

Delineating The Image Of Woman Through Akan And Dàgàrà Proverbial Expressions

Martin Kyiileyang & Bliss Acheampong

Abstract

African Expressive Culture is replete with proverbial expressions which address many subjects as part of cultural identity. Proverbs contain appropriate linguistic features which are suitable ingredients for spicing language. This study takes a critical look at how women are depicted through certain proverbial expressions in the Akan and Dàgàrà traditional societies with emphasis on her personality and character. The main objective of the study is to examine the image of the woman and the kind of personality associated with her in a typically patriarchal cultural environment. Data was gathered from two different cultural communities.

Dàgàrà proverbs were gathered between 2004 and 2019 through fieldwork whilst Akan proverbs were gathered through library and internet search. Proverbial expressions which focus on women were selected and analysed using the qualitative approach. The Lakoff–Turner Theory on the Proverb as

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Martin Kyiileyang (mkyiileyang@uew.edu.gh) earned his PhD at the University of Cape Coast. His research considers the aesthetics of Dagara folktales and examines the narrative structure, narrative language and skills of Dagara folktales. Currently, he is a lecturer in the Department of English Education and a member of the Faculty of Foreign Languages Education at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). Literature courses he teaches include Studies in Poetry and Drama, Introduction to Poetry and Drama, Studies in Narratology, Studies in Autobiography and Research Methodology in his Department. Kyiileyang also supervises graduate theses. His research interests cover Dagara Verbal Art, Onomastics and Dagara Oral Literature in general, and he is currently engaged in research on the Mabia languages, formerly referred to as Gur languages. He has published on Dagara xylophone musical texts, literary aesthetics on Dagara folktales, Dagara anthroponyms, Dagara proverbial expressions and a textbook on Dagara proverbs. Kyiileyang is a member of the Linguistics Association of Ghana and Literature Association of Ghana.

Bliss Acheampong (blissacheampong@uew.edu.gh) is a lecturer in the Department of English Education at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) where she teaches courses such as Phonetics and Phonology of English, Modern English Language Structure and Usage, Textbook Production, Adaptation and Evaluation and Creative Writing. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Cognitive Linguistics at UEW. Besides Cognitive Linguistics, she is interested in Pragmatics and the general use of English as well as English Language instruction including computer assisted language learning (CALL), and has a number of papers published to her credit in these areas.

The Lakoff–Turner Theory on the Proverb as a species of metaphor and Honeck’s affirmation on the cultural context of proverbs undergird this study. Results indicate that the woman is an admirable but vulnerable figure. Her personality reflects that she is a builder and a destroyer in society. This study generates significant debate on how the woman of yesteryear was depicted in the respective societies. It also reveals a pattern of misconceptions about her in the cultural context in which she was depicted.

Keywords: Akan, Dàgàrà, proverb, context, image, culture

Résumé

La culture expressive africaine regorge d’expressions proverbiales qui traitent de nombreux sujets dans le cadre de l’identité culturelle. Les proverbes contiennent des caractéristiques linguistiques appropriées qui sont des ingrédients appropriés pour épicer le langage. Cette étude jette un regard critique sur la façon dont les femmes sont représentées à travers certaines expressions proverbiales dans les sociétés traditionnelles Akan et Dàgàrà, en mettant l’accent sur leur personnalité et leur caractère. L’objectif principal de l’étude est d’examiner l’image de la femme et le type de personnalité qui lui est associé dans un environnement culturel typiquement patriarcal. Des données ont été recueillies auprès de deux communautés culturelles différentes entre 2004 et 2019 par le biais d’un travail de terrain, d’une enquête auprès des bibliothèques et d’une recherche sur Internet. Les expressions proverbiales qui se concentrent sur les femmes ont été sélectionnées et analysées en utilisant l’approche qualitative. La théorie de Lakoff–Turner sur le proverbe en tant qu’espèce de métaphore et l’affirmation de Honeck sur le contexte culturel des proverbes sous-tendent cette étude. Les résultats indiquent que la femme est à la fois une figure admirable et vulnérable. Sa personnalité reflète le fait qu’elle est un bâtisseur et un destructeur dans la société. Cette étude génère un débat important sur la manière dont la femme d’autrefois était représentée dans les sociétés respectives. Elle révèle également un ensemble d’idées fausses à son sujet dans le contexte culturel dans lequel elle a été représentée.

Mots clés: Akan, Dàgàrà, proverbe, contexte, image, culture

Introduction

Oral traditions and the verbal arts are closely related. They are effective ways of communication in and out of our traditional societies. Oral literature, oral tradition, verbal folklore, folk literature, oral performance, and popular culture are all areas of human communication and performance which are currently attracting increasing attention from social anthropologists. Obviously, oral literature has its own style and structure, and the composition of the various genres vary from one performer to another and from the societies they emanate. Various aspects of verbal art can be well comprehended through effective use of style. The manner a tale is structured, or the manner dirges are performed, and the context under which these verbal arts are performed constitute style. The effectiveness of an oral performance depends on the style and techniques, while the audiences try to make sense out of performances they witness. One of the ways for communicating verbally to people is through proverbial expressions. It is a prominent linguistic feature in both African and non-African societies. The use of proverbs in human communication is an indisputable fact. It is important to state that the subject of proverbs has been treated by several disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography and other language and literary studies. However, the linguistic item of metaphor in proverbs is culturally significant. In fact, the historical circumstances surrounding the origin of proverbs differ, due to the different cultural experiences that generated the proverb (Fayemi, 2009). An ethnographic study of Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions exposes the cultural convergence and divergence of the two ethnic groups; extends knowledge about the rich cultural values of the two groups and the philosophy guiding their verbal communication through proverbs.

Rationale and Methodology of the Study

The Akan and Dàgàrà languages are two distinctive entities which delineate different cultural and traditional backgrounds. This paper posits that certain peculiar images are projected about the woman through Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions. The paper makes a comparative analysis of Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions and juxtaposes the two cultures delineating the image of woman. The joint effort seeks to validate interesting revelations and clarify the similarities and differences in the traditions of the two distinctive languages. Diabah and Amfo (2014) contend that their study “is an attempt to investigate the nexus between language, gender and culture within the Ghanaian context, and especially within Akan Society” (p. 2). While Diabah and Amfo (2014) use only Akan proverbs to explore the inter relationship between language, gender and culture, this study extends the exploration beyond Akan

proverbs and relates Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions to conduct this cross-cultural study, in order to identify unique features of woman in the selected proverbs. Our emphasis goes beyond the Akan community to include the Dàgàrà of north-western Ghana, whose traditions are strikingly different from those of the Akan in terms of language and cultural practices, such as weaving of baskets. The main focus exposes some striking differences between the two cultural groups. Earlier paremiologists such as Yankah (1989) and Opoku Asare (1997) focused on several thematic patterns in relation to various categories of proverbs that they gathered through a field work. Their analysis covered both sexes as they were not gender biased. However, this gender-related study makes a specific focus on the image of woman as depicted in Akan and Dagara proverbs. As such, the study is a parochial investigation on the concept of woman through various images observed about woman in contextual proverbial expressions.

