

# Obaasima: An Akan woman of valour or a victim? From the perspective of Proverbs 31:10–31



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This study explored the cultural perception of the Akan woman in Ghana and critically evaluates the claim that she is marginalised and considered inferior to her male counterparts. Using Inculturation and Liberation Hermeneutics, along with womanist theological perspectives, the research examined selected Akan proverbs that reflect societal attitudes towards women. These findings were then juxtaposed with the values of the enterprising woman described in Proverbs 31:10–31. The study revealed that, despite outdated cultural practices, the depiction of the Akan woman as inferior is misleading. Instead, the gender-based roles within Akan society are mechanisms for shared societal responsibility.

**Contribution:** The article proposes a redefined paradigm of Akan womanhood that reflects dignity, capability and egalitarian partnership.

**Keywords:** Akan; woman; marginalisation; Akan proverbs; *Obaasima*; gender roles.

## Introduction

The Akan of Ghana constitute 52.7% of the country's population, making them the largest single ethnic group (GLSS5 2008:8; cf. Agyekum 2006:206; Aidoo 2022:187). There are also other Akan groups outside Ghana and within the African diaspora, making the Akan a large family with common cultural practices (Arko-Achemfuor 2018:2; cf. Agyekum 2006:206). The matrilineal system of inheritance sets the Akan of Ghana apart from other ethnic groups in the country. The Akan trace their lineage through their mother rather than their father. This practice is based on the belief that the mother provides blood [*mogyā*] to the foetus, thereby ensuring continuity with the child when it is born, while the father contributes spirit [*sunsum*] (cf. Ampofo & Atobrah 2023:3; see also Aidoo 2022:189; Arko-Achemfuor 2018:2; Kyiileyang & Acheampong 2022:58–59; Pietersen 2021:5; Wood 2017:2; Ex 21:4). It is generally accepted that every child has an identifiable mother, although this may not necessarily be the case for a father. This belief is captured in the Akan proverb *onawo na w'abusua asa*<sup>1</sup> [when your mother dies, your family is ended]. Thus, the Akan refer to their country or hometown as a 'motherland' rather than a 'fatherland'. This underscores the enviable and unparalleled status of women, particularly mothers, in Akan society (cf. Aidoo 2022:190).

Because the Akan trace lineage through the mother or maternal uncle, the survival and continuity of the community depend on the existence and well-being of the female population. When the last Akan woman dies, the community is destined for extinction (cf. Aidoo 2022:190; see also Masenya 2013:147). However, the life of the Akan woman, from childhood to adulthood, is often marked by perceived exploitation, marginalisation and inferiority in comparison to the male child. The girl child is seen as a spare to the male child (cf. Chitando 2019:15; see also Ejeh 2019:47; Kyiileyang & Acheampong 2022:63; Wood 2017:1). She performs household chores while the boy goes to school or learns a trade. This attitude is reflected in the proverb, *Obaa adesua nso mfasoɔ ben na ewɔ so?* [What advantage is there in a female's education?] (cf. Aidoo 2022:202; see also Ampofo & Atobrah 2023:6; Casimir, Chukwuelobe & Ugwu 2014:172; Chitando 2019:15; Frimpong 2022:273). Consequently, she stays behind, goes to the farm, carries loads of food home, assists with cooking, serves the food to her father (if present), male siblings, uncles, and other male members in the household. She also cleans the kitchen and cooking utensils and assists her brothers in fetching water (cf. Aidoo 2022:197).

The role of the Akan woman is defined by service and denial – without which society cannot function or progress (cf. Masenya 2013:141). A Northern Sotho proverb illustrates this: 'a woman is a baboon, her hands are eaten', meaning a worthy woman does all her domestic duties effectively

1: *Wo ni wu a, w'abusua asa* an Ashanti Twi version of the same proverb.

and without complaint (Masenya 2004:134). As if this were not enough, when she reaches marriageable age, she is admonished to bring her fortune back to her family and her liabilities to her husband – essentially instructing her to be an agent of exploitation in her marriage (cf. Wood 2019:2).

This article investigates the perception of inferiority and marginalisation of women in the primal Akan culture. It does so by examining proverbs that reflect the Akan view of women and comparing them with the image of the diligent female<sup>2</sup> in Proverbs 31:10–31 for the betterment of Akan society. The key areas of focus include: How Akan society perceives its women in terms of leadership and dependency on men; cultural perceptions of women's intelligence; the significance of marriage to Akan women; the stigmatisation of assertive women; submission of women in and out of marriage; and a critique of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10–31. Finally, the article suggests a new paradigm of Akan womanhood based on the model in Proverbs 31:10–31.

