All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought (ANUJAT)

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Volume 8/ Number 1

November 2020

Article 9

When Ghanaian Traditional Songs become Modern: Cultural Replication of the Traditional Responsible Woman in the Modern Gold Digger Woman

PETER ARHTUR

PETER ARHTUR holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK. He is a Senior Lecturer and was the Head of the Department of English, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. Currently, he is the Head of Department of Language and Communication Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana.

CONFIDENCE GBLOLO SANKA

CONFIDENCE GBLOLO SANKA holds a PhD from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana.

For this and additional works at:

anujat.anuc.edu.gh

Copyright © November 2020 All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought (ANUJAT) and Author

Recommended Citation:

Arthur, P. & Sanka, C. G. (2020). When Ghanaian Traditional Songs become Modern: Cultural Replication of the Traditional Responsible Woman in the Modern Gold Digger Woman. *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought*

(ANUJAT),8(1): 136-150. All Nations University Press.

doi: <http://doi.org/10.47987/FFRR2788>

Available at: <http://anujat.anuc.edu.gh/universityjournal/anujat/Vol8/No1/9.pdf>

Research Online is the Institutional repository for All Nations University College.
For further information, contact the ANUC Library: anujat@anuc.edu.gh

Abstract

The fluidity¹ of the text allows a mode of textual constitution by the user. Through an ethnographic research and a performance/literary analysis, this paper, interrogates the Akan patriarchal power construction which takes advantage of the fluidity of text. The paper investigates this cultural phenomenon by examining the replication of the traditional “bragorɔ”² song texts in modern popular highlife and hiplife song texts. The Akan patriarchal community constructs power by manipulating the codes in the original “bragorɔ” song text and that this manipulation is possible because the copy of the original “bragorɔ” text develops ideological shift through a process of meaning change, a change that is closely related to Akan gender power relations. The Akan patriarchal community therefore uses the fluidity of the text as a resource to maintain power over the woman. A very interesting aspect pertaining to this development is that this power manipulation disguises itself in modern popular songs which are normally not taken serious by the Ghanaian intelligentsia. And so, though very compelling this power construction may be, it manages to stay away from both academic and public discourses and thus grows bigger and bigger with time without being noticed. The paper recommends that educational planners should seriously add the study of contemporary culture and what it holds for the development of Ghana to both the senior high and tertiary curricula.

Keywords: *Fluidity of Text, Ethnographic Research, Akan Patriarchal Community, Power Construction and Modern Gold Digger.*

Introduction

Texts have their own inherent codes that influence or instruct the reader how to interpret them. Some critics believe true reading (text or a painting) is specified by the text and this results in the “reader’s act” or ‘re-creation’ of the work of art, retracing the same steps by which the artist

¹ The use of this concept, though similar to John Bryant’s (2002) *The Fluid Text*, which refers to textual transmission on account of vocabulary, grammar or metrics, differs from his on the grounds that the context here is mainly an oral one and not scripto-centric as John Bryant postulates.

² Akan puberty rites

originally constituted the text or image (Barber, 2003). And indeed, this is the credo of the New Criticism that the text has all its meaning and the reader should not go outside the text for any meaning. The text is therefore autonomous and that there is something in the text that binds the reader to keep to it for the art of reading is retracing the same meaning the artist put in his/her work. Meaning is therefore circumscribed by these inherent codes. But the post-structuralists quickly jump on their feet pointing out the defect in this kind of reading and saying the text rather stimulates but not constrains the reader to do his/her own acts of creation. Roland Barthes (1970) and Wayne Booth (1983) talk of reading a work “writerly” and writing a work “readerly” and this means one can put him/herself in the place of the writer while reading just like one can put him/herself in the place of the reader while writing and this, of course, imposes a certain degree of sophistication on meaning-making /construction and the reading of it. Interpreting a text is no longer “tyrannized” by inherent codes but that the one interpreting the text has the latitude of co-authoring, co-creating and co-writing the work.