The methodology of the study was based on library search on scholarly works by Yankah (1989), Opoku Asare (1997), Asante (2002) and Kyiileyang (2009). While the Akan proverbs are drawn from the scholarship of Yankah, Opoku Asare and Asante, the data on Dàgàrà proverbs are drawn from Kyiileyang's corpus. In view of this, the research location covers two geographical areas. Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions, which focus on women directly or implicitly, were selected and analysed based on an ethnographic perspective. Thus, the study adopted a qualitative approach in analysing the proverbial expressions.

The Akan and Dàgàrà: A Brief Background

For a better understanding of the study, an outline of the two ethnic groups under focus is necessary. The term 'Akan' refers to a wide variety of closely related ethnic groups which occupy a greater part of southern Ghana. The term is used to refer to both the people and their language. In recent times however, the term 'Akan' is mostly used to describe mutually intelligible varieties of Fante, Twi, Akwapem and related dialects. Though the cultural activities and dialects vary from one to another, the fact of mutual intelligibility allows for a singular description of their language as typically Akan. Proverbs are integral and very important part of the Akan system of communication. People who are well versed in their usage are accorded high admiration in the Akan society; yet, it is important for a performer of a proverb to prove himself or herself competent as referring to both the text and the context. The most dominant feature of the Akan people is their matrilineal system of inheritance in which a

person traces his or her ‘Ebusua’ (family) through the mother’s lineage. This matrilineal connection, which the mother shares with her children, determines one’s membership of the clans, which are the basis of the Akan social organization. Each Akan identifies himself or herself with one of these clans. The following are the principal Akan clans with their subdivisions:

Aduana (Abrade)	Asona (Dwunina)
Agona (Toa)	Bretuo (Tena)
Asakyiri (Amoakaade)	Ekoono (Asokore)
Asenee (Adonten)	Oyoko (Dako)

The clans are exogamous, and all the members are regarded as brothers and sisters, and therefore forbidden to marry, irrespective of the spatial distance between them. However, the Akan have an identical system of patrilineal groups known as ‘Ntoro’. These are twelve in number; a few can be illustrated as follows: Bosomafi, Bosomafraam, Bosomayesu, Bosommuru, Bosompo, Bosompri, Bosomtwe, among others. The ‘Ntoro’ builds a kind of spiritual relationship between the father and his child which ultimately balances the relationship between the child and the mother. The Akan have a political structure mainly controlled by chiefs and queen mothers in a highly centralized political order (Opoku, 1997, Yankah, 1989).

The Dàgàrà people can be found in three West African countries: north-western Ghana, southern Burkina Faso and north-eastern Côte d’Ivoire. Kuukure aptly describes the location of the Dàgàábà as follows:

The Dagarti people... live on both sides of the Black Volta River, which at that point forms the boundary between the Republic of Ghana and Ivory Coast and Upper Volta [now Burkina Faso]. These people live largely in the Northwestern corner of Ghana, spreading across the border into Upper Volta, ... As a result of colonisation, which split them up into zones of British and French influence, they now live in two different nations, namely Ghana and Upper Volta, not to mention the sprinkling of them cut off in Ivory Coast. (Kuukure, 1985, p. 23)

Linguistic Classification of Dàgàáre

There are three linguistic varieties of Dàgàáre: the Dàgàrà in the northwest corner, the Dàgàábà in the center-east, and the Losaalé in the southwest corner of the region. Citing Naden (1988, 1989), Bendor-Samuel (1989) points out that Dàgàáre belongs to the northern branch of the Western Oti-Volta group

of Central Gur. Thus, it is closely related to Safaliba, one of the endangered languages spoken around Bole, in areas such as Mandare, Tankpe and Buanfo, and to Moore and Gruni (Frafra). While Moore is spoken mainly in Burkina Faso, Gruni (Frafra) is spoken in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The Dàgáábà and the Frafra people are “play mates” as they tease each other about common things in life. There is clear similarity in their vocabulary, and as such, the two groups consider themselves as quite close linguistically. In other words, Dàgááre is much more distantly related to Sisaali, Vagla and Chakale, which are believed to belong to the Grusi branch of the Central Gur languages and distinctly related to the Lobi languages (Dakubu, 2005, p. 3).

Current research claims that the Dàgááre dialect continuum may be divided into four major dialect areas: North, Central, South and West. The varieties include a considerable number of variations, and there are no clear-cut differences. Nandom and Lawra speak the northern dialects, roughly corresponding to Dàgàrà and presumably Wááli. The Central dialect can be viewed in terms of geographical and linguistic perspectives. It is spoken in Jirapa–Bo–Ullo and Daffiama and other related areas. The Southern area begins at Kaleo, leading to the Wa Municipality. The West covers Birifor, which is west of the Central and South areas. Most of the people of the West claim they migrated from the Central area. The dialects differ in lexical terms, phonology and grammar. Linguistically, the Central and South dialects are very close while the West and North are related. Mutual intelligibility between these two main divisions is not very high though.

The Dàgàrà people are quite many in the north–western part of Ghana. The concentration of their settlement is Nandom and Burkina Faso. However, some of them are reported to have settled in present day Ivory Coast, in towns such as Bundugu and Buna. In Ghana, the Dàgàrà form the greater part of the population of Diocese of Wa and their relatives in the Diocese of Diebouougou of Burkina Faso (Bekye, 1991, p. 93–94). One of the theories on the origins of the Dàgàrà people posits that they originated from the Mole–Dagbani peoples of the Lake Chad region. They are part of the Gur–speaking (Mabia) group of West Africa. They have well organised and sustainable traditional, social, political and religious systems. Dàgàrà traditions include subsistence farming, sacrifices offered to Almighty God, marriage, dowry, initiation rites, inheritance, nomenclature, art and craft such as weaving, carving and pottery. All these originated from their ancestors. The Dàgàrà have always settled in villages according to patrilineal clans such as Bèkuone, Dikpiellè, Kusiéllé, Gbaane, Nàbèglè, Biibiilé, Bèrwuolle, Metuolle and Zàgé. Apart from these patrilineal clans.

Some of them include Somdá, Kpódá, Mědá, Some, Dábiré, Kámбирé and Hien. The Dàgáábà people (Dagarti, LoDagaa and Lobi–Dagarti or Dàgàrà and singular Dagao) are socially mobile, diligent farmers and highly educated Gur-speaking (Mabia) ethnic group in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast.