## Research methods and design

This study employs Inculturation and Liberation Hermeneutics to examine significant Akan cultural practices related to women and compares them with the hardworking woman of Proverbs 31:10–31. This method aims to make the Scriptures and their interpretation meaningful to the target culture. Its distinctive feature is the deliberate attempt to connect the biblical text with African cultural knowledge (Holter 1995:33–46; cf. Ukpong 1995:5–6; 2002:12).

In addition, the study adopts Womanist Hermeneutics as a methodology. This approach champions gender equality and seeks to restore women to their rightful status as full human beings, where marginalisation exists. Rooted in a liberative ethical and interpretive tradition, womanist theology promotes the holistic well-being of all people. Ethically, it encourages inclusion across gender, sexuality, race, ability, religion or creed. As an interpretive method, it fosters critical inquiry that uncovers patterns of hierarchical and exploitative systems and seeks to challenge and dismantle male-centred ethical norms (Allen-McLaurin 2023:2).

## Situating the Akan woman in her culture

### Akan maxims on how women are seen in their society

To appreciate the status and worth of women in the primal Akan context – beyond the inferiority and the dishonourable condition already discussed – this section explores selected Akan proverbs concerning women. The goal is to position the woman within Akan culture. Iwaniszewski (2019:5) defines culture as a product of human adaptation to the environment. Thus, the Akan perception of women and their gender roles may be understood as part of their cultural

<sup>2</sup>The study assumes that the woman in the poem is a literary creation for didactic purpose (cf. Allen-McLaurin 2023; contra Eastwood 2021:139).

response to environmental challenges. When coupled with religion (specifically Christianity as a subculture), this likely shaped the image of what is considered an ideal woman among the Akan (cf. Masenya 2018:1). This image is reflected in their proverbs, among other mediums.

'A proverb is a concise and convincing maxim confirmed to be factual by practice' (Arnold & Beyer 2008:314). Additionally, 'a proverb is defined as a classical saying frequently used that expresses generally bitter truth, morals, norms, values, and practical issues within society' (Bishwakarma 2020:103; cf. Kyiileyang & Acheampong 2022:65–67). The use of proverbs in this study aids in understanding how Akan culture has been shaped in its perception of women.

Gyan, Abbey and Baffoe (2020:2; cf. Abass Doskaya 2017:149) argue that 'maleness and femaleness are reinforced in traditional Ghanaian (Akan) societies through socialisation processes and the agents involved'. From infancy, boys and girls are socialised differently and expected to maintain this gender dichotomy throughout life's customs and ceremonies. In Africa, gender differentiation begins at birth. Children are socialised to understand and maintain gender<sup>3</sup> boundaries. Through this process, the girl matures into adulthood, absorbing these norms as part of her culture. This process of imitation is extensive and includes both positive and negative behaviours and expectations associated with women. It is facilitated through tunes, adages, aphorisms and tales. Over time, the impressionable and sensitive thoughts of progenies and young adults internalise these gender norms.

## Classification and reception of proverbs in the community

Proverbs are often classified and accepted as standards of behaviour within their communities. Over time, they are passed on to succeeding generations (Gyan 2018:71; cf. Chitando 2019:21). This segment surveys selected Akan maxims under the following themes: Dependency and Headship Skills, Lack of Astuteness, The Significance of Marriage among Akan Females, and the Stigmatisation of Assertive Womenfolk.

### Dependency and headship skills

In traditional Akan society, women are typically depicted as reliant on men for protection and guidance. One popular proverb states: '*Obaa to tuo a twere Obarima dan mu*', which means, 'If a woman buys a gun, it is kept in a man's room for safekeeping' (cf. Gyan et al. 2020:4; Korang-Okrah 2011:100). This saying implies that women are not expected to own weapons. The safety of the family is considered a man's responsibility. Regardless of a woman's accomplishments,

<sup>3</sup>Woman will be defined as a sex, which is 'a biological function that comes with functional attributes and values that inform and form femininity or masculinity which cannot be changed. Gender, on the other hand, is a socio-cultural, political and economic construct made by society that define the roles, responsibilities and general societal expectation for both men and women' (Casimir et al. 2014:169; see also Frimpong 2022:270).

she is expected to remain in a man's shadow. According to Gyan et al. (2020:4), 'Men have the privilege to own a firearm; therefore, no matter a woman's financial strength or social position, she is reliant on a man'. The proverb also suggests that womenfolk are not fit to take care of important assets or make informed choices in complex circumstances.

