's subordination to men and suppression in society because their subordination and suppression correlates to men's honour and power in society (both as husbands and fathers). Therefore, the family controls women's bodies. I did not overjudge Mr.Okyere as if he was trying to control my body, but his curiosity and question tells me how women's bodies and sexualities are considered as public and as an object of interest to men. Hence, patriarchy should be seen as a socially constructed system of male dominance within the family and society, wherein suppressing females' bodies and sexualities are a very significant aspect.

So, yes. Ghana is a patriarchal society. I do not find patriarchy in this matrilineal context to be unique, because it was apparent to me that women's lives in the Akan matrilineal family were as harsh as anywhere else in patriarchal society. Like in other patriarchal societies, Akan men are 'supposed' to head the household and society, and women are 'supposed' to submit to husbands and men. When I asked people about a widespread assumption concerning the matrilineal family system - that it gives women in the house more authority - most respondents said that the matrilineal system is a just kinship system that follows the mother side lineage, where offspring belong to their mother's family and not their father's, because they obtain their 'blood' from their mothers and only 'flesh' from their father (Awusabo-Asare 1990). However, this kinship system has nothing to do with women's power within the family because Ghana is based on patriarchal social structures.

Before further discussion of matrilineal patriarchy, it is worth noting that Akan households and families actively unsettled the Eurocentric nuclear family standard (Hanson 2004). As formerly, it is still

common among the Akan for married couples to live in different houses, with children living only with their mother or mother's relatives. Spatial separation in marriage and a corresponding paternal absence in the family are very common. There are even children without parents, raised by close or distant maternal relatives related by either marriage or blood ties. Therefore, Hanson says, their "boundaries of domestic groups" are blurred and flexible, and the structure of family is not always hierarchical by generation, unlike general western ideas of the standard family picture (ibid:29-33). However, these family arrangements still have not lessened the grip of patriarchy on the family and the community. So it remains a mysterious puzzle for me: why cannot matriliny be matriarchy, whereas patriliny is a crucial element of patriarchy? Why are men more powerful within families even when they are not present at all? And, by the way, where are they?

I was wondering about all these things while I was in Agogo, and especially where all the men had gone. I did not notice men's absence in the beginning because I thought that it was likely they were at work. I did not notice any empty spaces left for them in houses that I visited. It was at the moment when I tried to draw family trees with each participating family that I realized the fathers were not present in the house. I told my respondents to start drawing the tree with themselves at the centre and to extend it as far as their family boundaries. One of the participant families held seventeen family members in one house, a family that extended through four living generations. However, that drawing included no senior men like husbands or fathers - but there were seven mothers.[3] The respondents said that their 'real' family men (sons and brothers) left for their conjugal family, and their husbands left for many reasons, such as death, divorce, their own *abusua fie* (mother's family house), or different wives. While looking at the respondents' family tree drawings, I realized that there were not many men and, also, that there would be many branches on the family tree if we wanted to include everyone in the family house.

As requested, when drawing these family trees, individual respondents started from themselves and added siblings and then their mother's family. They generally did not know the family members on their father's side, and they did not include their father if he did not live in the same house. The Akan family trees were complicated horizontal structures, like spiderwebs, because of many siblings; the family trees were not hierarchical generational trees, like what I used to draw when I was in school, and which is a feature of western family trees. For example, the youngest boy in Amoako's family, Obeng, was the great-grandchild of Amoako's mother's mother's sister. Because of this distant matrilineal connection, it seemed meaningless to him to think about their exact relationship and closeness within the family, even though they lives\d together. Obeng does not live with his mother or father but other women look after him and he calls them 'auntie'

Actual fathers and husbands are invisible in the matrilineal families of Akan. However, they still exist as a symbolic presence within the patriarchal institution of the family, deeply embedded in society. Tabitha Freeman (2008) addresses these patriarchal paradoxes when she notes that there is tension between the symbolic presence and substantive absence of fathers. She argues that patriarchal

[3] See Appendix 2 : Family tree of Salome and Amoako's family.

theory reproduces the fundamental paradoxes of patriarchy by "giving central place to the father as a symbolic figure of authority while eclipsing men's relationships with their children under the shadow of the omnipresent nurturing mother (ibid:115)." In this light, patriarchy can allocate power to men while subordinating women and stressing their motherhood.

> *Basically, because of matrilineal system that we have, men are wicked. Because they know that all of things they have will be given to their children and the children belong to their mother. So men, they don't take care of their family and wives suffer… I was second wife when I got married to my husband. He did not even come to my house often and when he earned money he brought it to his mother's family or maybe his first wife's family, but nothing to me and my children. So, I had to work very hard to raise my children while he never paid for my children's school.*
>
> *(Nana Mansa, 75, Female, Mother-in-law of Mr. Okyere)*

> *Usually, women cannot own family property such as land and buildings. So, only men possess money and women have to be dependent on men, like husband or brother. And because most of property will be inherited by men they tend not to work hard as women do not support their own family… I can't just sit back and watch the children suffering like my husband does. I think it is something that is instituted in their mind not only because of the system. Men think: when the child grow, they will only buy a towel for their dad but they will build very nice house building for mother. So men have the perception that nothing will return to them from the children when they grow up, that children will forget what fathers did for them. I remember one of my uncle said that I don't care about my children as I was enjoying my life and they just came out. So I think men have their own mindset. They think they are not the one who brought them into this world, as if the children just appeared on their own, without anybody's intention or contribution.*
>
> *(Mabena, 49, Female, Mother of five children, divorced)*

Although Akan women have bargaining power with access to property, such as land and housing (Hanson 2004:34), in reality, most property is inherited by men. Therefore, women have less access to capital resources but must work to feed their children whether they have a husband or not. Perhaps, patriarchy in matrilineal societies is the best condition to maintain the patriarchal system with the least effort for the men involved. While symbolic patriarchy reinforces supremacy of men through the absent authority of fatherhood, women are supposed to play the role of parents as both mother and father, because they are seen as the ones who brought the child into the world, not the men. It is patriarchy without the patriarch.

Christianity's Contribution to Patriarchy

> *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone.*
> *I will make a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18).*

It was my second night in Agogo, I was staying at a hostel run by a Presbyterian church, and I was having a difficult time getting to sleep thanks to loud prayers coming from the church. It was cheap but there was reason for that: since my arrival, every weekend night from Friday to Sunday, I had sleepless nights due to the all-night praying and chanting to God. Even though Agogo is a small town, there were more than seven churches around my hostel and a number of Christian institutions, such as the hospital and schools.

Christianity is deeply embedded in the lives and culture of the community, beyond just religious belief; two-thirds of the population in Ghana is Christian (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). When I first met people, they usually asked me which church I was attending; they did not even ask first if I was religious. This is the extent to which Christianity is a crucial social identity in Ghana. As an agnostic, I automatically became a target whose soul had to be salvaged. Everyone wanted to take me to their church and I went to the church that kept me up all night reluctantly. At a glance, there were many more women than men in the church service, and all the women wore colourful and crispy ironed dresses with polished shoes as a way of showing respect to God and the church. Then they worshipped and prayed as if they were about to cry.

In fact, Christianity was not initially part of my interest in the research. However, during the fieldwork it turned out to be a critical element of patriarchal notions of gender. Moreover, a number of participants said Christianity actually brought big changes in the perceptions of marriage and family systems as well. Yet African Christian history, like western history, has been written from a masculine perspective that portrayes women as ‘helpers’ or as absent from development of African Christianity. Further, research about Christianity has been locked into an androcentric perspective with no attention to women with gender differences (Mwaura 2005:414).