Theoretical Framework

Lakoff and Turner's theory on proverbs as a species of metaphor and Honeck's affirmation on the cultural context on the study of proverbs form the main pillars of the thesis on Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions. In his exposition on *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, Lakoff (1992) points out that everyday language does not make use of metaphorical expression. Rather, metaphor is normally applied outside the realm of everyday conventional language. Thus, metaphorical expressions were assumed to be mutually exclusive with the realm of ordinary everyday language. The word metaphor was defined as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept (Lakoff, 1992: 1). The generalizations governing poetic metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought. They are general mappings across conceptual domains. Moreover, these general principles which take the form of conceptual mappings, apply not just to novel poetic expressions, but also to much of ordinary everyday language. The main argument is that metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. The general theory of metaphor is given by characterizing such cross domain in mappings. In the process, everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical. Lakoff reiterates the effect of cross-domain mappings in the following way:

“The result is that metaphor is absolutely central to ordinary natural language semantics, and that the study of literary metaphor is an extension of the study of everyday metaphor. The word metaphor has come to mean a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. The term metaphorical expression refers to a linguistic expression (a word, phrase, or sentence) that is the surface realization of such a cross domain mapping” (Lakoff, 1992: 1).

The contemporary theory that metaphor is primarily conceptual, conventional, and part of the ordinary system of thought can be traced to Michael Reddy's *The Conduit Metaphor*. He argued that ordinary everyday English is largely metaphorical and as such he rejected the traditional view that metaphor is primarily in the realm of poetic or *figurative* language. Reddy

demonstrated that the locus of metaphor is thought, and not language, and that metaphor is an indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualizing the world. That is to say our everyday behaviour reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience in the world (Lakoff, 1992: 2). Reddy was the first to demonstrate that ordinary everyday English is metaphorical by rigorous linguistic analysis, stating generalizations over voluminous examples. Reddy's argument caused the emergence of an entire branch of linguistics and cognitive science. Thus, cognitive linguistics developed to study systems of metaphorical thought that are used to reason and examine human actions.

Honeck (1997) affirms that cultural contexts enrich the study of proverbs, nevertheless he argues that for theoretical purposes, proverbs can be "abstracted away from their cultural specifics" because "the mental structures and processes of Homo sapiens are explainable on the basis of the same theoretical principles" (37). Thus, Honeck summarizes ethnographic work but does not substantially alter his theory in light of it. So far as the use of proverb involves mental performance, one can hardly discount such culturally determined factors as the size and familiarity of the proverbial repertoire, the amount of proverb practice provided, and the value placed on skillful use. Proverb use arises from a context of "cultural specifics" from which it cannot be "abstracted" without serious distortion.

Additionally, Bauman's (1977) theoretical ideas on Verbal Art as Performance are also essential to this study. Bauman (1977: 11) is quite explicit when he says that "fundamentally performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways". Modern theories on verbal art reiterate the message for its own sake or emphasise the form of expression over and above the needs of communication. Though there are differences in opinions on the nature of verbal art, there is one common feature in all these views; that is, verbal art is text-centred. Performance is heavily dependent on the "way communication is carried out above and beyond its referential content" as well as the competence of the performer. Performance therefore borders on mode of language use, that is, a way of speaking (Bauman, 1977).

Literature Review

It is important to point out that there is no overarching theory of proverbs. However, there are seven distinguishable views about proverbs. These are personal, formal, religious, literary, practical, cultural and cognitive. On the personal basis, proverbs can be subjective based on personal experience and understanding. From the formal perspective, clear cut scientific methods are used, involving concepts of linguistics, logic and semiotics in order to define, classify and analyse proverbs. The religious nature of proverbs emphasises a parabolic representation, in order to teach wisdom. Proverbs can also be analysed in terms of their literary value because various images can be embedded in them. Additionally, proverbs can be used for intelligence test, advertising and psychotherapy. From the cultural perspective, a proverb can be treated as a multifunction form of folk literature in the socio-linguistic context. Finally, in the cognitive domain, individuals are tested to use and understand proverbs (Kyiileyang, 2009, p. 62).

Performance is a very complex skill that is often manifested by a performer. Common features normally associated with performance include mode of spoken verbal communication, setting, text, context, audience and techniques. Malinowski (1926), Ben-Amos and Goldstein (1975), Bauman (1986), Okpewho (1990) and Ganyi (2013) have all stressed the significance of performance in oral art. Relating the oral text to the audience and context under which a performance is carried out, Okpewho reiterates what Malinowski emphasised many years ago, thus, “the whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and response of the audience mean as much to the natives as text” (Okpewho, 1990: 1). Additionally, performance must be situated in its proper time setting, the hour of the day and the season with the appropriate background.

Gender Related Issues among the Akan and Dàgàrà

In citing Anderson (2012, p. 10), Diabah and Amfo (2014, p. 2) point out that the gender conceptions found in proverbs form a system of gender hegemony that supports masculine superiority and feminine subordination. For example, in terms of marriage, men are depicted as choosers of their wives whilst women are portrayed as the chosen ones. Thus, the male superiority and female subordination can be seen in the marital relationship between men and female subordination can be seen in the marital relationship between men and women. Such a concept is corroborated by Wang (2012, p. 152) who posits that sex discrimination in English and Chinese proverbs equally portrays a ‘gender-biased ideology’ because men are shown to be superior to and stronger than women

In the Ghanaian context, extensive research has been done on proverbs, especially among the Akan (Asimeng–Boahene, 2009, 2010, 2013; Oduyoye, 1979; Yankah, 1989, 2012). Studies which have focused on female identities include those conducted by Asimeng–Boahene (2013), Oduyoye (1979) and Yitah (2007, 2011), as indicated by Diabah and Amfo (2012, p. 2). Oduyoye and Asimeng–Boahene indicate that the image of women and their social roles are reiterated through the articulation of Akan proverbs. Asimeng–Boahene (2013), in particular, refers to the matriarchal and patriarchal systems and indicates how African proverbs are used to “situate or socially construct African women” (cited in Diabah and Amfo, 2014, p. 2). Such proverbs show how men manipulate positions of socio-economic power by subjugating women to only domestic affairs. That is women are merely portrayed as dependent on men both at home and in the society at large. It is sad to note that women are projected as objects of men’s pleasure, and are therefore denied of their basic rights to their own sexuality. Ironically, women are shown to be difficult to manage or understand, yet they are expected to be diligent in all spheres of life.

It is important to acknowledge previous studies conducted on the image of woman through various proverbial expressions. However, this study does not only focus on Akan proverbs but extends the debate on the image to include Dagara proverbs. The crux of this study lies in the cross-cultural representation of the Akan and Dagara people, in relation to the mode of communication through proverbial expressions. This indicates why the perspective of this study differs from previous scholarship on the vibrant subject of woman. The comparative value is significant because the Akan and Dagara cultures are strikingly different as the proverbs used in this study have emanated from separate cultural contexts which enhance both the application and interpretation of these oral texts.

The Dàgàrà term for a respectable and ideal woman is ‘pɔg-minga’ (the real woman). In Africa, there are normative concepts about women. These concepts regulate female behaviour within the household, family, open market and office. The notions of how to be a good mother or a good wife varies from one society to another within the Dàgàrà communities, either in urban or rural settings. For instance, in Kyiileyang’s collection (2009), Proverb No. 29 states that ‘Yɛb pɔg sob mi ni nasɛbla’ (The man with many sisters is actually a black cow). In this proverb, the value of a woman can be drawn out of the phrase ‘Yɛb pɔg sob’ (the woman’s brother) who can suddenly become wealthy through the payment of several dowries when the sisters get married. Metaphorically, he is represented as a black cow (‘nasɛbla’). The black colour in Dàgàrà culture

portrays significance and mystery. The thematic representation in this proverb emphasises lucky people who are blessed with several privileges.