This implies that Akan society is structured to place women in subordinate roles, particularly in professional settings. They are also restricted in terms of what they can do. Akan tradition does not train progenies to see the sexes as equivalent; instead, women are taught to accept male superiority (cf. Korang-Okrah 2011:97).

### A lack of intelligence

The previous section discussed proverbs portraying women as dependent and unfit for leadership. This section explores proverbs that depict women as lacking intelligence and acting irrationally. For instance, '*Obaa te es abofra*' – translated as 'A woman behaves like a child' – suggests that women must be continually supervised and guided (Appiah, Appiah & Agyeman-Duah 2001:4; cf. Allen-McLaurin 2023:5; Chitando 2019:17; Kyiileyang & Acheampong 2022:64; Wood 2017:1). Regardless of her age or achievements, she is portrayed as a child requiring constant direction. This may help explain why women are typically excluded from inheritance in Akan society unless no male heirs, including nephews, are available (cf. Korang-Okrah 2015:14).

Another proverb, '*Obaa adwene akyikyim es ne nofo*', suggests that an adult woman's reasoning is as warped as a vine (Gyan et al. 2020:4). Such sayings reinforce the perception of women as intellectually inferior and in need of constant supervision.

### Women and marriage

In Akan culture, elaborate rites accompany all life stages, but marriage is the most celebrated, especially among young adults. Celibacy is considered foreign and unacceptable for those who wish to be regarded as responsible members of the community (cf. Korang-Okrah 2011:15). Marriage between the opposite sexes is seen as the peak of adulthood and is highly encouraged, particularly for women. Consequently, a woman's value and social status are largely determined by her marital status (cf. Allen-McLaurin 2023:10). This places immense pressure on unmarried adults – especially women – who may feel compelled to marry anyone available (Gyan et al. 2020:6).

Gyan et al. (2020:6) discuss the proverb: '*Obaa brefoo ko aware a, ode ade paba fie*', meaning, 'If a meticulous woman marries, she brings honour to her family'. Among the Akan, marriage is seen as a woman's highest achievement. Remaining single is often regarded as a misfortune or even a curse. Another proverb, '*Obaa ansua ade yo, na oko aware a, wodene nkwan gu ahina/toa mu kyere omaman*', implies that an unskilled woman is a disgrace to her family and a burden to her spouse.

A woman's success is measured by her marital status; without it, she is seen as having accomplished nothing.

Further proverbs include: '*Obaa a ope ne kunu, ose: mehwe wo ara*', meaning, 'A woman who truly loves her husband submits to him', and '*Obaa pa ne dea otie ne kunu asem*', meaning, 'A good wife is one who listens to her husband'. These sayings instil obedience and submission in women within marriage.

### Stigmatisation of assertive women

In Ghana, assertive women are often stereotyped and labelled as witches, masculine or unmarriageable – '*alomu dzata*', meaning 'aggressive woman'. This is especially true when they engage in politics or traditionally male-dominated spheres. Such perceptions make it difficult for Akan women to assert themselves in leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated settings (cf. Abass & Doskaya 2017:154–155; Allen-McLaurin 2023:7, 10; Gyan et al. 2020:6).

The following proverbs illustrate this bias: '*Obaa bonoaa na ode kotokuro yi ne twe suo*' – 'an aggressive woman employs a knife to cut the hair on her sex organ'. '*Besia gor mbanyin gor a, wokyer no mbanyin kyer*' – 'when a woman acts like a man, she is accorded the reception of a man'.

These sayings demonstrate the male-centric nature of Akan society, where women exist at the pleasure of men (Abass & Doskaya 2017:155–156; Gyan et al. 2020:5). Self-asserting women risk being labelled as witches, potentially leading to ostracism or even violence. Cultural norms thus compel women to remain submissive.

## The Hardworking woman of Proverbs 31:10–31 vis-à-vis Akan woman

### Introduction

The proverbs discussed earlier cannot fully capture the reality of Akan women. There are certainly other aspects of womanhood in Akan society that align more closely with the portrayal of the industrious woman in Proverbs 31:10–31. Comparing these traditions may provide liberating insights into the situation of the Ghanaian Akan woman. The following themes will be examined: leadership and independence, intelligence and industry, self-motivation, and marriage. The two cultural perspectives will be compared to illuminate each other for the enrichment of Akan culture.