This idea of co-authoring a text by the reader brings into the equation of reading practices the reader-response theory (1980). Thus, for proponents of the reader-response theory, the emphasis of meaning has shifted from the writer to the reader and that he/she fills whichever gap he/she finds in the text placed before him/her. In this case, the inherent codes are no more tyrants but playing a game of meaning with the reader, who, unlike in the case of the New Criticism, can now take his turn in constructing meaning in the reading process. The proponents of the reader-response theory are not alone in involving the reader in the meaning construction of the text. The followers of the Deconstruction theory are even more exciting to follow in this context. For Jacques Derrida (1974) and his supporters, meaning is breaking the text into its smallest components to ideas present or absent in the text and the full meaning of the text is the combination of the two. By implication therefore, something can be said or written but the real meaning is not what has been written but rather what is implied, that which is not directly or overtly said or written. This is an even more sophistication of the interpretation of the text; in direct contradistinction to the New Criticism theory. Here, the inherent codes instead of keeping you a prisoner within the confines of the text rather challenges you to go outside the text for a fuller meaning of the text, thus modifying the meaning of the text to go beyond just the writing, the painting or the lyrics one finds before him/her. The interpretation of the text thus being endowed with such fluidity in meaning-construction becomes very instrumental in cultural studies and this is what ignites this discussion. Thus Greg Urban sees the text within the context of the copy and the copied; the text then is believed to move from one context to another, completely jettisoning the concept in the New Criticism which sees the text as autonomous and therefore having no external relations, let alone to move to another copy. The original copy however possesses the inherent codes as to how the copy should be done, whether the copy should be the corrected version of the original or whether the hidden meaning in the original is what dictates the content of the copy. This metadiscursive component of the original copy might not be visible or audible but it has the power of exercising effect on the reader or the listener and the relationship between the original and the copy is contingent on the social relationship between the two texts such that there could be substitution

based on semantic, morphological and syntactical differences or deletion of materials considered to be redundant or irrelevant. There can also be addition of materials considered to be relevant, depending on the knowledge of the copier. Urban comes to this conclusion through an observation he made while living with an indigenous group living at PI Ibirama in the southern part of Brazil. He made two people transcribe the same text and he realized that the two transcriptions differed from each other because those who did the transcription related to the text differently. Wampo was supposed to be an authority in the tradition but Namla stuck very close to the original text because he was the student of Wampo (Urban, 1996). Urban explains that the same text moved from one person to the other but the manifestations of the text never remained the same. Perhaps, if you had any problem with the deconstructionist's position on the text, Urban, even though belongs to the entextualization school of thought, makes it clearer to you that the text is not as fixed as suggested by the New Criticism but they are really very fluid. Urban pushes this concept even further, positing that cultural texts are like the "ghost" or the "ethereal", moving from one concrete embodiment to the other without being seen physically or even being reduced to any material form. The text in this sense constitutes the abstract form for the production of the material and, in effect, he is providing the basis of what informs a group of people to respond to culture the way they do.

This fluidity in meaning construction presents us with two developments: a synchronous text, that which moves across space, and dichronous text, that which moves across time. In relation to such fluidity of texts, he postulates that such "carrying over, or 'transduction', is essential to culture understood as shareable or transmittable across the generations" (Urban, 1996: 21). Cultural texts therefore move from one generation to the other in an abstract form to be used in producing the material, signifying that changes in culture are not absolute but that there are always continuities between the original culture and the new one and that the original culture serves as the background to the new. This may explain why no matter how hard one tries to copy the culture of another person, one will never be able to produce the original culture one is copying. In effect, one is producing the "same" text but of different manifestations as seen in the case of Wampo and Namla. Urban makes it very clear that different manifestations of the same text, indeed the production of two texts from a single original text has been made possible thanks to a process known as replication (Urban, 1996: 21), which is the implementation of the detachment when the detachment is the "ghost" referred above, the unseen text carrying the codes responsible for the operations of the physical text. He goes further that the replication is involved in the examination not only of the "original and copied discourse, but also of the social relationships obtaining between the originator and copier" (Urban, 1996: 21). The originator produces an original text and the copier produces the copy and it is the relationship between them that constructs the viability of replication and here it is the social relationship between the two that characterizes the discourse. The social reality of the tradition characterizes the discourse of its songs and the social reality of modernity characterizes the discourse of the modern songs. Indeed, by extension, the viability of replication as explained above applies to all cultural activities, forming the basis for social change in cultures all over the world. Karl Popper emphasizes this point that what makes social change an interesting

aspect is that it keeps on changing, giving the discourse of life a novelty (Popper, 1961). And so it is that every generation has its own novelty, commonly referred to in anthropology as cosmopolitanism (Appia, 2006).

Karin Barber (2003) offers a very succinct example of the process from the copy to the copied and refers to how the traditional Akan “nwonkro” became a modern one. The traditional “nwonkro” was purely used on traditional occasions, for funerals and festivals. But Maame Afua Basa is credited to have modernized “nwonkro” such that it has new songs with few old praise texts and new instruments; this time using European instruments like amplifiers and loud speakers, new materials and new proverbs. Nwonkro has also developed a new style and performers are no more confined to traditional occasions but can attend national events like state-sponsored cultural festivals. In fact, the Catholic Cathedral of the Kumasi Archdiocese uses “nwonkro” during Mass and on occasions like Easter celebrations³. Barber further points out that this is how emerging cultures are constructed. A free market economy in Ghana has made it possible for the same “nwonkro” text to move from its traditional context to the non-traditional occasions like state-sponsored festivals. Again, it has moved from the traditional secular sphere to the religious one and even if in the traditional role it was going to be performed during religious occasions, it was definitely going to be for traditional religious purposes. But today, it is found in the worship of the Catholic Church, a Christian denomination. Meanings have changed.