The concept of ‘pog-minga’ reiterates the Dàgàrà woman who is properly married with her dowry paid up. She must be diligent and committed to her work and must be humble and quiet at social gatherings. Evidence must show that she cares for her household and children and should also be a pleasant-looking person. McCoy’s (1988, p. 155) memoir reveals that the missionaries’ impression of Dàgàrà women was that of an oppressed people without rights in society, hence the need to protect them. He noted that most of them were forced into marriages and whenever they suffered any verbal abuse, they fled to the missionaries seeking refuge (McCoy, 1988, p. 154). Therefore, the missionaries attempted to cancel the dowry system in order to liberate women from being ‘purchased (as) cattle’ through the dowry system prevalent at that time. However, the value of the dowry system and the inheritance of widows according to Dàgàrà traditions rather secured the social status of women. Furthermore, among the Dàgáábà in general, the predicament of widows shows how women are subjugated in their communities. Tengepare and Duhoe (2020) reiterate that the oppression of women occasionally blocks them from self-development and excludes them from a genuine marital life as they do not share similar rights that men take for granted. They argue that, economically, the death of a husband can lead to loss of income and property earned by the wife, unless determined otherwise by legal documents (Tengepare and Duhoe, 2020, p. 18).

Theoretical Concepts on Proverbs

A proverb is a distinctive expression which exposes a certain universal truth about human life. This expression is often embedded a metaphorical, ironical, and paradoxical image. There are four distinctive features of a proverb, namely brevity, symbolic representation, terseness and pithiness. From this definition, there is a difference between a wise saying, wellerism and a proverbial expression. It is important to state that every proverb is a wise saying, but not every wise saying is a proverb automatically. This is where one sees a clear distinction between an ordinary wise saying and then a proverbial expression. For example, wise sayings include the following: *Adversity and loss make a man wise and An apple a day keeps the doctor away. However, the following are considered proverbial expressions: It is crooked wood that shows the best sculptor and Even as the archer loves the arrow that flies, so too he loves the bow that remains constant in his hands.* A Ghanaian proverb states that: *Wisdom is like a baobab tree; a single man’s hand cannot embrace it.* For instance, no single individual researcher from a particular culture can do justice

to the immense treasure of African proverbs. Paremiological scholars from different cultures must collaborate in the gathering and interpretation of African proverbs emanating from other cultures (Bosman, 2002, p. 359).

It is important to open this discussion with a clarification on various concepts relating to the term “Proverb”. The term is derived from two Latin words, “pro” and “verbum” with “pro” meaning ‘in favour of’ or ‘in support of something’. However, the word “verbum”, traceable to the old French term ‘via’ means word. Several attempts have been made to define the term “Proverb”. Dalfovo (1984, p. 2) refers to Aristotle’s concept of proverbs as “fragments of ancient wisdom preserved amid wreck and ruin for their brevity and aptness” (Kyiileyang, 2009, p. 54). It is important to note keywords like fragments, ancient wisdom, preservation, brevity and aptness. These words form some of the main traits of the term “Proverb”. Finnegan (1970, p. 390) reiterates that the “figurative quality of proverbs is generally striking”, especially in relation to the metaphorical structure of proverbs. Hulme (1968, p. 14) cites Samuel Johnson on the term “Proverb” as follows: “a short sentence frequently repeated by the people, a saw; an adage”. These are characteristics which are similar to Aristotle’s concepts, especially on the idea of brevity. This idea corroborates the ancient and traditional nature of proverbs whose meaning is exposed through frequent usage. Hazlitt (1902/2017) (cited by Hulme, 1968, p. 7) posits that a proverb is “an expression or combination of words conveying a truth to the mind by a figure, periphrasis, antithesis or hyperbole”.

Again, according to Hulme (1968, p.7) a proverb is a “common saying, sentiment, or sentence in which all agree”. In this way, the proverb is not merely a linguistic feature but also its literary characteristics reveal the inherent property of symbolism embedded in most proverbs across cultures. The idea of truism is also closely associated with the term “Proverb”. For instance, Whiting, (1932, pp. 278, 301–302) states that a proverb expresses

what is apparently a fundamental truth, that is, a truism in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme ... some proverbs have both a literal meaning and a figurative meaning either of which makes perfect sense, but more often they have but one or two.

Proverbs comment on issues in human society, according to Dundes (1975) who contends that a proverb is a traditional propositional statement with a descriptive element which underscores a topic or comment.

There are more complex definitions of the term “Proverb”. Some salient points of those definitions project the short and pithy nature of proverbs, exposition of truth ascertained by experience or observation, and anonymity of authorship, a situation which relates the utterance of proverb to the traditions of antiquity. It is good to illustrate the above with some of those definitions. According to Voo (1989, p. 19) “a proverb is a stereotype linguistic entity expressing a fixed idea. It emphasises an artistic picture, a semiotic system and an instrument of poetic expression”. Lakoff and Turner equally treat proverbs as poems based on Merwin’s (1989, p. 160) book on poetry. In fact, Lakoff and Turner treat the proverb as a species of metaphor. They argue that human thinking is controlled at a deep level by a series of extended metaphors (also known as conceptual metaphors) such as “Argument is war” or “Life is a journey”. Though these are metaphors, one can look at them as concepts which are part and parcel of our minds. Thus, the cognitive level of these basic metaphors can be very powerful and effective. However, Honeck (1989) defines a proverb as a “discourse deviant which uses a present tense statement that uses characteristic linguistic markers to arouse cognitive ideals” (Bradbury, 2002, p. 270). In a number of significant features, Mieder (1977: 81) enumerates among other things that proverbs may “function as warning, persuasion, admonition, reprimand, statement, characterisation, explanation, description, justification, summarisation”, and it is well possible that one and the same proverb takes completely different functions in different contexts (Yankah, 1989, Grzybek, 1994).

Style and Structure of Proverbs

At this point of our discussion, it is relevant to turn our attention to the style and structure of proverbs. Figurative representation is a main and an indisputable feature of proverbs. With reference to African proverbs, Finnegan (1970: 395) posits that most of the proverbs use similes and metaphors to convey or express universal truth while some proverbs express poetic quality of some sort. Similes are common in most African proverbs. For the Hausa-speaking people, “A Chief is like a dust heap where everyone comes with his rubbish and deposits it” (Finnegan, 1970: 396 cited in Kyiileyang, 2009: 67). Just as rubbish waste material is unwanted, most of the complaints people lodge with their chiefs are unpleasant to hear. Most proverbs are metaphorical in nature, such as the following, cited by Finnegan about South African Proverbs:

“The dying of a heart is a thing unshared”.