### Re-reading Proverbs 31:10–31: Akan women's leadership and independence

The adult woman in Proverbs 31:10–31 is portrayed as a self-reliant and capable leader. Her leadership skills are evident in her investment decisions. She does not wait for motivation or direction from her husband or any man to initiate her

economic activities (cf. Allen-McLaurin 2023:11; Silaen et al. 2024:15). Yet she accomplishes all this without undermining her husband's role. Her efforts elevate her husband's status, as well as that of her family and society.

Historically, Akan women have demonstrated a strong spirit of independence, particularly in business. Aidoo (2022:188) notes that colonialism introduced European gender norms that subjugated women. Traditionally, however, Akan women could rule in their own right. For example, Nana Dwaben Ama Serwaa reigned over the Dwaben people from 1841 to 1850 as a chief<sup>4</sup> and did so successfully (cf. Aidoo 2022:204). Akan women farmed, sold their produce in markets, managed households, and coexisted with co-wives in polygynous marriages. Like the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, the Akan woman is far from weak – she has often been described as a beast of burden (cf. Carmody 1988:73; see also Fox 2009:895).

Akan women are not known for waiting for men to take initiative. By their upbringing and social conditions, they display a high degree of independence rarely seen in other societies. They own businesses, raise children with or without male assistance, and even go to war when necessary. There is historical evidence of an all-female military contingent leading a mission under Governor Winniett to depose King Kwaku Akka of Nzima (Aidoo 2022:206–207). Some European observers even opined that they would prefer Gold Coast (Ghanaian) women over men for any serious labour, as the men were often idle while the women worked diligently on farms or in markets (cf. Aidoo 2022:197; Horton 1969 :99; Silaen et al. 2024:12, 15).

### Wisdom, intelligence, and industry of the Akan womanhood: Re-reading Proverbs 31:10–31

The virtuous woman is described as one who speaks with sagacity and the laws of charity are on her lips (Pr 31:26). She is portrayed as a woman who not only extends a hand of charity to the needy (Pr 31:20) but also teaches the same to all who care to listen. Showing kindness to the miserable and destitute was a written agreement imperative in the Hebrew nation (cf. Pr 21:13; 19:17; Ps 41:1). The virtuous woman is thus presented as wise – demonstrated through her acts of charity and her teaching of these values in her community. She engages in daily tasks through hands-on activities such as weaving, selling, planting, and more. Ho (2022:78) insists that knowledge and wisdom can also be acquired through hands-on activities in an atmosphere of diligence and persistence. While this realisation is not yet mainstream in Proverbs scholarship, continuous manual work requiring focus produces keener mental acuity, social effectiveness and experiential knowledge – distinct from knowledge gained through hearing or eyewitness accounts. Wisdom and knowledge are vast and dynamic, not fully grasped through hearing alone. The virtuous woman is thus the embodiment of wisdom, not merely a constructor of it (Ho 2022:62). This is

4. She was post-menopausal by the time she was serving as a chief among her people (cf. Aidoo 2022:205).

where the pious adult woman of Proverbs 31:10–31 and the Akan woman converge: both acquire wisdom and knowledge through the practical activities of everyday life – in farming, market trading, weaving, sewing and nurturing the next generation. The Akan woman embodies wisdom in managing daily life.

There is also an Akan proverb that portrays women as epitomes of wisdom or intelligence: '*yenko bisa abrewa*' [Let us consult an old woman]. This is typically invoked when a group of men, including local leaders or intellectuals, reaches a deadlock during deliberation (cf. Olojede 2011:5). The Akan believe women possess the ability to decipher matters beyond the reach of standard mental analysis. The power to provide counsel with oracular authority is not limited to elderly women; rather, it appears to be a common trait among many women – a reality acknowledged in Akan culture. The proverb '*Ena ye bosom*' – meaning 'mothers are oracles' or 'mothers are goddesses' – reflects this belief. The Akan have observed that a mother's words or warnings often materialise, even when initially unfounded. Across cultures, women's remarkable ability to foresee future events has been widely recognised (cf. Morelli 1994:61).

The Akan woman can also be said to live by the South African axiom, 'I am because you are'. It is a cultural imperative to support one's extended family, including not only her biological kin but also her husband's relatives if married, and the community as a whole. These typically include nephews, nieces, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and sometimes stepchildren from her spouse's former matrimony or offspring given birth out of matrimony. Although they may not teach the wisdom of charity, they live it for all to witness and emulate (Korang-Okrah 2011:99).