In the same vein, the Basotho people of Lesotho take advantage of the structures of their oral and traditional praise poetry to recreate a new form called “sefele” (Coplan, 1997) The Lesotho people migrate to South Africa, carry with them the traditional text of praise poetry and use it to express a new experience and consciousness they encounter in South Africa. Once the traditional text is used for the new experience, it becomes a popular genre and the traditional ethnoaesthetics give way to a more metropolitan one. The traditional text instead of being used to praise heroes in the Basotho culture changes to “sifele” which is used to express the experiential development of migrancy and why they have to leave their homeland to another. Here again, meanings have changed. The same experience obtained in Ghana when in the 1980s for economic reasons Ghanaian musicians migrated to Europe. These musicians used the old highlife text and developed a copy called “burger highlife” (Collins, 1994) which is a local expression of highlife for the migrants. These Ghanaian musicians like George Darko, Charles Amoah, Kwodwo Antwi and so forth took advantage of the higher musical technology in these developed countries and used this genre to express the Ghanaian experience in places far away from their homeland.

Ulf Hannerz (1997) also addresses himself to the changing of the old order to the new one by explaining that contemporary culture is a shift from the micro, the ethnic mosaic, to the macro-culture, a “creolization” of world cultures. What was formerly considered different ethnic cultures now come together to form modern nationhood and so we now speak of the modern nation Ghana rather than concentrate on Ashantis, Fantis, Dagombas and so forth as congeries of cultural groups. It does not however mean that these ethnic groups have vanished and given way to the nation

³ Participant observation in the Easter celebrations at the Catholic Cathedral of the Kumasi Archdiocese, 2017.

Ghana but that the nation Ghana is a copy text of the original texts of all these ethnic groups put together, what Benedict Anderson calls imagined community (Anderson, 1991). Again, the nation Ghana is part of a wider whole called the international order or the global world which has its own classification; first, second and third worlds. The first world, that is the developed nations being the center of this paradigm and the third world being at the periphery of this order with cultures moving from the periphery to the center and the center to the periphery forming a potpourri of cultures. This is what Hannerz refers to as creolization of cultures which draws many cultures, integrates them and make them one and as this process continues, meanings which construct the various cultures also continue to change. Indeed, post-colonial cultures are copies 2⁴ of the original cultures, the colonial cultures being copies 1 and therefore it is the colonial experience that constitutes the social development that frames copy 1, the colonial experience, and the liberation struggle that frames the copies 2, the post-

colonial culture. This therefore means that post-colonial writers interrogate the relationship between the copies 1 and copies 2 and draw out the differences in these texts and the effect copy 1 it has on copy 2. Here we can mention almost all African post-colonial literary writers like Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, James Ngugi, Chinua Achebe, and so forth. Outside Africa, we can mention Edwards Said, Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Naipaul and so forth. They all see the post-colonial culture in terms of the African heritage and most of them come to the conclusion of alienation, sense of loss, deprivation, denial and so forth. But the fact is copy 2 can never be the original culture for copy 2, as Ulf Hannerz indicates, a global one while the original culture is purely a local one.

It is not only the post-colonial culture that expresses the concept of cultural change. Cultural change is also prevalent in the feminine theory with regards to anthropological, sociological and literary spheres of how the African woman is seen in the African society. In literature, there have been some intellectual response to this development and some of the writers to have contributed to changes over the years in feminist perspectives in African have been Tsitsi Dzengaremba of Tanzania, Buchi Emacheta and Florence Nwapa of Nigeria, Mariam Ba and Aminata Sow Fall of Senegal. In Ghana, Ama Atta Aidoo's (1993) concept of womanism, that the woman is not a competitor to the man but a partner, a feminist text, which even though not exactly what we find in time past is practiced today, is well document in African feminist literature. Her counterpart, Ama Darko (2004) does not only talk about womanism but does hold the society responsible for the problem of the modern Ghanaian woman.

Therefore, in all this development of how the original cultural text develops into copy 1 and so forth, there are certain questions that we need to address. What makes the copy 1 have manifestations that make it a new version of the original text? What is the social development between the original culture and the copy culture, such that there should different meanings between the two cultures? How does this cultural activity help to map the literary experience that is the result of the social expressivity of gender and feminism of the Akans? As indicated above, the feminist perspective with regard to gender and role of women in Africa as expressed in

⁴ The original cultural text is the traditional text. The copy 1 is the colonial text and copy 2 is the post-colonial text.

traditional and modern songs are under researched. The observation is however that in modern Ghana, traditional roles of African women are confused with the gaze theory that puts the body of the woman at the center of all discussion as the only value of the woman. In this paper, a look is taken at how *bragorɔ* song texts in the Akan traditional cultural setting have developed different meanings in modern times. A look will also be taken at the social developments responsible for the new meanings in the copy texts. The qualitative research approach is used for this investigation so there is recourse to participant observation, interviews and transcriptions. To analyze the data, there is also a recourse to Greg Urban's theory of replication already given above, "implementing detachment" (Urban, 1996: 21) and transduction, "the carrying over...essential to culture understood as shareable or transmittable across generations" (Urban, 1996: 21). There are two sections in this analysis; the first one is on the traditional song texts and the social development that influence their meaning and the second is on the modern song texts that are derivatives of the traditional ones and how a change in generation has affected the meaning of the new texts.