“If the Chief speaks, the people make silent their ears”.

“He devoured the Kaffir-beer and it devoured him”.

“Termites cannot bite a rock”.

“Water is no equal to the basket”.

“The strength of the crocodile is in water”.

“If you are patient, you will see the eyes of snail”.

The above proverbs express various metaphorical images. These images are latently embedded in the structures of the expressions (Finnegan, 1970: 398, Pachocinski, 1996: 392, 395). The fifth proverb which presents a juxtaposition between water and basket is a clear case of diametrically opposed features whereby basket, which is a solid object and a container, can never carry water especially in its liquid state. The idea of futility in pursuing a particular matter in human life is being projected here by this proverbial expression. With this proverb, the idea of the basket seems more dominant and overbearing in relation to water. This is where the proverb projects a clear divergence between the images of water and basket. That is, water as a metaphorical image depicts vulnerability vis-à-vis the visual image of a basket, which in this case has dominance, control and power over water. In real human life, there are certain people who are open to vulnerable situations in relation to those who have power over them. The sixth proverb, unlike the fifth one, draws two things together, i.e., crocodile and water, in a suitable convergence. Water as a metaphorical image in this proverb depicts suitability, and this situation enables the crocodile to navigate its way in the environment it is used to. As a metaphorical image, crocodile signifies power and influence in the environment from which one operates. Thus, any separation of the two can cause a radical change in the power and influence referred to in this proverb. The environment has an overarching influence in the way human power is manifested in society.

Apart from the poetic and figurative nature of proverbs, they are equally pithy, that is, a few words are often used to convey their message with terseness and thrust. There are several Dagara proverbs which are pithy in nature. A few of them can be illustrated here.

“Kunε, kunε ni sɛbru”. (Step by step one learns how to dance properly.)

“Lɛrbir nu ló kuomi”. (The heavy hoe-blade has dropped in the water.)

“Μόλλε βε paghr vaar ε”. (Whatever is covered by leaves indicates ownership.)

“Song túllu ba-túllu mi nyogh”. (Set the swiftest dog against the fastest rabbit.) (Kyiileyang, 2009, pp. 198–201).

Another significant feature of proverbs is the nature of fixity. Yankah (1989) is quite categorical on this when he says that a proverb does not stay at one place, it flies. One proverb can be applied in one situation and not in another. This is what Yankah (1989, p. 28) refers to as “an analytical dichotomy between the proverb concept and proverb in context”. The wording of proverbs varies from singular to plural with various tenses. These forms also vary from place to place. The most significant feature of a proverb is its contextual application. Context relates to the setting of a text; as the social and cultural contexts of verbal art forms are important. Without sleep, there can be no dreams and similarly without occasions and incidents (context) there can never be any proper citation of a proverb. Performance is another important feature in the study of proverbs. Performance goes along with context and creativity. Context is indispensable because it provides cultural signs for performance and appreciation of folklore. Proverbs become virtually meaningless when they are used out of context. “Unnatural elicitation of proverbs outside contextual usage” distorts effective discourse. Yankah and Seitel are both firm on this matter (Kyiileyang, 2009, p.75).

Opoku (1997) equally talks about the roles of proverbs in many African societies. He cites Mbiti (1997) who confirms that proverbial expressions abound in Kenya as well as other African societies. Opoku (1997, p. ix) points out that Mbiti posits that the people of Ukambani in Kenya, regard “the language of proverbs is a whole way of seeing the world, a way of speaking with the people, a way of feeling the atmosphere in the society in which they live”. According to Mbiti (1997), preachers in the church embellish their sermons with proverbs to the admiration of their audiences and congregations. Opoku further corroborates Yankah (1989) and other scholars about the peculiar nature of the language of proverbs. In citing Mbiti again, he says that “the language of proverbs has a rich vocabulary of words, phrases combination of words, symbols, pictures, allusions, associations and comparisons” (Opoku, 1997: x). Proverbs are inherently effective communication symbols packed with anecdotes and other stories. In the Akan, Dàgàrà and other African societies, there are many symbolic representations in proverbs such as the following:

“One finger cannot kill a louse”. (Kenya)

“One finger does not catch a fly”. (Ethiopia)

“One finger can never fetch okro soup”. (Dàgàrà)

Many proverbs are used for the purpose of teaching people local wisdom and philosophy, ethics and morals. They provoke deeper analysis and reflection about certain things in human life. Proverbs also prompt people about dangers in human relations as people are not perfect. This is exemplified by the following Tanzanian proverb:

“Your neighbour is a snake, he/she kills you without your knowledge” (Opoku, 1997: xi).

Proverbs play major roles in Akan and Dàgàrà oral communication, and are therefore indispensable elements in normal discourse. They embellish and add some linguistic flavour to speeches. In other words, proverbial expressions enrich our discourse. It therefore takes a lot of pains to understand and use proverbs as the Akan, Dàgàrà and other African people place great value on wisdom, which in Akan is termed “nyansa”. Wisdom is placed far above physical strength, beauty or money. The elders are certainly the authentic repertoire of wisdom, particularly through proverbial expressions passed down from one generation to another by ancestors.

The contextual application of proverbs has been demonstrated clearly in the outstanding case of the Chief of Abeamzi, Nana Kwaku Amisa of the Central Region of Ghana. He was famous for the citation of proverbs. Therefore, one of the Kings of Asante sought his wisdom by sending some envoys to him for citation of proverbs. The messengers were asked to close their eyes and open them. When they were asked about the kind of dreams they had had, they responded rightly that they had not slept and as such had not had any dreams. Then, Nana Kwaku Amisa emphasised that “when the occasion has not arisen, you do not cite a proverb”. That is, the use of proverbs is rightly based on occasions and any speaker worth their salt can never ignore this fact. The citation of proverbs is also culture-based. These proverbs are true reflections of the cultural environment in which they are uttered. They reflect the human body, trees, birds, animals and the firmament. Both animate and inanimate creatures and objects are carefully used to express proverbs.

From the above discussion, it is important to stress that the originators of proverbs were keen observers of nature and human behaviour in particular (Opoku, 1997: xix-xx). It is also significant to note that proverbs are normally expressed in both verbal and non-verbal language. In the African culture, the use

of drum language and the blowing of horns on festive occasions constitute effective ways of communicating proverbial language. Akan and Dàgàrà artworks and other forms of visual arts provide sound basis for Akan and Dàgàrà aesthetics. According to Opoku (1997: xxi) “these visual images are a powerful and sophisticated form of communication and they remind people of their values, rights and obligations as citizens, as well as the consequences of certain anti-social behaviour”. Moreover, modern textiles and other fabrics communicate proverbial language louder than words could express.