All of my participants were Christian. Not all the men went to church every Sunday but all the women did. In fact, African churches carry out paradoxical roles for women’s rights and empowerment (Oyěwùmì 1997). The churches offer women a space to organize various activities and cooperate on most aspects for their lives, such as micro-financing, vocational training programs, and even moral support. Thus, the churches give women both physical and spiritual supportive space (Bawa 2017:8). Nevertheless, the churches' role in empowering women in practice does not obstruct the fact that they still inform and uphold social expectations that women be submissive to men and that they perform the reproductive role in family and society. According to the Bible, a principal instructional guidebook of the church, woman is subordinate to man and possesses lower status than do men in family (ibid.:3). In many societies, religion has been used to explain gender inequality and, more specifically, the social dominance of men; gender and religion have a mutually reinforcing relation that is rooted in cultural and philosophical heritage. Thus, religious beliefs and practices are formulated and perceived from the perspective of gender.

However, despite this power imbalance, women are more devoted to prayers and following the ‘sword of the spirit.’ How come the Bible gives women nothing, but gives men all the moral authority over women? It is not only men who believe that men should head households and females should

submit to men; women also believe and justify these ideas because they appear in the Bible. Through a male-centric understanding of the Bible, women subordinate themselves due to the idea that they are inferior to men (Ruether 1985:114). In fact, most women I interviewed had no complaints about the notion that men should have headship in households and superiority over women, even though there were many women who played the role of head of household. Whatever it is that makes Akan women think 'men are wicked' implies that only rarely are there Akan men who show 'biblical manhood.'

M.S.: But who gave the men the authority to dominate the family?

O: Bible. Like woman came after man was created by God. So, at least woman should show respect to man because woman came after man and for the man and because of man.

M.S.: But then what about before the Christianity? Before there was Bible?

O: Hahaha (laughs)... before the Bible?? Um... But still the same thing happened. It was more about responsibilities.

M.S.: But I think women believe in Christianity more sincerely than men, right?

O: Yes, hahaha (laughs). But the one thing that I can say about woman is that they very easily accept and adapt to new things. But man takes more time because they have harden heart.

(Okyere, 56, Male)

The Bible tells us, God established the planet and he brought up animals of all kinds and each of them were two male-female. However, the first human kind, Adam, had no female human kind or helper. So God created Eve to support Adam.

(Mabena, 49, female)

Good woman, they listen to husband and follow husband's decision. They know how to cook, how to wash, how to take care of children and respect husband. It's written in the Bible.

(man at the bar, middle-age)

These statements tell us that people do not really question the notions of male headship within the family. Rather they take it for granted, under the name of God. In fact, the Bible does not speak explicitly about male headship as superiority over women but, rather, implies men's responsibilities as heads of household. Akan men seem to interpret scripture to mean that men are the bosses while women are the servants, but Akan women think that men do not consider the boss's responsibilities. As I mentioned before, many participants said that Christianity brought changes in traditional family system. However, in my opinion, Christianity's influence today is mostly found in changes of people's perceptions of the patriarchal family system, because there is not much actual change in people's lives. Religion provides a plausible pretext to maintain the patriarchy.

P: The Bible says man is head of family and head of family means that the head contains brain which is the most vital part of body, without brain nothing will work…Rest of the family is other lower parts of the body. We, the man, think about the future and look forward to the right ways with our vision. Brain will coordinate other parts of body and organs. So that we will move forward. And that's the role of the head.

M.S.: Does it also talk about women?

P: Yes. Let me bring the Bible… Here we are. The Proverbs. Chapter 31:10, The wife of Noble Character…

(Peter Junior, 18, Male, Second son of Mabena)

The Bible and Christianity legitimatize androcentric male authority over women as they are interpreted by men from a patriarchal perspective and exclude women's presence and perspectives (Ruether 1983;1985, Thistlewaite 1985, Klinken 2011). Although Christianity brought changes in marriage customs from traditional polygamous to monogamous to the Akan people, it still reinforces power relationships between men and women in the family with patriarchal notions of gender. So, in the end, nothing much changed in women's lives; indeed, as one of the female participants noted:

Christianity with the Bible says that man and woman should meet and form their own family. However, Christianity did not make actual change or improvement to woman's life in matrilineal family system. It just brought idea that husband and wife should live together in the same house. But anyway that's still not easy while husband's and wife's roles and responsibilities are still the same. The system has been implemented in Akan since the beginning so it's hard to go away with it.

(Mabena, 49, female)

As I witnessed in Agogo, this 'misunderstanding' of male headship in households as male superiority over women is often linked to their misbehavior or failure in fulfilling their responsibilities. Thus, it causes problems in marriages and family relationships. But it was common for Akan people to take men's misunderstanding and misbehavior as part of men's nature. So, Christianity reproduces patriarchal notions of masculinity and contributes to a fixed understanding of gender hierarchies as female submission and male domination (Klinken 2011:120).

When Peter Junior, above, came back with the Bible he started reading Proverbs 31:10 out loud: *"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies… She gets up while it is still night, she provides food for her family…She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night…"* Peter Junior is the second son of Mabena. While I was listening to his monologue, I was looking at Mabena cutting beef surrounded by flies, preparing food for the night. I had mixed feelings because the 'she' in the Proverbs overlapped with Mabena's behaviour, but at that moment it seemed to me it was only in terms of women's sacrifice.

Matrilineal Patriarchal Family Relations

In the end, there Is no matriarchy here that brings power to women; rather, patriarchy prevails in Akan society. When I asked my research participants about general ideas of the matrilineal system, they paused and tried to find appropriate words to describe their routine as they never wondered about their practice of it. Interestingly, most of the men linked the matrilineal system with inheritance and men's position within the family while women stressed their relationship with their children. Poewe notes that male power is dependent on control over the sphere of economics and female power is based on the generative ability to reproduce (Poewe 1981). In most patriarchies based on patrilineality, only men, not women, have generative power and authority. The principle of men's power and authority is therefore compatible with patrilineality: tracing descent through the male line.

In Agogo, although patriarchy is the dominant ideology in family and society, a woman definitely has authority over her children because the children belong to her family group, not her husband's. During my field work in Agogo, I noticed a number of men described their having a child with the term 'giving birth,' as if, while women give birth to their husband's family in a patrilineal society, men give birth to their wife's family in a matrilineal society. It is notable that Akan women's loyalty is not to their husband but to their maternal family and this leads to a weak bond between wife and husband, explored further below. The marriage is often more brittle in matrilineal societies than in patrilineal societies, as described below. However, that does not mean that women have more power than men. The fact is that men exercise authority in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies (Holy 1996:103).

As mentioned, one unexpected observation from my fieldwork was that the tie between husband and wife was weak, generally, and that there were a number of broken families in Agogo. When I asked participants about the typical family in Akan society, they said 'married couples (men and women) with children in the same place.' That is, a heteronormative nuclear family based on western standards. However, I think that is more of an ideal type of family for Akan people because while everyone described this general type, it was not common and I rarely observed it in practice. Among the four extended families participating in my research, only one family was even close to this idealized norm. The other families were a combination of multi-generational, extended, divorced, or female-headed families. No matter which type of family people lived in, though, they defined the essential ingredients of family as 'marriage' and 'sharing space (house).'

Although people spoke of marriage as an essential ingredient of family, marriage did not provide a strong foundation for the families I observed in this matrilineal society. Husbands and wives still lived in their own *abusua fie* (family house) after marriage, demonstrating that, in reality, family was something they were born into, not something they created. This was because marriage in Agogo was still based on customary marriage patterns, which are different from western marriage patterns. In contemporary western societies, marriage is defined by and based on legal status, with recognized corresponding rights and obligations. Although this style is increasing visible in Ghanaian urban centres, most Akan marriages take place after the woman becomes pregnant; when men then acknowledge their relationship and her pregnancy, the marriage can be conducted. In this light, the decision to marry is in men's hands, rather than being an essential element of creating families.

‘Sharing space’ was reported as another key component of families. Respondents also reported that in their matrilineal kinship system, there were no illegitimate children because mothers never left their children. For example, one female participant, Salome, had three children, one son and two daughters, but her husband was never around. She said she was never actually married. Her son, Evans, was the result of a rainy night with her first boyfriend and her small daughters were from ‘the guy’ (she never described him as her husband). Salome also was raising one more girl from ‘the guy;’ although she was not her biological daughter, she accepted responsibility for her as such.