### Self-motivation of Akan women in the light of Proverbs 31:10–31

Hebrew culture, like Akan culture, assigns distinct roles to men and women to ensure communal harmony. However, the diligent female person of Proverbs 31:10–31 shows that assertive women should not be viewed as a deviation from societal norms (cf. Yoder 2003:444–445). On the contrary, assertiveness in women can be beneficial to society. Therefore, the Akan should not fear assertive women. When the Ashanti King was captured and exiled to the Seychelles in 1900, it was Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the queen mother of Ejisu, who mobilised and led the Ashanti kingdom in resistance against the British army (Arko-Achemfuor 2018:1–2). Similarly, when the Dwaben state fell out with the Ashanti kingdom, it was Nana Ama Serwaa who led her people back to their homeland after defeat and self-imposed exile in the Akyem lands (Aidoo 2022:204–205).

Akan women are historically self-motivated and do not wait for a man's initiative before taking action. The perception of Akan women as lacking initiative is not supported by historical evidence.

## Akan women and marriage in the light of Proverbs 31:10–31

Marriage is highly significant in both cultures, especially among young adults. In Hebrew culture, an ideal woman is expected to be married and have children – this forms part of her identity and social status (cf. Harris 1992:9468; Stol 2016:60). This is reflected in the Hebrew language, where the word for ‘woman’ [אִשָּׁה *’iššâ*] can also mean ‘wife’ (cf. Bellis 2024:89; Masenya 2004:101). Among the Akan, however, this is gradually changing as single-parent homes – mostly headed by women – become increasingly common (Boateng 1996:2). Like the impeccable woman in Proverbs 31:10–31, whose marital status is a backdrop for her economic activities, many Akan women were traditionally married to one man (in polygamous arrangements). While marriage among the Akan was not exclusively monogamous as in the Christian tradition, these women are still able, even without a husband’s support, to raise their children, educate them and prepare them for responsible adulthood.

## Feminist critique of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10–31

Allen-McLaurin (2023:1, 2) argues that the portrayal of the woman in Proverbs 31:10–31 as a role model for all women is problematic and a product of a patriarchal society interested in subjugating women as their subjects (cf. Masenya 2001:141). Feminists look at the Hebrew scripture with suspicion and have spared no effort in exposing what they consider unfair classifications of women, in their attempt to reinterpret androcentric biblical passages (Fontaine 1988:516; Ho 2022; Masenya 2004:114). However, Biwul (2013:284) takes exception to the feminist allegation of patriarchy and misogyny against the Hebrew poet (Pr 31:10–31). He insists that a didactic book such as Proverbs always outlines what is acceptable and what is not, serving as a teaching aid for the covenant people.

Some scholars have argued that the woman (Pr 31:10–31) is not independent and exists only to serve her husband, her children and society. They insist that her activities serve everyone except herself, making her nothing more than a slave.<sup>5</sup> In their minds, the woman is a glorified slave, perhaps a slave who was elevated to the status of madam of the household who combines her dual roles beautifully (cf. Brenner 1993:129; Masenya 2004:105). Unfortunately, there is nothing in the poem to suggest that she was a slave or a mere house help; rather, her status as the mother and wife of the family is not in doubt. Phalatsi-Shilubana (2024:74) observes how the Nguni culture expects the bride (Makoti) to serve the family of the groom as part of her matrimonial duties. Such cultural expectations fuel the disdain feminists have for the activities of the Proverbs 31 woman as servitude. However, if she were a mere slave or house help, then the concerns of the feminists would have been tenable. She was a wife and mother of the family, and as a result, the well-being of the family was her well-being, and that cannot be described as exploitation.

5. Yonder (2003:6, 8, 16, 20) argues that she has a purchasing price, which could mean that she was a slave elevated to the status of a madam.

Some feminists equate her activities in the domestic sphere with being consigned to an inferior domain, while her husband operates from the gates, a sign of superiority (Masenya 2004:104). They seem to argue that what one does is not as important as where it is done (cf. Camp 1987:55). In some African cultures, there is the expectation that the wife is restricted to the domestic sphere to attend to the tasks of cleaning, cooking and childcare (cf. Phalatsi-Shilubana 2024:74; see also Wa Gatumu 2019:24). However, if this is done for the purpose of sharing the burden of running the family, then it can be described as a division of labour. The woman in the poem was not restricted to the domestic sphere; she also operated in the public sphere. The convenience a lactating mother enjoys by working from home cannot be overemphasised, nor can the opportunity for nurture by a mother with infants be underestimated in the development of a safe and just society.