Discussion

The Akans are found in both Ghana and Ivory Coast, all in West Africa. This paper is however interested in the Akans in Ghana and that comprises the Ashantis, Fantis, Akwapims, Sefwis, Ahantas, Nzemas, Bonos, Ahafos, Wassas and the Akyems, all in the southern and middle belt of Ghana. The Ashantis, Fantis, Akwapims, Bonos, Wassas and the Akyems speak languages that are intelligible to one another. Indeed, they comprise almost half the population of Ghana⁵.

Brakorɔ is an Akan rite of passage of the girl from puberty to adulthood. This used to be a traditional practice by all Akan groups but modernity is gradually wiping it off the festival calendars of most of the sub-ethnic groups. Among the Ashantis, for example, very few towns or communities like Kumawu, Worakese and Bonwire still perform the puberty rites for the girl-child. The starting date of the festival varies from the last week in January to the first week in February. The account presented for study in this investigation is the 2019 version by the people of Worakese in the Bosomtwe Freho district of Ashanti region. Friday is usually the arrival day and tourists, dignitaries born in Worakese but residing outside the community, representatives from the media and other visitors arrive in the town. The gong- gong is beaten amidst shouts by women in the town at dawn, signifying the beginning of the festival. All the girls who have menstruated for the first time are gathered in the house of the Queen mother who dresses them up in the traditional fashion, giving them a beautiful "dansinkran"⁶. These are the *raison d'être* of the festival so they are taken to the palace and introduced to the Chief. The next day morning, Sunday, they are taken to the riverside and women in their menstruation are not allowed to get to the riverside where the girls are washed by an elderly woman amidst singing and exhortations. They are carried on the back of the elderly women back to the town and in the afternoon, a big *durbar* is organized in the honour of these maidens whose breasts are exposed, rubbed with a kind of oil to

⁵ Ghana Population and Housing Census published by Ghana Statistical Services, 2012

⁶ The sides of the head are shaven and rubbed with local herbs to look shiny black. Then a scarf is tied at the upper part of the blackened portion.

make it shinny. They are presented with a ceremonial food, “ετῶ”⁷. The significance of the pepper in the “ετῶ”⁸ is that life could be difficult and the salt also signifies that life could be beautiful and it is the combination of the two that makes life complete. They eat amidst singing by the *Nwonkrɔ* group and dancing by the women in the community. They are then given motivational speeches by the women and the dignitaries in the society. The rest of the day is given to merriment. Monday is the last day and the community organizes fund-raising activities after which all visitors return to where they come from.

The Traditional Woman; purity and delicateness

The songs under consideration in this investigation are “Fa mpaboa behyia me” when these maidens are being carried on the back of the elderly women back from the riverside to the town and “Nee mmaa pɛ ne aputonsu”. This paper argues that “Fa mpaboa behyia me” which is a prelude to “Nee mmaa pɛ ne aputonsu” are adequate proof that the traditional concept of the woman is that she is pure and delicate and needs what she needs from a man is to help her maintain these values.

Akan

Fa mpaboa behyia me e,
Odo ye wu e,
Fa mpaboa behyia me
Na menan yi kyiri abosea

English

Bring me sandles,
My sweet love
Bring me sandals
For my feet is too delicate to walk in pebbles

There are two points to note here. First, the girls have reached their menstruation and have reached womanhood. They are fertile and ready to continue the generation of the society and for this purpose, they have to be purified for such a sacred duty thus are taken to the riverside for ritual bath; both their souls and those of the community are spiritually cleansed for the all-important project of the continuation of the generation which, of course, perpetuates the existence of the community. Second, the state of purity therefore does not entertain any interference that degrades this sense of purity. The song is therefore symbolic of the new state of the woman who is now pure and her state of purity becomes delicate for any object or treatment that will inflict pain, a situation considered to be an aberration to her sense of purity and delicateness. Hence the pebbles are symbolic negative interventions that can disparage her purity. Of course, the symbolic communication in the song text throws the meaning open to a wide range of interpretations as to what could constitute what can harm her purity but the simple fact here is that the girl, who has reached womanhood is a representative of womanhood and should be treated with the utmost care. Quite interestingly, all the songs sung after coming from the riverside is a social expressivity of the Akan meaning of love. This is an area that has been under researched for most modern Ghanaians believe that love is the Western type often displayed in modernity, on TV, in the internet

⁷ This is an Akan delicacy of a mixture of mashed yam and mashed boiled ripe plantain with pepper, salt, eggs and pieces of smoked fish which is dry.