Emmanuel, Mabena’s son, also has an elder brother who has a different father. When I first heard that I thought automatically that he would feel excluded among the brothers. However, they said since they have the same mother, they are ‘blood brothers.’

After my time with these families, I reached the conclusion that women are in the centre of the family even if they are not at the centre of power. During the fieldwork, I sometimes felt as though I were a marriage consultant, even though I am not married. When I agreed enthusiastically with the women, the men started complaining. I always had to remind myself that I was not there to judge, nor to record the misbehaviour of Akan men before every interview. Sometimes I felt that, once men became ‘old enough,’ they seemed to lack their own space to show their honest emotions including sadness, frustration, and weakness.

> *I think women have more power than men in matrilineal system. Because women have children when they get old. But nobody cares for old man in the house. They will just come to me when they need money.*
>
> *(Man at the bar, middle-age, farmer)*

Audrey Richards (1950) highlighted the male ambiguity of the masculine position in matriliny. She coined the term ‘matrilineal puzzle’ to describe the complexity of known matrilineal societies; with it, she describes confusion over men’s position in families and tension between a man’s natal family and the wife’s matrilineal descent group as a function of brothers and husbands having to share authority. She argued that there is difficulty in splitting men’s loyalty between his own natal family (as brother and uncle) and those of his wife and children (as husband and father). In practice, male participants said living with the wife’s family (uxorilocal residence) was the worst case of marriage and family shape, even ridiculous. For example:

> *That is impossible. That is not going to happen. It can’t be happening. Even society is against that. Akan, we don’t do that. Men never come to women’s house to sleep. It’s not possible more than not common. It’s man who is getting married to the woman, not woman to the man. So he needs to figure out their accommodation by himself.*
>
> *(Amoako, 25, male)*

In fact, Mr. Okyere had experience living with his in-law’s family at the beginning of his marriage, due

to his mother-in-law's request. He could not stand more than two years and finally built a house for his conjugal family.

> *In the beginning, it was just me, my wife and mother-in-law. But later brother-in-law also came. So, normally what we do is that I give my money to my wife and she cooks for everyone. So, everyone enjoy my money and food. I was taking care of the whole house and that's traditional Akan family thing. But there was conflict after sometime. The brother who came to join us, he gossips about me and my wife with mother-in-law. They were sniffing around for gossip and my money.*
>
> *(Okyere, 56, Male)*

Mr.Okyere said that if a man stays in his in-law's house, the community will think the man is useless and that an in-law family member, usually the brother of his wife, wields their power over him. In the end, the matrilineal puzzle has an underlying assumption that male roles are central in the family and society, and dominate the economic and social spheres. Under matrilineal descent, property typically passes from a woman's brother to her son. Thus, there was no space for women's power in Akan matrilineal families even from the beginning. However, whether seen as good or not, most people said that the matrilineal kinship custom is fading away because of westernization, modernization, and a shift toward western patriarchy, enforced (as noted above) by Christianity.

MASCULINITY AND FATHERHOOD

Introduction: Theorizing Men and Masculinity

"Masculinity [is] an institution, we call patriarchy" (Banner 1989:708). Over the past decades, many studies have been conducted on multiple masculinities and the redefinition of the concept across and within societies. Connell (1995) argued that masculinity is constructed and embodied in society, and that there are plural and hierarchical masculinities in every society at any given time. Masculinities are not the opposite of femininities but, rather, are embedded in gender configurations and practices of specific power relations in each society within hierarchies and domination structures. He introduced the term 'hegemonic masculinities,' that is, ideal typical and normative forms of masculinity embodied in society by practices, social norms, ideals, and ideologies which generate dominance over women and marginalization of various social groups of men.

Fatherhood is associated with masculinity closely as 'performing masculinity,' especially within the family context, because parental masculinity and manhood are constructed and reconstructed in a mutual way (Enderstein, A.M. and F. Boonzaier 2015, Pleck 2010). Thus, the intersection of fatherhood and masculinity can be a definition and performance of gender identity and affects the practice of fatherhood (Pleck 2010).

A hegemonic masculinity will be not only practiced by men but also by women; the term 'hegemonic' also relates to power relationships between genders (Connell 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt

2005). Therefore, the study of masculinity is not only the 'study about men' but, rather, a study of gender including both masculinity and femininity, along with the power dynamic between them through different social contexts.

In this section, I will explore the narratives of multiple masculinities among the generations of Akan matrilineal families by introducing the ideal hegemonic masculinity and the actual practices of fatherhood found in the families participating in my field research. 'What makes a man?' was fundamental question for all participants and 'being a father/family man' became a main ingredient for every conversation.

Being and Becoming a Man; The Idealized Husband
During the long journey from Accra to Agogo, my old friend Asamoah and I had an interesting discussion about the matrilineal system. When I asked him about general ideas about the matrilineal system he said,

> *How can we men be so sure if these are our children? What if they are from between my wife and a different man? It is obviously easy to know who is a child's biological mother because there is eyewitnesses, but not easy to be certain about the father because nobody knows.*
>
> *(Asamoah, 32, Male)*

I was stunned. How come he can give me such a clear reason for practicing matriliny? I was lost for words and wondered what evidence of and concerns with fatherhood are present in the patrilineal system. Besides, from his interpretation of matriliny, it implied that women have no choice about being a mother when they are pregnant while men have an option to negate being a father. Before and after being a father, men always have superiority over women.

It is not hard to realize that Akan communities are male dominant. There is a general cultural expectation that women will respect and submit to men, especially their husbands. The sexual division of responsibilities and work in the house is clear: husbands are considered main providers even when the wife has a higher income, while wives are responsible for houshold duties, including cooking and childcare. Although most women increasingly work outside the home, women's first responsibility is still the domestic role and if they do not carry out the traditional role of mother, nobody will praise them (Ampofo and Boateng 2007, Adinkrah 2012).

Moreover, Akan men tend to show a sexual double standard before marriage and even after. Although polygamy cases have decreased, there are still many, especially in rural areas, and a number of men believe that having multiple wives shows a man's power and prestige (Adinkrah 2012:475). During my field work, it was common in Agogo for men have more than two wives and a number of children even though they did not marry officially. Virility is also crucial for ideal masculinity; thus, the ability to perform sexually and have children is the ultimate proof of masculinity (ibid:475). Therefore, in Akan society and according to Akan men, successful masculinity is still measured by filling both the

provider role and sexual performance as measured in the numbers of wives and children:

> *He said he wants wife from Korea. I asked him whether he is married, then he said yes. Then I asked him why he wants another wife from Korea. He didn't even smile at it. He said that Muslims can have four wives and asked me if I know the reason. He then said a man needs "a white lady, a dark lady, a skinny lady and a fat lady" so he doesn't have to cheat (if he has only one wife)*
>
> *(fieldnotes; 4 August, 2017)*

Akan women also perceive Akan men's 'womanizing and boozing' as second nature to them and that they overlook men's breaking of moral codes (as prescribed by religion and church) is common. Even though women are unhappy with men's common misbehaviour, they reluctantly comply with men and the situation because they believe they are obliged to submit to men (as prescribed by religion and church).

Men's perception of their superiority over women can be seen among younger generations as well. One of the young participants said that he will not marry a woman who has a higher education than him because once a woman is educated and gets to know her rights, she will start making demands for these rights. Although he acknowledged the importance of women's empowerment at the beginning of the interview, his view was that this situation would lead to the woman challenging the man's power and bringing family trouble.

The Akan ideal man is represented as a Christian man, implying responsibility to his family in terms of economics and loyalty. As ideal woman is considered to be a Christian woman, mainly meaning being submissive to men.

