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The Making of Akan Men: Confronting Hegemonic Masculinities in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*

Theresah Ennin

The Healers by Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* are two texts that focus on issues of manhood and masculinity in traditional Ghana. These writers subvert the normalization of hegemonic masculinity vaunted by society and to which many of the men in society ascribe. By throwing a critical lens on the male protagonists in the texts as gendered subjects and examining the influences that contribute to their subjectivity, this paper highlights the various constructions and manifestations of masculinities in the texts; critiquing the social institutions that make these constructions possible, showcasing the often negative consequences of masculinity on its performers, and theorizing new approaches to the male protagonist in African literary texts. In spite of the different portrayals of men by the authors, one common theme is that normative hegemonic masculinities limit and restrain the potential of the growth of the male character.

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A little over two decades ago, masculinity studies, or men's studies, was borne as a response to the growing undercurrent of discontent with the establishment of feminist gender critique as a force for social change in the 1960s and 70s. Coming of age in the 1980s, under the shadow of a decidedly female-driven sexual politics, the study of men and masculinity faced a crisis of confidence in its ability to engage a theoretical framework for challenging the intellectual arguments against male power and dominance in the social system (Mugambi & Allan, 2010, p. 3); consequently, the first works to be published from this discourse betrayed the influence that feminist criticism had had on it. Scholars in men's studies concede that masculinity, like femininity, is socially constructed and that masculine identities, coming out of their environments, are liable to change. The recent trend in masculinity studies is to interrogate and focus on the fluidity, instability, and contradictory nature of masculinity. A consequence of the strong opposition to the hegemonic view of an unchangeable and undifferentiated maleness is the preference for the term *masculinities*.

A lot of critical attention has been given to the representations of female characters in African literature as gendered beings without a corresponding balance of male characters. Yet, such a balance is critical, as it will strengthen the scope of criticism on gender and render it more complete. It is in an attempt to do this that this paper highlights the various constructions and manifestations of masculinities in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1965) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* (1979), examining the social institutions that make these constructions possible and the often negative consequences of masculinity on its performers.

Much of the criticism of Ama Ata Aidoo's works has centered on the portrayal of the female characters and feminist concerns. Critical reception of Aidoo's works has focused on her art of crafting a blend of English literary forms with African oral traditions and the representation of strong female characters. Aidoo's characters are often described as having voice and agency, fashioning space for themselves, and, sometimes, dealing with the dilemma of modernity and tradition. Critics have also emphasized Aidoo's engagement with discourse of the African diaspora, seeing connections that are necessary for an understanding of the importance of memory and remembrance. Aidoo's works have been largely accessed through feminist lenses, where the relations between the genders have been analyzed and attention focused on the domination of women by men as an oppressive force in their lives. A sustained discussion of the male characters in her works as gendered subjects is missing. Subsumed under the feminist analyses of her female characters, the men are, therefore, treated as one of the burdens on the backs of African women. Kofi Ako in *Anowa*, for example, receives analysis because he is the husband of Anowa, the female character under discussion. Yet, as Naana Banyiwia Horne (2010) claims,

there are enough nuances in Aidoo's works to indicate that an exploration of her male characters is important in understanding gender relations in her literature (p. 178).

Critical reception of Ayi Kwei Armah's writing has always been ambivalent. Constantly accusing Africa of self-betrayal and Europe of downright oppression, his works are both acclaimed and rejected (Fraser, 1980, p. xi). The critical reception he has received centers on the originality of his art, the problematic issue of race, the polemical and controversial nature of his writings, as well as his ground-breaking achievement in the development of an African literary aesthetic. However, there also appears to be a lack of sustained criticism on the portrayal of his characters, whether male or female, as discussions of them are subsumed under the broader themes of his works.