Analysis Of Akan And Dàgàrà Proverbial Expressions

Data was gathered from Akan and Dàgàrà communities. Dàgàrà proverbs were drawn from fieldwork conducted between 2004 and 2019, whilst Akan proverbs were gathered through library search using field data gathered by scholars of Akan traditions in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Proverbial expressions which focus on women were selected and analysed using the qualitative approach. The proverbs chosen for analysis were purposively selected from three main sources: four of the Akan proverbs from Yankah’s (1989) and two from Opoku’s (1997) collection, whilst all the six Dàgàrà proverbs were taken from Kyiileyang’s (2009) study. These sources contained suitable data that was required to justify the rationale for this study. Out of the data, twelve proverbs were considered most relevant to address the subject of this study. Other proverbs which were not so suitable were omitted from the list.

Analysis of Akan Proverbs

Broad Theme:	Strategies in Conflict
Proverb No. 1:	Sapɔ funu, yɛfa no dahia da.
<i>Translation:</i>	<i>The wretched sponge is picked up in needy times.</i>
Source:	Old woman from Abira (Yankah, 1989)
Cultural Context:	Marriage
Theme:	Challenges in marriage

Proverb No.1 was uttered by an old woman from Abira. She admonishes the beleaguered son in marriage about proper behaviour towards partners. This proverb is a direct criticism on the vacillating nature of the man who married three times and regretted for the collapse of the three marriages. Eventually, he returned to the first wife, and it was under such problematic circumstances that the old woman uttered the above proverb. The image of the abused woman delineated first as a wretched sponge, that is something or an object that was initially regarded as valuable but later abandoned. This image of worthlessness

depicts the woman as a mere object of utility: used and dumped at will. The woman's husband treated her like 'bona fide' property. The idea of slavery is portrayed here, where abused women were treated like chattel as they could be treated any way by men. Thus, the images of abuse, scorn, exploitation and disrespect are closely associated with the above proverb. The idea of worthlessness can be deduced from the plain utterance of the proverb in *Sapo funu*. However, the *Sapo funu* is retrieved in times of critical needs. It is only circumstances that change that negative perception and rather make the woman look angelic and adorable in the eyes of the old lover who thinks she is worth nothing. It is this way that one can see the significance of image of woman depicted in this proverb.

Broad Theme:	Strategies in Conflict
Proverb No. 2:	Kaseɛ konkuro: wofefe a, w'ano ye wo ya; wogyae to ho a, w'ani di akyire
Translation:	<i>The enigmatic hollow bone; when you suck it, your lips hurt; when you leave it, your eyes trail it.</i>
Source:	Akuwa Hawa, (Yankah, 1989)
Cultural Context:	Marriage
Theme:	Challenges in marriage, vacillating character, poor judgement

This second proverb in another situation of marital abuse. A man married and divorced the same woman three times. The frequent return of the man to the same woman excited the divorced woman. She then uttered a sarcastic proverbial statement to emphasise the fact that she was a charming and an irresistible woman who kept the undecided man coming back to her after several attempts to dump her. From this proverb, one realizes that the affected woman regards herself as an enigmatic hollow bone, which the man struggles to lick and abandons with frustration but finds it necessary to retain again and again. This proverb points out the paradoxical nature of marital relations. The image of the divorced woman can be seen in several perspectives. She is that sweet marrow lodged in the enigmatic hollow bone (Kaseɛ konkuro), which is being licked in frustration. As the man tries to savour it, the crooked nature of the bone hurts him and he abandons it only to regret his misdeeds and returns for it. The man's curious eyes keep on trailing the beautiful damsel that he has been abandoning at will. The divorced woman is an image of agony and delight to the frustrated man. Unlike the first proverb where the image of the woman is despicable, the image in this second proverb is positive as the enigmatic hollow

bone is increasingly charming to the distressed man. Herein lies the metaphorical and literary significance of this proverb.

Broad Theme: Strategies in Conflict

Proverb No. 3: **Wosum bɔɔdeɛ a, sum kwadu**

Translation: *If you prop up the plantain tree, prop the banana too; for in time of hunger, you cannot tell which your saviour will be.*

Source: Adwoa Ode (Yankah, 1989)

Cultural Context: Marriage

Theme: Challenges in marriage

This third proverb is another situation of a divorced wife. Unlike the two proverbs discussed earlier, this divorced woman does not take kindly to the return of the man; she offers the necessary resistance to the supposedly repentant husband. Through the utterance of this proverb, the divorced woman sees herself as an ideal personality who should be treated with dignity and respect. Using the plantain tree and the banana tree, she argues that if you prop (support, assist, tolerate, embrace) the plantain tree, it is also necessary to support the banana tree, for in times of hunger, you cannot tell which your saviour will be. The complainant was also jilted for another woman and when the frustrated man returned, she uttered the above proverb. The images of dejection, rejection, abandonment, humiliation and dumping can easily be associated with the proverb. The bitter divorced woman admonished the man to go far away from her because he had proved to be insincere and can never be trusted. The plantain and banana trees, here, represent metaphorically, the two women the man married and abandoned one for the other through the silly act of jilting the first one. The image of sustenance, value, worthiness and indispensability are closely associated with the victim of the collapsed marriage. Indeed, the plantain and banana trees bear similar fruits and are similar in substance. Most farmers treat plantain better than banana as banana is often used only as a dessert or last source of refreshment. The image of the banana tree represents scorn, contempt, abandonment and disregard. That's, the call for justice, fairness, and equity in life underscore the significance of marital relationships. Negligence and abuse are risky things people employ in life situations.

Broad Theme: Lineage and Family Relationships
Proverb No. 4: *Ɔyere te sɛ kuntu: wode kata wo so a, wo ho keka wo; wuyi gu hɔ nso a, awɔw de wo.*
Translation: (A wife is like a blanket: if you cover yourself with it, it irritates you; and if you take it away, you feel cold.)
Source: Opoku Asare's Collection (1997, Proverb No. 161, p.36)
Theme: Vicissitudes in Marriage

This is one of the most interesting proverbs that has been captured by the Akan society. The proverb underscores the significance of women in marriage, particularly as wives to their husbands. However, one clear image of the blanket renders the proverb as very valuable and can be used aptly: *ɔyere te sɛ kuntu: wode kata wo so a, wo ho keka wo; wuyi gu hɔ nso a, awɔw de wo*. The image of the blanket signifies comfort, consolation, satisfaction, convenience and protection. However, just like the irritation which comes from the blanket, a woman can be irritating to the husband under certain circumstances of incompatibility and disagreement. This depicts the situation of blowing hot and cold. However, the indispensability of a married woman to her husband can never be underestimated. Though the woman sometimes causes discomfort (just like the man) in marital relationships, nobody can ignore the value and worth of a married woman in any given society, particularly that of the Akan. This means that marriage has its ups and downs (vicissitudes), joys and sorrows, and it takes wisdom and compromise to maintain an acceptable balance, hence the importance of the image of the blanket. The blanket brings heavy comfort, and also heaps a lot of challenges in and out of season. Such is marriage life! The literary significance of the paradoxical image of the blanket can be seen in the dichotomy that it poses (the comfort and hardship) in human life.