> *We, the Akan men, don't like wife to challenge us. Two wise men cannot be in the same place. One must be a fool and that should be a woman. That's what we think. We always think woman should be down and men should be on the top but it's not dominating. It's more like compromising.*
>
> *(Ernest, 28, male)*

> *If you are commanding and authoritative to family while you are providing, there's nothing wrong actually. But the key things is that if you as a man fail to do your responsibility, for example you can't pay for children's school fee, then, you can't be seen as a man. You can complain men's responsibility is too much, meanwhile you are not doing it. However, a man cannot do that anymore. And you know, if a father does not provide while a mother does, the children will see the mother to be a father as well and not respect the father. You can't command while doing nothing. And wife will not respect her husband, neither will the family, the community and the society.*
>
> *(Amoako, 25, male)*

Ideals of masculinity are also embedded in the ways men perceive the relationship between women and themselves. As mentioned in a previous section, men usually feel disempowered by doing housework because it is seen as women's responsibility. Even though both men and women acknowledge the change of women's status with education and employment, women still have more barriers to higher education than men due to the social expectation that 'ladies will end up in the kitchen.' However, contemporary expectations of woman as future wives seem to be higher than they used to be: many men of marriageable age said that they want wives who have a regular income source or professional job, but that they still expect them to 'fulfill their duty' as a mother and wife.

For the younger men who experienced the 'traditional' manhood/fatherhood of their fathers in matrilineal families, with absence as the dominant feature of fatherhood, ideas about family and marriage seem to have changed when compared to the older generation. They prefer Christian marriage rather than customary marriage and one of them said marriage is about 'business,' not only about love. And they prefer patriarchal gender relations, hoping that they might fulfill the ideal of male provider (while being resigned to the fact that this might not happen).

I first met Ernest at Salome's place. I was doing an interview with Salome and he came to the house to fix the cable TV. While Salome was talking (more accurately, backbiting her husband and Akan men), he chimed in to our conversation and said:

> *Sorry to interrupt you but don't make all the men bad. They might have their own struggles. But I am sure 90 percent of men are willing to help their family. It's only because they don't have enough money. And they know that they won't get any benefit from their children when they get old.*

The language he chose - 'willing,' 'help,' and 'benefit' - tells how a number of men perceive their position in the family: as a combination of a calculated task performed when affordable and convenient, and a sense of abandonment and exclusion because they cannot compete with the centrality of mother's role. The boundary between men and women as providers in the family becomes blurred for various reason. Men cannot remain in the position of single breadwinner because the economic situation has changed compared to previous generations: jobs are scarce, incomes are low, and men struggle to get employment. However, this blurred 'breadwinner' boundary does not mean more horizontal or more equal relations between men and women, nor does it mean changes in men's perceptions of ideal marriage, ideal manhood, or ideal womanhood.

Younger men of marriageable age in Agogo are struggling to 'be a man.' For example, Ernest left Agogo for higher education but had to come back because he couldn't afford city life without a proper job and initial capital. He said he had to decide between doing something that he did not want to do in the city or coming back to his family. Compared to older generations, at his age he should have already been 'a man' with wives and children. However, along with Ernest, other marriage-aged men said they do not want to marry until they have a proper job and enough money to rent a place for

their future wives.

During interviews, when I asked younger men how they felt about being a man, they told me that being a man is privileged in Akan because they have power over women and children. However, they also expressed their concerns and challenges of living up to the ideals they described above. They appreciated the changes provided by more education opportunities or the possibility of not being a farmer that their fathers could not enjoy. But, they also said that they feared failing to be 'a man' as defined by their fathers' lives, because being a man is not enough to maintain authority anymore.

Women and society demand more than performative identity from men. As Judith Butler (1988:519) wrote, gender is "no way a stable identity or locus agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts." So even though younger men still have perceptions of men as material providers for a family they control, they realize things are not like in 'olden times.' Akan men struggle to sustain evidence of their superiority over women in the house and in the community. They cannot just become a man in the same manner of their fathers: by making a woman pregnant. Now, they have to show what it means to be a man by proving themselves on all counts: providing, protecting and performing manhood in and outside the house. All of these in a socio-economic context which is not conducive to fulfilling such dreams.

Disempowered Masculinity

Mr. Okyere is a busy man: he introduced himself as the head of his whole family and head of his church when I first met him. According to Asamoah, he is recognized as a good man in his family and the community. Whenever I walked with him in the community, people recognized him and greeted with a salute, a manner of Ghanaian men's greeting, or a bow. Sometimes people asked him about his family and church. He also seemed to enjoy being recognized by people in the community. He said people often came to consult with him when they had problems, especially with family issues. It may be that Mr. Okyere was a rare example of the ideal masculinity known as 'Presbyterian masculinity.' The term was introduced in 2005 by Stephan F. Meischer; following Connell's concept of multiple masculinities, Meischer focused especially on Akan men in Kwahu in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, among whom he identified three traditional notions of masculinity: adult masculinity as signified by marriage; senior masculinity (elderly men); and the status of being a 'big man,' as an uncle.

In this matrilineal society, a man's paternal responsibilities extend to the well-being of the children in his own matrilineal family, such as nieces and nephews. However, according to Meischer, the 'Presbyterian masculinity' that was promoted by the Basel (Swiss/German) missionaries embodied such ideals of masculinity and fatherhood as hard work, moderation, law-abiding behaviour, and monogamous marriage, with a man's primary allegiance due to his wife, children and church, and only secondarily to his matrilineal lineage. The missionaries spurned local notions of masculinity that prevailed through the Akan matrilineal family system. As a result, Miescher identified changes in the Akan construction of religious and social masculinities.

It's important to note that masculinity is not only defined by the men themselves. It can be defined or qualified by society and community within certain social contexts. Including Mr. Okyere, all participants - regardless of gender and generation - agreed that an ideal man should be responsible for himself and his family, and that financial ability was the bottom line proof of whether or not he was fulfilling his responsibilities as a man. However, unfortunately, it was very hard to find such a man in real life. Perhaps this is not surprising, as it is an ideal. Mr. Okyere, who appeared to fulfill that ideal, seemed to enjoy being recognized as a good man in the community.

However, appearances are deceiving. Mr. Okyere's enjoyment came at a high cost to himself and his wife, Abena. Technically, his wealth came from his wife's family. Although he owned his own family house and his three children were all in well-known universities in Accra, he said that he could not pay for it all without his wife's 'help.' He often spoke about his suffering due to his children's school fees; his job (a teacher at a public secondary school in Agogo) did not pay good money. So, his wife also had to work to support the household: she ran a small grocery store in the market and sometimes went to farm tomatoes and plantains. Often, Mr. Okyere commented about his wife and his mother-in-law, saying that his wife spent too much time at her (mother's) family house instead of his own. Sometimes he was obliged to make his own breakfast and dinner because his wife was always with her mother. He was not complaining, but when he said that he knows how to cook for himself, he did not seem very happy or proud of it. He added, however, that he would not be able to achieve his happy marriage and good reputation in the community without his wife and her family.

According to Connell (1995:33), the "cultural function of masculine identity is to motivate men to work." Men's breadwinning position within the family identifies successful masculinity and bestows a man with the authority to dominate his wife and other family members. The position of (male) breadwinners is associated not only with economic independence, but also social status and respect as a man. This can be seen sometimes when men pressure their wives into low-paying jobs to gain this form of 'respect' (Wilott and Griffin 2000). In fact, all the male participants looked uncomfortable with the idea of having a wife who earned more than them, even if they did not have the means to pay children's school fees and bills from their own earning. According to Thebaud (2010:383), a man tends to interpret his income as the main resource for providing essential family needs, even when a wife's income is about the same as their own. Being a breadwinner in a household is important to men to retain their strong identities as a men.