⁸ Interview with some women in other localities indicate that not all the localities add pepper.

and on the screens. If you consider, “Ɔɔɔ kɔ nɛɛ ɔɔɔ wɔ”, love goes where there is love and “Fa ɔɔɔ bɛɔɔ ɔɔɔ mu”, let’s be one in love, love is not portrayed as arbitrary as found in some cultures which believes love is blind. In the Akan traditional context, there is a condition that serves as a supporting text for the traditional notion of love. In other words, the substance of traditional love resides in the fact that the man should recognize and appreciate the purity and the delicateness of the woman. The discursive presentation of the lyrics as depicted above supports this. The image of the sandals represents an intervention that stops the receiver from being harmed as in the case of an individual walking bare-footed and risking being pinched or even wounded by a sharp pebble. The sole of the foot is soft and vulnerable to penetration. The sandals therefore serve as a protective cover to shield the soft sole of the foot from such attacks. Symbolically the sole of the foot is the woman and the pebbles stand for the harsh conditions in life. Again, the sandals were introduced by the Whiteman during the colonial days and apart from the fact that it was seen as a popular culture at that time, it also constituted a mark of metropolitanism which the evolved citizens associated with. The call here is to take the woman and develop her to look modern, even as at the time the song was composed. Of course, in the Akan culture, when a woman mentions “aware bɔne”, it is basically in reference to the husband’s inability to make her comfortable in marriage. Interestingly, this is a gender role expectation (Levesque, 2011) which requires the woman in the Akan community to have certain expectations from the man – to be treated like a queen. A conversation with an old lady in her fifties supports what we are saying:

Akan

*Na me kunu gyegye me so ankasa. Na ɔye biriara me bisa no enna na ɔka nsem de kyere me. Mehunu me ho se ɔhema. Enne yi dee, saa nnyegyeso no nni ho biem na saa nneema yi nyinaa ama mafe me m’awaree ahyeasee no.*⁹

English

My husband really pampered me. He would do everything I asked of him and he would say very kind words to me. I really felt like a queen. Today, that treatment is no more there and this occasion makes me feel very nostalgic of the early part of my marriage.

This was the beginning of the marriage not long after the puberty rites which initiated her to the concept of Akan nuptial love but she regrets that time has influenced this meaning of love and things are not the same.

Unlike this old lady, the young girl going through this rite of passage is going through the process of being initiated to another stage of life. She used to be a child when she had not menstruated but now that she has menstruated and can get pregnant when she sees a man, it is the duty of the society to prepare her for the new state she is going to enter. This is where some people applaud the traditional culture for its role in socialization. In the first place, the durbar is a community gesture

⁹ Interview with Maame Abena Anima, Worakese, 02/02/2019

to incise it in the mind of the girl, not only the significance of the occasion but to help her to remember all what is said and meant during the occasion. Michael Banton (1968) describes the corporeal significance of the French Bastille when the French publicly executed their king and goes on to add that it was for the purpose of constructing community memory that never again should anybody behave the way King Louis XIV did. Again, the *bragoro* ceremony is to construct a ceremonial rather than a private self to indicate that what goes on during the ceremony is a community philosophy and not an individual thinking and all these goes to put weight on the significance of the occasion, what she takes away from it and the role she should play as a woman. This role is prescribed by no other community than that of the Akan. This is important because we will later examine how this Akan feminist concept has been encroached upon by foreign ones. The young girl is now being separated (Campbell, 2008) from the state of innocence when she knows nothing about being a woman apart from learning to do household chores. She is now fertile and the culture consciously puts her through a process towards motherhood and significant aspect is the epistemics of Akan love which is the main supporting system of Akan marriage. There is very little wonder when on Monday morning, when almost all the rites are over, the *Nwonkro* group sings “Nee mma pe ne aputonsu”.

Akan

Dee mmaa pe ne apotonsu!

Kooko aben, nkafo aben!

Dee mma pe ne apotonsu!

Mmarima ee moano se pusa!