Broad Theme: Human Nature
Proverb No. 5: *Ananteaa nya ne nyanne a, ɔmmfa nkɔma nantupɔn.*
Translation: (When a young woman who has slim legs has rich beads, she does not have to give them to a woman with fat legs.)
Source: Asante (2002)
Cultural Context: Akan Artwork
Theme: Assertiveness/Indisputable Ownership

This proverb underscores the importance of regalia in the Akan culture. Clothes are used not only to cover the body but also to enhance the personality

of the one who wears them. Among the Akan and other ethnic groups in Ghana, beads are used to accompany clothes in order to enhance aesthetic depiction of the wearer. However, the physical stature of the wearer of beads plays an important role in enhancing the cultural beauty of the wearer. There must be a corresponding and agreeable relationship between the beads and the legs that they are on. This proverb highlights and juxtaposes two people of different physical stature –one thin and the other fat. However, if the owner of beads has thin legs it does not prevent her from wearing or at least keep them as her bona fide property; therefore, she should not be compelled to give them out to somebody with fat legs. The literary significance of this proverb lies in the fact that leanness or fatness (i.e., fitness or suitability) should not be used to determine ownership of property such as beads. Anybody can acquire riches and keep them as their property. In the olden days, beads were used as symbols of royalty. Nowadays, beads of all kinds of quality are available for all manner of people to use. In the Akan tradition, beads are worn by women on the neck, around the wrist, around the waist and just below the knee (to be held in place by the calf muscles of the leg).

Analysis of Dàgàrà Proverbs

Broad Theme:	Value of Life
Proverb No. 6:	Íághr kún pɔg-nyàŋ bǎárí ɛkyɛ fu kyǎã sógre dākɔg í?
<i>Translation:</i>	<i>Severe cold has already killed the old woman and you are still asking for a stool?</i>
Source:	55 year–old man from Nandom–Dondometeng (Kyiiileyang, 2009)
Cultural Context:	Interview during fieldwork in Nandom
Theme:	Solution coming too late to resolve a problem

During the field work regarding the collection of Dàgàrà proverbs and their contextual application, the above proverb was uttered. Among the Dàgàrà people, stools are very important domestic furniture. Most of the elderly people have and use their own stools. The above proverb delineates the symbol of the stool (‘dākɔg’) and severe cold (‘Íághr’). The image of contrast between ‘Íághr’ and ‘dākɔg’ shows the relationship between the misfortune and the one who suffers from it. It is important to note that the misfortune could have been avoided at all costs. The image of the woman in this proverb depicts misery, vulnerability, negligence and lack of care. The stool here represents the lifeline of the vulnerable old lady. That is in Proverb No. 6, ‘Íághr’ (severe cold) represents any serious problem, while “pɔg–nyàŋ” (old woman) refers to the most vulnerable in society who are often neglected until the situation gets beyond control. This proverb underscores deep criticism on indifference, negligence

Broad Thematic Category: Value of life

Proverb No. 7: Pɔg-nyàŋ mi wób ni pele mani u lôbóghr.

Translation: An old lady normally weaves a sizeable and portable basket to facilitate handling.

Source: 35-year-old man from Nandom–Brutu (Kyiileyang, 2009)

Theme: Doing things according to one's ability or resources.

With the baskets weaving industry, traditional mats and ropes are normally associated with Dàgàrà women. The subject of an old lady comes up again in this Proverb just as Proverb No. 6. Unlike the first instance, where the image of vulnerability emerges strongly, the image of the old lady in this seventh proverb depicts ability, humility, realistic view of life and living within one's means. This proverb was captured during a visit to a drinking bar ('pito' bar) where a carpenter used to emphasize the fact that it is necessary for one (him in particular) to live within one's means and drink 'pito' instead of bottled beer and wine which are regarded as more refined and more expensive than 'pito' (Dàgàrà local beer). The image of the woman is delineated here through such words as 'pɔg-nyàŋ' (old lady), 'wób ni pele' (weave a portable and sizeable basket) and 'lôbóghr' (in between armpit). The image of woman is projected in this proverb because the proverb specifically makes reference to the old woman since in Dàgàrà culture, old women are noted for carrying baskets in this fashion and not men. This image is positive and encouraging to the hearer to live within his means.

Broad Theme: Development and Maturity

Proverb No. 8: A lɛb wà zàɛ ni zà, fu lɛb wà gbóne kɛ-mââr i?

Translation: Has it come to the situation of grinding wet malt because you have a good market?

Source: 50-year-old man from Nandom–Kogle (Kyiileyang, 2009)

Cultural Context: Interview during fieldwork at Nandom

Theme: A sudden realisation or complete volte face

This proverb wonders why there is a reawakening of jealousy in the one being addressed. There is a volte-face, and that change has aroused greater interest in the addressee. First, Proverb No. 8 addresses over-anxiety. In other words, it emphasises that in human life there are times we experience despair and become lousy in attitude. However, a wind of change can blow in our favour, leading to a sudden realisation. The word 'zàɛ' (grabbing in large numbers or quantities) as used in this context, implies that tasty 'pito' is being

out promptly on large demand and ‘gbóne ke-mââr’ (grinding wet malt) reiterates the visual image of jealousy associated with a woman (that is, a ‘pito’ brewer) who is actively engaged in preparing malt for the next brewing of ‘pito’. Her attitude shows that she has a good market. The image of woman in this instance, is delineated implicitly through the pito-brewing industry with its attendant diligence, fervency, smartness and taking advantage of the situation under favourable conditions. The positive images of economic empowerment and independence of women are significant to the understanding of the above proverb.

Broad Theme: Entertainment and Recreation

Proverb No. 9: **îág-tu táár ñwàrɛ ni táár gâmbié.**

Translation: *Dancing and following one another closely, eventually leads to destruction of one another’s ornamental beads.*

Source: 50-year-old man from Nandom-Kogle (Kyileyang’s, 2009)

Cultural Context: Interview during fieldwork in Nandom

Theme: Problems of Unnecessary Rivalry

In the olden days, the wearing of rope-like beads among the Dagara was a privilege to women who were highly regarded in the society. The rich and influential women wore these beads. “Gâmbié” (thick and rope-like beads) were quite ornamental and those who wore them could display them on various occasions such as the “Bagr” Festival (of the Traditional Religious Practitioners), “Kakube Festival” (to mark an end to a farming season), traditional weddings and even during funerals. Women who wore such beads and danced on festive occasions held one another by the waist as they danced along. The firmness with which one held a partner’s waist and the vigour with which the one who was being held could result into the loosening or even the breaking of the rope-like beads. When that happened, it was embarrassing as the dancer was exposed in terms of dressing. Therefore, there was the need to exercise caution while dancing.