## Submission of women: In and out of context

There is a growing scientific consensus on the anatomical and physiological differences between men and women, which may suggest that women are a more advanced version of men. For instance, women have far more robust immune systems compared to men (cf. Wilson 2023:40; see also Klein & Flanagan 2016:626; Oertelt-Prigione 2022:479). Despite the life-threatening experience of childbirth, women’s life expectancy in Ghana (64.6 vs. 61.5) and many other societies surpasses that of men (GLSS5 2008:6). Their ability to discern the unknown, especially future events, is well-attested in several cultures, including the Akan (cf. Morelli 1994:61). How then can women be described as the ‘weaker sex’ (contra Pt 1 3:7)? There must be contextual clarity to that description. It is most probable that Apostle Peter was referring specifically to the marital relationship (cf. Aidoo 2022:188; contra Wood 2017:2).

Marriage has its non-negotiable rules, where the man is considered ‘first among equals’ (contra Musengimana 2025:131). This implies that when in doubt, a wife should defer to her husband (cf. Wa Gatumu 2019:4). It does not mean that in all male–female interactions, men are leaders and women are subordinates (cf. Bawa 2017:2). In Genesis 3:16, Eve’s subjection to Adam was clearly within the context of marriage. ‘Your husband will rule over you’ was not an elevation of one sex over the other but a prescription for marital order. Similarly, in Ephesians 5:22, Paul writes, ‘Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord’ (cf. Pt 1 3:1; Col 3:18).

## A new paradigm of Akan womanhood (*Obaasima*)

From the foregoing, it is important to state that the complementary model of male–female relationships (cf. Chukwuedo 2024:298; Musengimana 2025:125, 129–131) should be seen as a relic of the past – except in marriage and certain cultic settings. Except for sacramental roles reserved for men, gender relations should adopt an egalitarian

approach in all other spheres of life (cf. Chukwuedo 2024:300; Musengimana 2025:125, 131–132; see also Masenya 2013:138). However, this does not support radical feminism that seeks to overthrow established structures and replace them with female dominance (cf. Owanikiri 1992:206). The new paradigm of Akan womanhood is one who is capable of ‘controlling the commanding height’ (Kling & Schulz 2011:1) of society without seeking to dismantle male leadership. If she is married, she should be able to manage her household – children, husband, extended family – and serve the broader community. She must be self-motivated and work tirelessly to support herself and her family.

## Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Akan culture has historically marginalised and dehumanised women by portraying them as inferior to men. Through analysis of proverbs and cultural roles, it was found that Akan society is organised along gender lines, often stereotyping women as unintelligent and in constant need of guidance. Certain vocations are deemed gender-specific, with women discouraged from pursuing roles traditionally held by men. Additionally, marriage is considered the peak of maturity, and unmarried women are often stigmatised.

However, this study revealed that such narratives do not fully reflect the reality of Akan women. They are self-motivated and industrious, navigating outdated cultural norms while fulfilling their responsibilities. The study proposed a new paradigm of Akan womanhood – one that reflects their ability to thrive despite gender-based barriers. Like the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10–31, the Akan lady sees her man not as an adversary but as a counterpart; she is complementary, not subordinate; an ally, not an enemy. She is not diminished by her contributions to her family and society. The poem in Proverbs 31:10–31 sheds liberatory illumination on the misconception that assertive ladies are witches or that their roles in childbirth and childbearing make them inferior. It also debunks the idea that supporting one’s husband relegates a woman to societal irrelevance. Instead, it reveals that Akan women play an indispensable role in the development of their society – despite outdated cultural barriers. Consequently, beyond the realm of marriage and some cultic roles, the relationship between men and women should adopt egalitarianism for the betterment of Akan society.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article. The author, D.J.H., serves as an editorial board member of this journal. The peer review process for this submission was handled independently, and the author had no involvement in the editorial decision-making process for this manuscript. The author has no other competing interests to declare.

## Authors’ contributions

P.N.-M. authored the research and D.J.H. supervised the research and the writing.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was received from the Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria on 21 July 2021 (No. T045/21).

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## Data availability

The authors declare that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

## Disclaimer

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