English

*what women like is aputonsu*¹⁰

Water yam is cooked, “nkamfo”¹¹ is cooked

what women like is aputonsu

Men your months like “pusa”¹²

Going through the ceremonies, one is left in no doubt that the songs have been arranged to follow a particular narrative of the journey of the young girl to marriage. Full treatment of this may not be possible here but let be said that the climactic order in this narrative is very significant in the sense that the song text quoted above is the climax of all the meanings expressed during the festival. Indeed, this text is often quoted by the modern Akan as indicative of the fact that women are given to easy and glamorous life (Asante-Darko and der Geest, 1983}. In the context of this text being the summary of all the knowledge the young girl has been initiated to; that she should be prepared for a long haul of life’s vicissitudes and that life is pepper and salt, one cannot but agree that the context does not in any way suggest a woman of easy life. Again, the discursive configuration of the text does not support the idea that the woman is given to cheap life of merely demanding comfort from the man. It must be pointed out that the image of “aputonsu”, has been often cited as referring to women demanding comfort from men because “aputonsu” is kind of

¹⁰ This is a kind of Akan soup, delicious but hurriedly prepared by adding water to fish and mashed pepper, onion and tomatoes and boiled.

¹¹ This is a kind of potato, bitter but a delicacy for the Akans.

¹² This is a kind of yam that grows wild in the forest of the forest area of the Akan people. It has been difficult looking for the English equivalent.

soup that takes a short time to prepare and so within this context it means sweetness without hard work.

The discursive configurations in the text above however suggest otherwise; the woman is not given to easy life. When referring to the easy life of the woman while making reference to “Nɛɛ mmaa pɛ ne aputonsu”, the Akan patriarchal community usually ignores the second line which says, “kooko aben; nkamfoɔ aben”, the water yam and the “nkamfoɔ” are both boiled ready for the dining table. The contrast between these two tubers common in the Akan culture is very significant. First the timing for the boiling of the two tubers is significant. While “kooko” takes a very short time to cook, the reason for it being called “five minutes”, “nkamfoɔ” takes a very long time to cook. Again the texture of the two must be taken into consideration. While “kooko” is very soft, “nkamfoɔ” is very hard. Furthermore, even though they all grow wild, “kooko” is normally found in marshy areas around the village but “nkamfoɔ” is found in the forest, far away from the village. Moreover, the taste is also a factor of difference; “kooko” is sweet but “nkamfoɔ” a bitter sweet and for the Akans, “nkamfoɔ” is a delicacy; it is the Akans’ favorite. “Kooko” abounds but it is not the favorite of the Akan. The contrast as presented here echoes the food that is given to the young girl being initiated in the rites, the “ɛto” that comprises pepper, signifying hardship and salt signifying sweetness. This contrast is the vicissitudes of life; today is sweet but tomorrow could be bitter or vice versa and it takes the two to make life a complete phenomenon. A man in his fifties had this to say concerning this song:

In the Akan culture, the women want men of quality. They do not want a lazy person because they, the women work very hard and expect the men to work even harder so they do not like short-cuts in life.¹³

The young girl is therefore being educated to avoid short-cut in life and that she should appreciate the fact that life is not always sweet and that she should be ready for hardship when it comes. In fact, this discursive presentation indicates that the original copy of this text should read “Nnyɛ nɛ mmaa pɛ ne aputonsu”, what the women like is not just “aputonsu”, echoing the textual experience of the translation Greg Urban made Namla and Wampo do for him in Brazil, 1975. Namla being younger than Wampo left some details out but Wampo, being an elderly person and closer to matters of the tradition, was able to supply the omissions by Namla in his translation (Urban, 1996). Urban’s experience is brought in here as a comparison because as indicated earlier, the copy is a revision of the original and in the case of the text being discussed, the girl is being advised to be ready for all eventualities in life and there is nothing in both the discursive and non-discursive practices in the text to indicate that the woman wants cheap life. Thus the negative particle “nnyɛ”, to wit, not what, that precedes “nɛɛ mmaa pɛ ne aputonsu”, what the women love is not aputonsu, has been omitted but the meaning of the text indicates that “nnyɛ” is a hidden code, without which the meaning of the text is lost.

¹³ Interview with Mr. Gyamfi, Kumasi-Appiadu, 14/08/2020

The modern woman; “a gold- digger”

As seen above, when the second line is ignored and the negative article “nnye” is also omitted in the initial position of the first line, the impression created is that Akan women want easy life. This, of course, ignores the contribution they make in marriage and it goes further to suggest women relying on men for their survival. In modern Ghana, even women have come to believe that they cannot live without men. In fact, Nimrod Asante-Darko and Van der Geest quote Kleinkowski as saying this about a group of women in the 1970s that during:

an annual meeting of a Ghanaian women's organisation a (Twi) song was composed which said: 'The belief of the past that men are superior to women gives way to a new era: men and women are equal.' The women liked the song but did not want to sing it because, as they said, their husbands would stop giving them 'chop money' if they heard the song” (Kleinkowski, 1973: 63).

In fact, Nimrod Asante-Darko and Van der Geest also quote Bleek as revealing that “relatives look askance at a marriage in which husband and wife develop a close relationship” (Asante-Darko, 1983: 246) and this is all due to the fact that the relationship is seen as asymmetrical and even though the man is supposed to pamper the woman, there is no room for mutual love which implies gender equality.