> *My wife is a hair dresser. And obviously, her money is less than my earning. I decided about two years ago, that from now on, anything she earns from her work she should use for taking care of herself, like doing hair, buying underwear.. meanwhile I provide everything important like paying bills and school fees because that's my responsibility not hers. She is a lady, she needs to take care of her body... Men are suffering and getting pressure but because of poverty it is not easy to afford everything. But we try and that is important. That is the way of being respected and regarded as a real man in society.*
>
> *(Atimah, 32, Male, Bar owner)*

Male breadwinning is general 'gender frame' that organizes social relations and personal identities across gender, class, and socio-political lines even though it is associated with working class and conservative men (Demantas and Myers 2015:642). Breadwinning is core element of hegemonic masculinity because it links men's earning to their negotiation of masculinity. Breadwinning affects how people perceive themselves and others by measuring their breadwinning role in the family (Connell 1995). Thus, men have to engage in 'manhood acts' (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) as a type of identity work in order to achieve the breadwinner title. When men fail to achieve the breadwinning title, that can be emasculating for them (Springer 2010:383).

The position of a man as a breadwinner is a typically positive, or rather ideal, social role for men in patriarchal ideology (Bernard 1981). In this regards, Parsons and Bales (1956) described the male role within the family as more instrumental than the female role. However, in matrilineal societies, the instrumental role of men in the family becomes more intensified, because they generally do not live with the conjugal family after marriage but still have to provide for the wife and children. In other words, their role is reduced almost entirely to material provision, since physical absence prevents them from participating in daily care or emotional involvement. If they cannot provide, they will not only lose the role of, and respect as, a providing husband and father, but also of 'a manly man' and they lose respect from others. So, among the participants, all middle-aged men were worried about that happening to them as they aged. Moreover, if a man could not provide as much as his wife, men felt this as disempowerment and a loss of dignity *as a man*, because their family and society would not respect them. They also think that their children will not take care of them:

> *They will just buy me underwear and towel to me while build a house for their mother. So what is the point of taking care of them? They won't return anything to me… Men is always suffering, and it is nothing related to matrilineal system or religion. They don't come to see me anymore unless they need money.*
>
> *(Man at the bar, middle-age, married)*

But still, at any rate, it was very hard to find men in Agogo who performed the 'ideal' man's role. As a result, their concerns were dismissed as 'whiny complaints' by women. Among the fourteen male participants who gave me in-depth interviews, one group of middle-aged men at the bar, and all those husbands whom I was unable to meet because they had left their family, there was no man who was the sole provider for his family. Besides, I met only one man who lived with his wife and children, and a number of men with more than two wives.

Father Absence and Young Masculinity

> *His full name is Emmanuel Okyere. He is named after the Mr. Okyere, not his biological father. He said that actually his mother and he decided to change his name when he entered the junior high school, since they divorced. They wanted to remove any trace or any memory of his father from their family. So not only Emmanuel, but other children too*

all have different family name. He said when the siblings do not have the same surname, people usually think that their mother is sleeping around with many men. So, even when the man and wife don't have a good relation or even divorce, still it is not common to change the name. However, it seemed her reputation was not more important to her than her children's wishes.

(fieldnotes; 17th July, 2017)

I always had dinner at Emmanuel's house. He was the second son among the four sons and one daughter of Mabena. She cooked and sold food at the lorry station every night. The first day I visited his family, we made a deal that if I were to pay five Ghanaian Cedi (about 1 Euro) every meal, they would make my favourite Ghanaian dish every day. So, for the sake of my fried yam, I went to their house every single day, even during the weekend. Mabena called me *daughter obroni Adwoa* (the last is the Twi name for a girl born on a Monday) because I was born on the same date as her daughter. I very much enjoyed observing and talking with the family every day. Observing their routine was emotionally moving although it was almost the same every day.

Emmanuel told me that he did not have any good memories of his father; he only remembered that when he was very small, his father bought him a small chair. Other than that, most of his memories about his father appear to have been built by his mother since his father left the family when Emmanuel was six years old.

My father was womanizer and never brought money to house. He stole mom's money and used it for his enjoyment. He was just trouble maker and I am not going to be someone like him, never… If he worked and supported our family, we wouldn't have to go through all this suffering. We would have had our own house, my mom wouldn't have had to work until now.

(Emmanuel, 21, Son of Mabena)

According to Chodorow (1979:176), when a father or an adult man is not present in the family, boys are taught to be masculine more consciously than girls are taught to be feminine. Boys are 'assumed to learn' their heterosexual role without teaching, through emotional interactions with their mother. And the mothers, the wives without husbands, tend to expect that sons will identify with their fathers.

Since father-absence is common in the Akan matrilineal family, sons have fewer opportunities to learn masculine roles through personal relationships with their father (ibid). Hence, male gender development is more complicated than female in the matrilineal society because of expectations from mothers and society that boys must attain 'proper masculinity.' In Ghana, there is still a belief in fundamental distinctions between men and women, such as men should not express their sadness or weakness. They consider weeping or crying as unmasculine not only for adult man but for boys as well.

However, this does not mean that boys, in the absence of their fathers, do not learn masculine roles

or behaviour, just as boys whose fathers are present do not always follow their fathers' examples. The article 'Deconstructing the Essential Father' in *American Psychologist* (Silverstein and Auerbach 1999) disputes the argument about the danger of fatherlessness: that is, empirical research does not support the assumption that boys need a father to establish a masculine gender identity. The father's importance as a sex role model is ideological, rather than empirical. However, it is important for children to form personal relationships with their 'object of identification' and make those distinctions through the identification that results from the 'object' (Chodorow 1979:175). When the object of identification is not present in reality, they are replaced by ideals. "In their unattainability, masculinity and the masculine role are fantasized and idealized by boys (and often by girls), whereas femininity and the feminine role remain for a girl all too real and concrete." (ibid:177) In practice, when I asked young guys about what being a man meant to them and what kind of man they wanted to be in the future, most of them gave me a picture of manhood that was actually not close at all with their fathers. The boys attempted to construct their sense of masculinity more in contrast to their fathers, as a result of their negative evaluation of the men.

It was not only Emmanuel who removed his father's name from his own name. Evans was first son of Salome. He said that he does not have any memory of his father. He only knows his face through a picture that his mother owns.

> *I don't remember anything about him but my mom described him sometime. He abandoned me since my infancy, like when I was 2 years old. She said the only thing that he did for me was that he brought me ball to play. He did not pay even a pesewa for my school fee… He was teacher in Kumasi. So once we went there to see him with my uncle but we couldn't meet him. But the other teachers asked me if I am son of Mr. Kobo, that is my father's name. I resemble him a lot. I was about 13 years old but they already recognized me as his son. But still he didn't show up that day and later the school said he retired. I don't know if he was trying to run away from me or not though…*
>
> *(Evans, 19, Son of Salome)*

Perhaps with respect to the negative reputation of fatherhood, masculinity in a matrilineal society sounds similar that of to patrilineal society. However, a matrilineal kinship system which is rooted in a patriarchal society actually gives men freedom from responsibilities to their conjugal family while exposing them to negative social reputations. I do not want to overgeneralize, but I wonder about the future of these young men. During my interviews with older men in Agogo, they all spoke of similar (negative) experiences with their fathers when they were young and, yet, they repeated their father's behaviours and practices although they thought they would never become like that.

This research on Akan matrilineal kinship systems as practiced in patriarchal Ghana was depressing. I came to believe that matriarchy was just a myth. Has there ever been any time or place that was not patriarchal? Can men change or do they even want to change? In a patriarchal world, if men do not think or want to change, nothing will change.

MOTHERHOOD AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women and Motherhood

Although discourse about men as the head of household dominates Akan society, women's substantive role as breadwinner is common because there are a number of men who have more than one wife and they do not (or cannot) support one of their families. Thus, despite an ideal of male headship as being the main provider for their wives and children, most women do work: running a shop, sewing, farming, or selling food on the street.

However, women face more barriers to obtaining jobs than men because of child-care responsibilities and household duties. Culturally, the role of motherhood is more valued in matrilineal societies because the offspring belongs to their mother's family and, in the past, women were not allowed to go to school because of the widespread expectation that they were going to end up in a domestic role. As a result, there were not many women who spoke English in Agogo - although most men did. In this light, the matrilineal system and patriarchal social order intersected to keep women domesticated by limiting their sphere of activity, and reproduced a gendered division of labour in the households and segregation in the market by gender.