Research on masculinity in Ghana is a growing field. Of much importance is Stephan F. Miescher's (2005) work, *Making Men in Ghana*, which explores the changing meaning of being a man in Ghana through the life histories of eight senior men from Kwahu in the eastern region of the country. Other research on masculinity in Ghana tends to be from the social sciences, such as Obeng (2003), Adinkrah (2012), Amoakohene (2004), Takyi and Mann (2006), Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2007), and Sarpong (1991), which all affirm the multiplicity and dynamism of masculinity in the country. Obeng (2003), for example, examines the pre-colonial Asante and concludes that their notions of masculinity revolved around men's capacity to exercise authority over women and junior men and accumulate wealth and exhibit courage and bravery in the face of adversity or war. Miescher (2005), on the other hand, identifies multiple masculinities among the Akans by the late 19th century, which included the warrior ideal; adult masculinity, signified by marriage; senior masculinity, found in the figure of the elder (*opanyin*); and the status of the big man (*obirempon*).

According to Adinkrah (2012), cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity in contemporary Ghanaian society include a belief in the fundamental biological distinctions between male and female human nature as well as corresponding behavioral prescriptions (p. 475). Therefore, men are expected, for instance, to be hard working and women to be nurturing. Furthermore, it is frowned on when a man exhibits behavioral traits associated with women and vice versa. Ghanaian societies also subscribe to a number of patriarchal features: men occupy a dominant social status vis-à-vis women in most social domains and there is a general cultural expectation that women acquiesce to men (Adinkrah, 2012, p. 475). Familial responsibilities are also organized along gender lines: the husband is the provider and the wife is the housekeeper. According to Adinkrah, males additionally tend to subscribe to a

premarital and post-marital sexual double standard, evidenced by polygyny as a culturally permitted practice among all ethnic groups in the country.

Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2007) indicate that the stratification of gender roles is often reinforced by traditions that are passed down from one generation to the next. Through apprenticeship, in vocations such as woodwork and masonry, definitions of appropriate masculinity are transmitted. Male characteristics that are approved or encouraged include virility, strength, authority, power, and leadership qualities; the ability to offer protection and sustenance, intelligence, and wisdom; and the ability to bear physical and emotional pain. Oral literature in the form of stories, songs, and proverbs is another avenue whereby gender stratification is reinforced. Several proverbs in Akan culture portray men as brave and capable of handling critical situations. Examples of such proverbs include:

When a gun is fired, it is the man who receives the bullet on his chest.
 Even if a woman buys a gun or a drum it is kept in a man's hut.
 The hen also knows that it is dawn, but it allows the cock to announce it.
 (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2007, p. 55)

Proverbs such as these are used in daily discourse to endorse masculine inclinations in boys and reinforce gender positions, which ensures that girls and boys know their appropriate places in society (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2007, p. 55).

Furthermore, girls are taught to defer to men and to see boys as stronger, wiser, and more responsible and boys are accordingly taught to lead and control women. Name-calling and ostracization are some of the structures in place to ensure that these measures are followed. A boy whose lifestyle does not measure up to the prescribed expectations is given derogatory names, such as “Kojo-basia” (man-woman). Conversely, a girl who veers from prescribed feminine roles into those of boys is branded “Babasia-kokonin” (a female cock) (Adomako Ampofo, 2001, p. 199).

The theory underlining this project is hegemonic masculinity, which was formulated almost three decades ago and has had a lot of influence on research on men and gender. When it was first formulated in the mid-1980s, it was understood as “the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just as a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Connell and Messerschmidt further clarify that:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not

assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (p. 832)

These writers contend that hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; rather, it meant, “ascendancy through culture, institutions and persuasion” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Another important feature of hegemonic masculinity is that it is subject to change, which is likely to happen when there is a struggle for hegemony and older forms of masculinities are displaced by newer ones.

Hegemonic masculinity has been the focus of much research in education: to understand the dynamics of classroom life and the relations between curriculum and gender-neutral pedagogy (Martino, 1995). It has also found usage in research in criminology, media studies, men’s health, and organizational studies (Adinkrah, 2012; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As a result of the vast amount of research involving hegemonic masculinity, the concept has been expanded and fleshed out in four ways: documenting the consequences and costs of hegemony, uncovering mechanisms of hegemony, showing greater diversity in masculinities, and tracing changes in hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Nevertheless, the concept has been subjected to a lot of criticism in the field. One such criticism has to do with the underlining concept of masculinity itself. Some critics argue that masculinity is framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes male-female difference and ignores difference and exclusion within gender categories. However, critics Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reiterate that masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals; rather masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting (p. 836). Likewise, the fact that research has shown how women enact masculinities negates these claims of essentialism.