But today, all has changed. Women’s education has influenced their thinking about the lives they lead especially the subaltern roles to men prescribed by the culture (Asante-Darko, 1983: 246). Education has also enhanced their economic power and the educated ones do not necessarily need to be taken care of by the man, let alone to be pampered by him. Education has also brought about diversification of professions so far as gender is concerned and women are now in the positions of men in the working places. (Asante-Darko, 1983). Women in trading are making a lot of money and have attained economic independence. These and many more factors as given by Asante-Darko and Van der Geest put the woman on a different social level. She now sees herself in a different manner and she loves to express her femininity in a manner previously unknown. She now admires her physical beauty as a sign of confidence, self- esteem, health and youthfulness. She is now open to all that globalization or cosmopolitanism¹⁴ offers her as a woman; fashion, gender equality, feminism, feminine pride, the career woman, the pride in single motherhood and so forth. Literary writers in Africa in general have given expression to this new-found freedom. Florence Nwapa talks about the new Nigerian woman. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie walks us through the evil effects of male domination within the religious context in Nigeria. Tsitsi Dangeramgba also offers the window of what it looks like to be a modern woman in Zimbabwe. In Ghana, Ama Ata Aidoo and Ama Darko are flying high the flag of women pride in the Ghanaian society.

The most striking aspect of all these is the premium the woman puts on her body, knowing that it has the power to attract men, what Laura calls the gaze theory (Laura, 1968). The influence of the media, which is her major source of information and entertainment cannot be overlooked here. Foreign ideas about her circumstances, especially her body and the meaning of being an Akan

¹⁴ The concept of having the most sophisticated taste the world culture offers.

woman begins to take on a different hue. Beauty now carries a semiotic density previously taken for granted. When properly handled, the body of the Akan woman can really attract the man.

The agency of the woman negotiating for power in the traditional setting now moves a step forward: she now demands power. The body is the source of visual and other pleasures to the man (Laura, 1968) and most importantly, power, when power is making something or somebody do your wish (Faucault, 1978). Now she commands the man to do her bidding. The tables of power seem to be changing.

The patriarchal Akan society will have none of that; that the woman is powerful such that the man should serve her bidding is “unnatural”. The Akan patriarchal society therefore resorts to certain discursive practices, all in a bid to maintain male domination and identity. The new power of the woman is slanted to mean demanding cheap comfort. There is however a kind of dialogicality in this development such that the more the women become powerful the more the men too slant the meaning of this power to mean that women want cheap life. Such meanings have not been widely explored by literary writers. You find them mostly in popular culture and writers like John Collins, Esi Sutherland, Nimrod Asante- Darko and Sjaak Van der Geest have investigated the use of highlife to keep the façade of male domination in highlife.

The concept of the new Akan woman with power might have started earlier but it became very clear in the 1980s that men were not very comfortable with the new position of the woman and highlife became a cite for the expression of this displeasure. Jewel Ackah sang:

Akan

Maakɔtɔ serekye duukuu

Medze ama wo e, ɔdɔ e

Ɔdɔ ye wu e, sokoo na mma wɔ pɛ

Duukuu medze ama wo e, ɔdɔ e

Sokoo na mbaa wɔpɛ o

English

I have bought silky head scarf

I have offered it to my love

My love, women want cheap comfort

I have given you head scarf, my love

Women want it cheap comfort

Jewel Ackah’s man-woman relationship text is gendered and supported by the patriarchal ideology of male superiority. The traditional man-woman relationship provided by the *bragorɔ* song text, “Nɛɛ mmaa pɛ ne apotonsu” makes it clear that the woman wants a man of substance. In Jewel Ackah’s version, which in the context of this study is a copy of the *bragorɔ* song text, there is a development similar to Urban’s theory of “transduction” and that the social reality influencing the copy might cause omission in the copy. And there is a deliberate omission of the second line in the traditional *bragorɔ* text which reads, “Kooko aben nkamfoɔ aben” and so, as explained above, Jewel Ackah is echoing the revised text or the copy of “Nɛɛ mmaa pɛ ne apotonsu”. The revision of the original text brings about a change in meaning. But the copy as provided by Jewel Ackah does not afford the reader the opportunity of the completeness of the original text to see what is happening. And once the reader believes what Jewel Ackah is saying, the rest of the discursive practices have got to do with legitimating the second meaning as provided by repeating it in all social activities, including expressive popular culture like music.

Subsequently artistes like Amakye Dede produce the copy 2 of the copy of Jewel Ackah, this time emphasizing in greater detail, the easy life of the woman.