Not surprisingly, both male and female participants in my research declared that motherhood is the nature of woman. Most women say that children are all they have in their life and they take them as a duty that is assigned to them by God. Having children is considered to be a significant achievement of a woman's life and offers the attainment of social respect in their community, because giving birth represents a continuation of the family lineage both in physical and religious terms (Hollos and Larsen 2008). Therefore, women's successful mothering and motherhood represent a 'milestone' that grants to them the achievement of their female identity and normative destiny as women (ibid:170-171).

> *More than 300 people attended at Nana mansa's 75th birthday. Including Mr.Okyere and Abena (his wife/Nana mansa's daughter), all her family came even from abroad like the Netherland and U.K.. She looked splendid with nice blue and orange colour kente dress with gold jewelleries. She looks little nervous but enjoying her day... There was grant ceremony for lifetime achievement award for her by Pentecost church of Agogo. After, her daughters and grandchildren read a congratulatory message for her. I did not understand because it was in Twi, but some of them showed tears while reading out. I think today must be one of the most special day for Nana mansa's life.*
>
> *(fieldnotes; 12th August, 2017)*

> *To some extent, I feel highly recognized in Agogo because when you mention my name, everyone knows who I am. And it is because people know that I have been working very hard to send my five children to higher education, having my own business and house for my family, all by myself without husband. I feel proud of myself for that. Then I feel being empowered that people use myself as good example of parenting. Because some people find difficulty to raise even one child.*

(Mabena, 49, Female)

Indeed, when I asked the question “when do you feel recognized in the community?” all the female participants who have kids responded that when their children grow up and finish school, they feel empowered and highly recognized in the community. In the same manner, when the child has done something bad, their misbehaviour becomes their mother’s disgrace, as they are considered to be failed women. Rarely is the father blamed. Therefore, women’s motherhood may empower women, but this empowerment still takes place within patriarchal authority (Walker 1995:421).

Patriarchal definitions of motherhood also reinforce limited definitions of femininity, because motherhood not only defines what mothering is, but also women’s identities. Since being a successful mother means being a successful woman, the women who cannot achieve the title of successful mother are marginalised in their society, including women who are infertile. However, I did not see any ‘bad mothers’ in Agogo. Most women are struggling to feed and send their children to school while the husband is not present.

> *Being a woman in matrilineal system is not easy. All I have got is children. Right now, my children are grown up. So I think I have done really good job. All I do is praying for them. You need to think about yourself and your children because men don’t think about it. People think I have done good job raising children because I have made it by only myself and God. So when they have any problem, they come to seek advice from me. And people know that I can help them. It is all God’s plan.*
>
> *(Mabena, 49, Female)*

> *From the time that you will be woman, you should start thinking of getting married to a man. And that means that everything that you are doing is to help your husband. Making sure of giving birth and bringing up your kids. It is lady’s job to feed and take care of them: giving them your breast-milk, enlightening them, teaching them how to behave… that’s why lady is a mother.*
>
> *(Theresa, 44, Female)*

We cannot deny that a mother is a woman, if 'woman' only means a biologically female parent in a heterosexual family. However, that does not mean that women are all mothers or potential mothers. Moreover, motherhood should not define women and femininity. There is no biological link between female sexual organs and the capacity to be caring, nurturing, and loving just as there is no connection between a man’s sexual organs and being macho.

Women’s mothering and motherhood have been taken for granted and it is a persistent sexual division of labour. In 1979, Chodorow analysed women’s mothering and its reproduction across the generations in *The Reproduction of Mothering*. She addressed the reality of the period that women’s mothering was taken as inevitable by both society and feminist scholarship, and that explorations of women’s roles within the family centralized childcare or taking care of the husband. However, the

issue of women's mothering is that it extends beyond the family. "Although women's mothering is of profound importance for family structure, for relations between the sexes, for ideology about women, and for the sexual division of labour and sexual inequality both inside the family and in the nonfamilial world, it is rarely analysed" (ibid:3).

As a woman, the story and experience of Agogo women are not a long way off from my personal experience. An Akan woman's story might be my mother's story, my sister's story, and my own story as well. During my stay in Agogo, I received unexpected proposals from strangers several times, even asking me to have a baby with them. Although they thought it was just a silly joke, I suspect they would not make such jokes to men. For men, I was just one of the future mothers, regardless of any other information about me.

Although mothering by women is universal, the foundation of the belief among Akan people that it is natural and instinctual to women is due to the matrilineal kinship system: children belong to women's family in matrilineal communities. In other words, parenting is understood as mothering while it is hard to find any meaning for 'fathering.' Thus, women's mothering activities are embedded in the social organization of gender.

> *M.S.: Why do you think men do not take care of children?*
>
> *S: Akan men, they don't take care of children because they are wicked. They just don't want to take care of babies. Some men do. But most of them, they will just come to house sometimes to play with kids or scold them. They think that's their job. They don't even think taking care of children is work like labour, so nowadays, they don't even respect their wife if she doesn't work for money.*
>
> *(Salome, 38, female)*

Salome's statement shows that men have a choice about caring for their children based on their preferences, while women accept their role in rearing children as fated and natural since they were born as women. Indeed, men are in a better social position to enforce their preferences than women. This entitlement is based not only in biological difference between men and women but also in power relations between the genders socially and within the family. Therefore, women's mothering activities become a fundamentally legitimate 'arrangement' and 'ideological formulation' which justify the sexual division of labour within patriarchal social and familial organization. In this light, women's mothering does not mean only performing the role of mother, but, also, contributing to the reproduction of gender inequality through patriarchy and its effect on masculinity and femininity (Chodorow, 1979:32).

According to Adrienne Rich, the concept 'motherhood' can be distinguished by two different meanings: as an experience related to "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children," while, as an institution, it "aims at ensuring that the potential mother – and all women – shall remain under male control" (Rich, 1977:xv). The institution of

motherhood can be a most effective tool of oppression in a patriarchal society for reproducing gender inequality: the reproduction of women's mothering role is the fundamental reproduction of women's domestic position and responsibilities. It is important to note that women are also perpetrators of reproducing the notion of motherhood as the essence of femininity and, along with it, their own social role and position in the hierarchy of gender.

> *It's not only in matrilineal system that women work more than men in the house. All the chores and labors would give burden to wife and daughter. For example, Adwoa (her only daughter) will do every work in the house when I am not around. When it comes to taking care of children, women mostly take responsibility. My children have no father and I don't have husband. But it is not true that I take care of my children while my husband does not because of matrilineal system. I am a mother of the children, that's why.*
>
> *(Mabena, 49, Female)*

> *I told her not to argue with Evans because she is pregnant now. So it's not good for her and baby. But she never listens to me. She is very stubborn. She doesn't like to cook. She doesn't like to wash clothes. Even she doesn't really like children. I don't know what kind of mother she would be.*
>
> *(Salome, 38, Female)*

Her family calls her 'pregnant woman,' instead of Dora, her name. She is Salome's stepdaughter, but she did not grow up in Salome's family house. She came to live there when she was pregnant because the father of her baby denied his paternity and her own mother was not able to provide a good environment. Although her own common-law husband is not around, Salome allows his daughter to stay in her family house. Although Salome was not in the best situation herself, she said her stepdaughter needed someone to teach her 'how to be a mother.' The community praised Salome for her generous act and it is thoughtful that Salome embraced her stepdaughter. However, Dora did not seem really welcome in the family; they did not respect her because she became pregnant before marriage and she had to drop out of school because of the pregnancy. Her own mother cannot provide the knowledge Dora needed to act as a good role model. As Chodorow says, "Women come to mother because they have been mothered by women. By contrast, that men are mothered by women reduces their parenting capacity" (1979:211). Therefore, mothers and daughters share the experiences of motherhood and their relationship reproduces institutionalized and patriarchal motherhood.