The words “îág” (dance vigorously), “ñwàrɛ” (cutting), “táár” (one another) and “gâmbié.” (thick and rope-like beads) vividly describe the situation. Most situations of entertainment are marked by excitement, but problems such as rivalry, unhealthy competition and jealousy can set in depending on the way each person dances. The image of woman delineated in this proverbial expression is that of rivalry which is common among Dàgàrà women. This is not peculiar to only Dàgàrà women, but the cultural context of this proverbial expression lends credence and adds value to its interpretation. The visual images derived from the terms “îág-tu táár” (dance vigorously and follow one another), “ñwàrɛ” (cutting), “táár gâmbié” (one another’s ornamental beads) underscore happiness, excitement, destruction

of cherished property and the attendant consequences of competition in life. Simply put, it brings both joy and pain.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions which delineate the image of woman. Most of the images used to depict women emphasise the metaphor which proves that its literary significance can never be overestimated as exemplified by the proverbs in this study. The utterers of the first three Akan proverbs are women based on the ancient tradition of marriage. The tone of bitterness, anger, frustration, jealousy and negligence can be discerned from the personal experiences of these victims of marriage. Most of the metaphorical images focus on issues of marriage and admonition offered by experienced people who understand the main challenges connected with marriages. These proverbs reveal that there are pains and sacrifices in marital relationships. Traditions alone do not make marriages, but the characters involved as well as their personality have a clear bearing on the quality of marriage people experience after consummation of their relationship. Property ownership and slavery are negative issues which develop in some marriages in the African cultural environment. That is, the negative images of abuse, scorn, exploitation and disrespect can be observed from the proverbs used in this study. It is in this vein that the linguistic significance of literary aesthetics can be drawn from some extended metaphors used in Proverb No. 2. With this proverb, a paradoxical image delineates woman as an “enigmatic hollow bone” and yet she is increasingly charming to the distressed man. Thus, this proverb points out the paradoxical nature of marital relations. The enigmatic hollow bone is a captivating image which aptly describes the joys and pains in marital relationships. The couples initially enjoy each other, but paradoxically enough, when challenges set in, quarrels, betrayals and disrespect mar the peaceful co-existence. Herein lies the literary significance of this Akan proverb.

Another extended metaphor is prominent in Proverb No. 4. The metaphorical image of the blanket signifies comfort, consolation, satisfaction, convenience and protection. However, just like the irritation which comes from the blanket, a woman can be irritating to the husband under certain circumstances of incompatibility and disagreement. The literary significance of the paradoxical image of the blanket can be seen in the dichotomy that it poses (the comfort and hardship) in human life. The image of woman in this context depicts the realistic nature of human life.

In Proverb No. 7, a positive image of woman is delineated through such words as ‘pɔg-nyàŋ’ (old lady), ‘wób ni pele’ (weave a portable and sizeable basket) and ‘lôbóghr’ (in between armpit). This visual image is positive and encourages or admonishes the hearer to live within his or her means. Additionally, with Proverb No. 9, the visual images derived from the terms “Íág tu táár” (dance vigorously and follow one another), “ŋwàɛ” (cutting), “táár gàmbié” (one another’s ornamental beads) underscore happiness, excitement, compromise, destruction of cherished property and the attendant consequences of competition in life.

It is interesting to note that aside Proverb Nos. 4 (Akan) and 7 (Dàgàrà), which use ‘Oyere’ (wife, which can only refer to the woman in a marriage) and ‘pɔg-nyàŋ’ (old lady), the other proverbs do not categorically name woman. However, at the heart of the activities or phenomena around which the proverbs are carved is the African woman in the context of Akan and Dàgàrà people. Through these proverbs, woman is depicted as strong-willed, industrious, desirable, irresistible, dependable and indispensable. However, in the patriarchal society in which she lives, she is often downtrodden, abused, exploited, unfairly treated, looked down upon and taken for granted. These attributes are drawn and delineated through the juxtaposition of the elements at the centre of the proverbs represented, by the lexical items within the proverb and the referent element within the context. For example, the ‘sapɔ funu’ (wretched sponge), ‘kaseɛ konkuro’ (the enigmatic hollow bone), ‘bɔɔdeɛ/kwadu’ (plantain/banana), ‘kuntu’ (blanket) and ‘ananteaa/nantupɔn’ (slim calf/big calf) in the proverbs refer to the ‘woman’ within the context in which the proverbs were used. There are similar images in the Dàgàrà proverbial expressions. gbóné’ (grinding) and (‘ke-máár’ (wet malt) are implicit of woman, in respective terms, to situations of pregnancy and brewing of ‘pito’. These juxtapositions first of all depict metaphorical images in Proverb No. 1, and paradoxical images in Proverb No. 2 (Akan). Finally, it is relevant to reiterate the words of Hazlitt (cited by Hulme, 1968, p. 7) on the figurative nature of a proverb that, it is “an expression or combination of words conveying a truth to the mind by a figure, periphrasis, antithesis or hyperbole”. The evaluated proverbs revealed the kind of personality associated with woman in a typically patriarchal cultural environment. Therefore, the evaluation of these symbolic representations delineates a clearer image of woman as depicted in Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions. That is the semiotic value of proverbs delineating the image of woman has been projected vividly in this study through Akan and Dàgàrà proverbial expressions.

The following are some specific insights this study offers in terms of comparison of Akan and Dàgàrà delineation of woman through proverbs:

1. The metaphorical consideration of the Akan Proverbs No. 1 to No. 4, in tandem with Dàgàrà Proverb No. 9, depicts a dichotomy of negative and positive image of woman, pointing to the complexity of life. These proverbs depict the desirable and undesirable facets of woman and thus reveal the value and indispensable nature of woman in Akan and Dàgàrà cultural environments, which undergird this study. The proverbs are therefore complementary in nature, in revealing the positive image of woman, in spite of the juxtaposed negative perception as seen in the metaphorical value of the *sapɔ funu*, *kaseɛ konkuro*, *kwadu* and *îáǵ-tu táár ɲwàrɛ ni táár gàmbié*.
2. The Akan Proverbs No. 1, 2, and 4 are specifically dichotomised between positive and negative image. However, Dàgàrà Proverb No. 9 specifically reiterates a situation of danger and destruction in the midst of happiness and excitement.
3. By way of convergence, Akan Proverb No. 5 and Dàgàrà Proverbs No. 7 and 8 depict the image of woman in purely positive ways. For instance, the Akan Proverb No. 5 depicts the assertiveness of woman as a purely positive image of woman, whereas Dàgàrà Proverb No. 8 depicts her as industrious and astute, which are also purely positive images. Conversely, Dàgàrà Proverb No. 6 is generally negative in its depiction of the image of woman. However, although this proverb projects the concepts of irresponsibility, negligence and indifference to woman, and by metaphorical extension the poor and vulnerable in society, it seeks to serve as an admonition for society to desist from such.
4. With exception of Proverb No. 5, the Akan proverbs were observed to typically show a dichotomy between negative and positive images of woman. The Dàgàrà proverbs have more to offer on the image of woman as they veer into possibility versus impossibility, and excitement versus danger, aside the mainstream negative versus positive image

of woman, thereby delineating more complexities in the image of woman than the Akan proverbs. The Dàgàrà proverbs thus delineate the image of woman in a more complex way than the Akan proverbs.

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