Akan	English
Mmaa pɛ sokoo	Women only want comfort
ɛnɛ mmaa yɛaba wonni sika yɛmpɛ wo e	The modern woman does not love
the poor man	
Mmaa pɛ sokoo, sokoo na mmaa pɛ ɛ	Women only want comfort

And as the text travels through time, at any given time, the emphasis put on women's desire to feed off men grows in intensity. Sarkodie produces the copy 3 in "Rich Nigga Shit", released in 2017. He presents the woman in her worst state of being a gold digger:

Akan	English
ɛnɛ Ghana girls obiara ne ne prize	Today, every Ghanaian girl
	has her prize
Nti wonni bi a kɔpɛ wo size...	If you do not have money, look
	for you type
Wotwi Maserati deɛ a, you will be surprised	You will be surprised if you have
	Maserati
Enti woni bi pɛ wo size	So go for your type if you are
	a poor man
Corrolla X by this time?	This era Corolla X?
ɛndeɛ massa manage nkoso noara	You just manage it like that
Wo car ne wo nan deɛ a, gyina nkyɛn	But if your car is your leg, then
	you are out of the race

The commoditization of the modern woman, reducing her to a mere merchandize, is clearly described using the leg-car semiotic binary code. The leg is in contrastive terms to the car where the leg is the non-mediated, in other words, non-endowed, and the car is the mediated and the endowed. And even among the endowed sphere of mediation, we still have gradation – Corolla X, meant for the averagely rich and Maserati, an Italian expensive car, meant for the very rich. So the Marxist class systems of the low, middle and high classes are invoked here, thus the Ghanaian contemporary social boundaries are presented in terms of the mobility metaphor in which the leg stands for the poor, Corolla X for the averagely rich and Maserati for the very rich; the value of the woman is tied to this material classification and this presents her to the highest bidder. But let us be careful; the bidding metaphor is carefully handled and hidden because the woman is not selling herself openly. But if you do not have money, *gyina nkyɛn*, just step aside; no woman for you or the best you can settle on, as the song progresses, is a prostitute. Of course the relationship between the concept of the leg-car and the outside world is not a direct one but the meaning is very

clear to the Akan speech community; that the woman is only looking for cheap comfort life without working for it. And so by this song, the contemporary Ghanaian man sees the female counterpart as being a gold- digger; a woman using her body for financial favors from men.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a closer look at Akan song text fluidity from the traditional to the modern context. We have seen a metadiscursive practice in which the Akan patriarchal community manipulates the codes in the original song texts in the copy for the purpose of creating power. The *bragorɔ* song text have been used to illustrate this fluidity and that what we consider the original *bragorɔ* song text of “Nɛɛ mmaa pɛ ne aputonsu” has travelled through time and what initially used to be an advice to be prepared for all eventualities in life has been manipulated by the Akan patriarchal society to mean that the woman is a gold-digger. This comes at the heels of an era when women are more independent than ever and the so-called modern construction of the copy of the original *bragorɔ* text which originally expresses the woman’s readiness for the vicissitudes of life has now become a patriarchal machination to contain women. Of course, popular culture is not an area much considered in Ghanaian national academic and development discourse but the analysis makes it obvious that it is a cite where current Ghanaian social developments can easily be tracked and subsequent findings fed into policy-making process for the country. This paper therefore recommends that attention should be paid to the study of Ghanaian popular culture and its link with national development at both SHS and tertiary levels.

References

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* London: Verso.
- Asante- Darko, N. & Der Geest, V. (1983). Male Chauvinism. In Christine Oppong, ed. *Female and Male in West Africa*, London, Allen &Unwin.
- Ata Aidoo, A. (1993). *Changes: A Love Story*. New York. New York: Feminist Press
- Appia, K. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism : Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Banton, M. (1968). *An Introduction to the Study of Social Relations*. London: Tavistock Publications Limited.
- Barber, K. (2003). Text and Performance in Africa, *Bulletin of SOAS*, 66, 3, 324-333.
- Barthes, R. (1970). *S/Z*, Seuil, Paris, 1970.
- Boothes, W. (1983). *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bryant, J. (2002). *The Fluid Text*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Campbell, J. (2008). *The Hero with Thousand Faces*. California: Joseph Campbell Foundation.
- Collins, J. (1994). *Highlife Time*. Accra: Anansesem Publication Ltd.
- Coplan, D. (1997). Lesotho Migrants' Songs and the Anthropology of Experience, In Karin Barber, ed. *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Darko, A. (2004). *Faceless*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Derrida, J. (1974). trans., Gayatri Spivak, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). trans. Robert Hurley, *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Hannerz, U. (1977). The World in Creolization, In Karin Barber, ed. *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Muvley, L. 1968. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Sassatelli, R. (2011). "Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture". *Theory, Culture & Society*. 28 (5) 123–143.
- Urban, G. (1996). Entextualization, Replication and Power. In Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (eds), *Natural Histories of Discourse*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, J. (2009). *Style, Basics of Quality and Grace* (3rd edition). Harlow: Pearson/Longman.