Women's Empowerment

It was during the second interview with Mabena. Emmanuel, her son, was translating my questions to her and her responses to me. 'What do you think about women's empowerment?' I asked. Then Emmanuel hesitated translating this into Twi; he said he could not find the appropriate word in Twi. I asked him again 'Okay, then when do you feel you are empowered?' Then he gave me a look meaning that he was still not sure. I asked him if he knew meaning of 'empowerment.' Then he smiled awkwardly and shook his head and asked me 'Isn't it something related to 'power' and 'women's

education?'

It is true that there is no word to explain ‘empowerment’ even in my language, Korean. Then how do I even perceive this word to talk about it?

Women’s empowerment has been a buzzword in development and feminist gender studies. According to Kabeer (2001), empowerment is closely linked to agency. She sought to establish a link between agency and empowerment by analysing women’s strategic choices, arguing for the need to contextualize approaches to understanding empowerment with respect to assessing interventions that were intended to better women’s lives. She also discussed different levels of empowerment, from personal to structural, indicating that achieving the former does not directly lead to achieving the latter. Thus, Kabeer's theoretical approach to women’s empowerment explains the manner in which women in any given society sees themselves, or may be seen by men and the their community.

Empowerment is also often associated with women’s emancipation. If empowerment is involved with individuals’ capacity within the system, emancipation challenges power structures and attempts to change the system (Inglis 1997:4). Among multiple approaches to women’s empowerment and emancipation in feminist research, much of it equates emancipation with women’s entry into the public sphere, such as education, the political domain, and employment. While these were the basis of women’s emancipation in socialist societies, Moghadam (1992) discussed the relationship between emancipation and development, arguing that, despite criticism of development as a modernist, western ideal of progress, it has undermined patriarchy around the world and economically empowered women, especially through employment. Development, then, has emancipatory potential. However, whom do we regard as empowered women and whom do we not? Do women need empowerment and emancipation?

To return to translation, I tried to explain ‘empowerment’ to Emmanuel as I understood it as based on Kabeer’s framework. So, I asked again ‘When do you feel you are recognized by your community?’ and ‘What makes you think that you have a voice in the decision-making process?’ Then he seemed to understand what I was trying to ask. As I explained in the previous chapter, most of the female participants (including Mabena) said that they felt empowered when they had achieved a good reputation for parenting their children. This was because it made them feel as though they had succeeded at the most important role available to them, which is being a mother. According to Rich (1977), mothering could empower women through their use of their natural power to create better situations around themselves, leading to satisfaction. O’Reilly also addressed empowered mothering: “The theory and practice of empowered mothering recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy. This perspective, in emphasizing maternal authority and ascribing agency to mothers and value to motherwork, defines motherhood as a political site wherein mothers can affect social change through the socialization of children and the world at large through political-social activism.” (O’Reilly 2004:12)

During my field work, I expected to hear women talking about their agency and strong statements against the institution of motherhood in a patriarchal society. However, when they spoke about their own experience regarding empowerment,it was directly linked to motherhood: they felt empowered by their motherhood and mothering. When I asked them if they had any other source of empowerment they gave me the answers that I expected in the beginning.

> *… Apart from my children… When I go to market to buy meat for catering, I buy big portion of beef like whole thigh and leg. There are not many people who have money to buy whole part of the leg and it's not easy to cut them and take bone out. Even though there are butchers, I don't need them. I can do it by myself. And when there was funeral in my family, so many people came from my side to pay condolence, much more than I expected. Then I realized that I have been highly recognized in the community in a good way and that makes me feel empowered.*
>
> *(Mabena, 49, female)*

Although Mabena had started her catering business to support her children as a single mother, the facts that she decided to divorce her husband, to start thinking of her food business, and to send her children to a good school were definitely part of her agency. In this regard, I disagree that motherhood only acts to disempower any sense of women's agency by controlling expectations of their role as mothers. Rather, it can allow women to define not only their own value and concept of mothering, but, further, their empowerment as well. Women's empowerment is a multidimensional and complex idea. Therefore, measuring and conceptualizing it by regulated theoretical frameworks cannot always be employed in practice. Then I thought that perhaps I was biased towards categorizing women as those who need to be empowered and emancipated.

While most women I spoke with had positive thoughts about women's empowerment, most of men had mixed feelings on the subject. In the beginning, men said it was good because it contributed to bettering women's lives. But after some conversation, they showed their concern about it.

> *Women's empowerment is good thing and it can bring changes in family. They are educated more and understand issues more. And it also helps her children as well because women can help with children's homework and all that. You see, the empowerment that we are talking about now is not arguing with their husband and being assertive. Empowerment should be to contribute to family meaningfully, not to argue and claim your rights.*
>
> *(Asamoah 32, male)*

> *You know what, actually women don't need to be empowered or superior because they will be under control of men anyway. Every man will agree with me. I have this girl, Esther. She is challenging me because she is educated. She doesn't want to be under control of men. But I want her to be a lady who listens to man. But she thinks that's not something for her. She likes me but I can't marry her. Oh… she is too challenging.*

(Ernest, 28, male)

> *Empowerment of women is very good. It will reduce unemployment issue and stress on men as well because they will contribute to household. But, if women are educated and empowered too much they will start talking about their rights. Then, there are two parties in the house who will fight over superiority, like: I want to show that I am the boss. Here, they run marriage as business. It's better to have only one person as decision maker, that is man.*
>
> *(Atimah, 32, male)*

According to these statements, men think women's empowerment is good in terms of improving women's education and contributing to the household financially. However, at the bottom of their hearts, they have negative feelings about empowered women who challenge their authority and attempt to become dominant in the family. I imagine women's emancipation cannot be welcome here. Although the men I interviewed recognize that they cannot be the only providers in the house, due to regular unemployment and changes in the economic climate, they have the misconception that empowering women means disempowering men - as if empowered women will dominate them. Meanwhile, women say they feel empowered when they are caring, mothering, and performing the patriarchal duties of women.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the conceptualizations and practices of masculinity in the matrilineal society of the Akan community in Ghana and their association with family power dynamics and women's empowerment. An intersectional approach was employed to explore how people perceive masculinity, femininity, family, and everyday life in a matrilineal context, and how these perceptions shift under the influence of social factors such as gender, age, generation, and religion. By combining participant observation with interviews, this ethnographic orientation enabled me to engage closely with daily life in Agogo and to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences. The findings demonstrate that intersecting social dimensions—such as gender, ethnicity, class, age, generation, religion, education, and cultural norms—shape perceptions of masculinity and reinforce patriarchal ideology and gender inequality, even within a matrilineal kinship system. My research journey, however, was far more dynamic than I anticipated.

First, the literature shows how concepts of matriarchy and matriliny have often been dichotomized through patriarchal ideology and linked to assumptions of women's empowerment. In practice, Akan society demonstrates a matrilineal kinship system embedded in patriarchal values that reinforce male supremacy and female subordination. As a feature of 'matrilineal patriarchy,' my study revealed a paradox: the matrilineal system symbolically affirms men's presence while allowing them to evade social responsibilities as family men. Religion, particularly Christianity, further legitimizes male authority and control over women.

Second, perceptions of masculinity and fatherhood have shifted across generations. The figure of the 'Christian man' has emerged as an idealized model of loyalty and family responsibility. Yet this remains more aspirational than real, as the breadwinner role—central to hegemonic masculinity—is often more tied to identity than to actual responsibility. Younger generations construct ideas of manhood in relation to absent fathers; many aspire to enjoy legitimate authority while distancing themselves from their fathers' failures, seeking intelligent and independent partners while still holding onto patriarchal expectations of authority. Boys growing up without close relationships with their fathers often internalize idealized versions of manhood and fatherhood, shaped largely by maternal expectations and societal norms rather than lived paternal models.

Third, in this matrilineal system, motherhood remains central because children belong to the mother's family. Despite the increasing participation of women in paid labor, motherhood continues to be framed as women's natural and primary duty. This patriarchal framing defines femininity through motherhood and extends its scope into the sexual division of labor outside the household. Yet, contrary to outside expectations, many women in Agogo do not experience this as oppression. Instead, they find empowerment through mothering, which provides agency, autonomy, and the power to extend their family lineage—something men cannot achieve. This generative capacity grants women a form of authority that may explain men's anxieties about women's empowerment in the matrilineal system.

Ultimately, there is no matriarchy in Agogo; matriliny is not a mirror image of patriliny here, but, rather, another variation of patriarchal social structures. My encounters with men and women in Ghana illustrate the existence of multiple masculinities shaped by intersectional social relations. Hegemonic masculinity, as well as people's everyday perceptions, is constructed through overlapping factors such as gender, generation, age, religion, education, economic status, and cultural norms. Likewise, understanding women's lives in matrilineal systems requires attention to these intersecting layers and to individual experiences, rather than simple comparisons with men's lives.

Finally, just as people's positionalities are constructed and reconstructed through shifting social relations, my own positionality was reshaped by the environment during fieldwork. I hope the reader recognizes this reflexive dimension and understands that my intention is not to cast Akan men in a negative light, but to present an honest account of my experiences, observations, and interpretations from my time in Ghana.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Guideline Questions

1. **Basic questions for all participants (family members)**
   - How is life and family relationships within matrilineal family system in general?
   - Do you think there have been any changes in family relationships from older times? And if there is, how?
   - (How the changes impact on men and women's lives and their relationships in family?)

2. **Each research question**
   - **Research Question (RQ): What are the relationships between men and women within matrilineal families?**
     - How do you describe your own life in the matrilineal family system in general?
     - How different do you think is your life from your parents' lives, and what has changed?
   - **RQ: What does it mean to be a family man?**

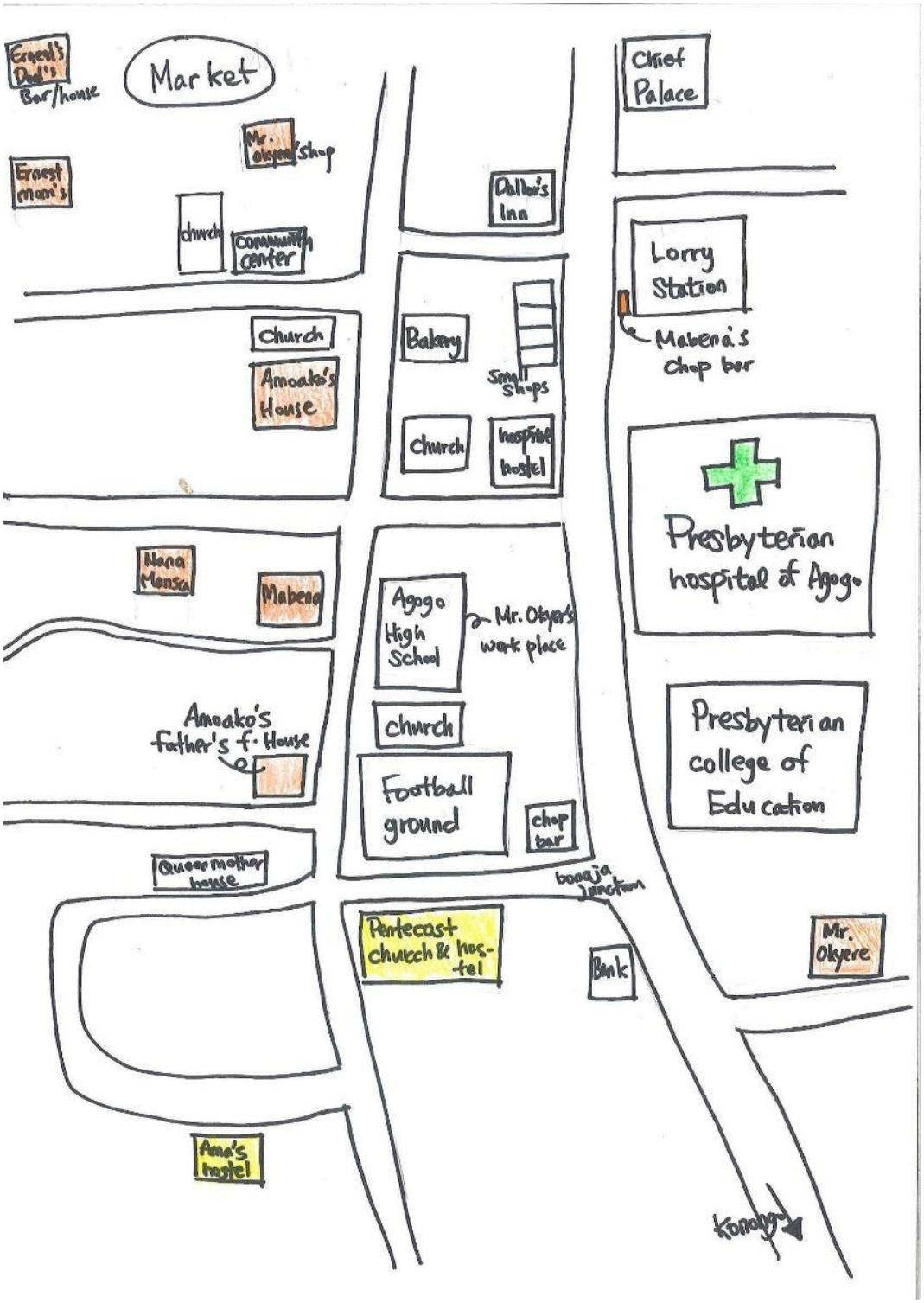
     To men
     - How do you see yourself within family relations?
     - Do you think the idea and notion of manhood has changed? If you do, how and why?
     - How do you feel about being a man?

     To women
     - How do you see yourself within family relations?
     - How is your experience and relationship(s) with the men within your family?
     - What are your expectations of men in family? Do you think there is a gap between ideal and practice of manhood?
   - **RQ: How have the notions and practice of manhood changed through generations and what do the changes mean to men's and women's lives within family?**
     - Do you think that the ideas and notions of a 'family man' have changed from before? If you do, how and why?
     - What is the impact of any changes on your own life and family relationships?
   - **RQ: What do the meanings and the changes mean to women's empowerment?**

     To men
     - What do you think about the empowerment of women?
     - Do you see any changes in the idea of the empowerment of women?

     To women
     - What makes you feel being empowered? (What does empowerment mean to you?)
     - Has your idea of the empowerment of women changed over time?

Appendix 2. Drawn map of research area in Agogo town



Key

Red-coloured places: houses of participants and main meeting points
Yellow-coloured places: my hostel and church

Appendix 3: Photographs from field research

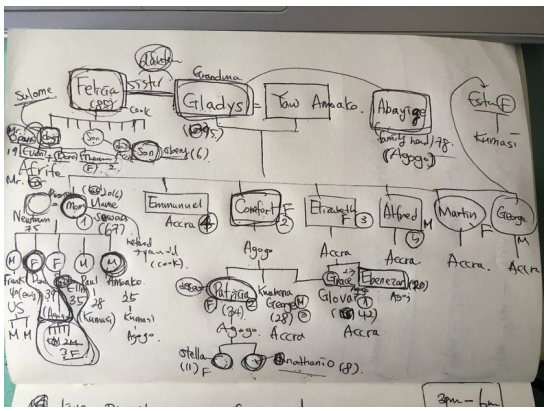


Fig. 1: Family Tree of Salome's Family

Fig. 2: Mabena's family:
Mabena, Emmanuel, Peter and Caleb

Fig. 3: Group of men at local bar (participants of group interview) and Ernest

Fig. 4: Pictures of Nana Mansa's 75th Birthday: Her (blue dress) and her daughters cutting Bible-shaped cakes
with Queen Mother and church people