Another area of criticism is who actually represents hegemonic masculinity. There is the allegation that many men who hold great social power do not embody an ideal masculinity; whereas others who are deemed by researchers to have hegemonic masculinity do not appear to have much masculine substance to them. Martin (1998) also criticizes the concept for its inconsistent applications, noting that it sometimes refers to a fixed type of masculinity and at others to whatever type is dominant at a particular time. In response to this criticism of ambiguity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contend that the circulation of idealized models of admired masculine conduct, which may be exalted by churches, narrated by mass

media, or celebrated by the state, refer to, but in various ways distort, the everyday realities of social practice. Thus, they argue that hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet, Connell and Messerschmidt assert that these models, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires and further articulate loosely with the practical constitution of masculinities as ways of living in everyday local circumstances (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838).

A final criticism leveled against this theory of hegemony in masculinities is its connection to power/violence. Holter (2003) claims that it is erroneous to deduce relations among masculinities from the direct exercise of personal power by men over women. Issues of the institutionalization of gender inequalities, the role of cultural constructions, and the interplay of gender dynamics with race, class, and region must all be factored in the discussion. Collier (1998) also criticizes the concept for its typical use in accounting for violence and crime. He suggests that hegemonic masculinity has come to be associated solely with negative characteristics that depict men as unemotional, independent, non-nurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate; elements that are seen as the causes of criminal behavior. To this criticism, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that, since the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on a practice that permits men's collective dominance over women to continue, it is not surprising that, in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men's engagement with toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting (p. 840). However, they are quick to note that, violence and other noxious practices are not always the defining characteristics, since hegemony has numerous configurations. Most accounts of hegemonic masculinity include many positive actions, such as providing financially for a family, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father. They argue that the concept would hardly be relevant if the only characteristics of the dominant group were violence, aggression, and self-centeredness, as such characteristics imply dominance but hardly hegemony. And for hegemony to prevail, the consent and participation of subaltern groups are crucial. In conclusion, the essential features of hegemonic masculinity are that it presumes the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities; implies cultural consent, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives; and is open to challenge—from women's resistance to patriarchy and from men as bearers of alternative masculinities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, provides an explanation for the presence of a particular version of masculinity that has greater legitimacy and supremacy, whereas multiple masculinities coexist in society.

For the purpose of this paper, I use this term to denote the ideal, normative form of masculinity embodied by the most socially powerful males in a society and to which most males in that society aspire in varying degrees. This essay focuses on the challenges to hegemonic masculinity in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1965) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* (1979) by discussing the various ways the writers subvert this concept in their works as they focus on issues of manhood and masculinity in pre-independence Ghana. The fundamental assumption here is that these two writers challenge the normalization of hegemonic masculinity vaunted by society and to which many of the men ascribe. By throwing a critical lens on the male protagonists in the texts as gendered subjects, this essay examines the influences that contribute to their subjectivity and new approaches to the male protagonist in African literary texts.

Based on an old Ghanaian folktale, *Anowa* tells the story of a young woman, the eponymous character of the novel, who defies tradition and her parents' wishes to marry a man of her own choosing and the tragic consequences that result from this act. Commenting on the play, Opoku-Agyemang (1997) states that, "The tragic irony of *Anowa* is that the heroine creates choices which offer her hope at the beginning and terror at the end. The disappointment of *Anowa* lies in its silence over alternative avenues of growth for the intelligent, independent woman" (p. 29). Therefore, Anowa's suicide should be seen as the ultimate symbolic act of taking complete control over her destiny and "thereby making a noble exit in a world of no exits" (Opoku-Agyemang, 1997, p. 30). However, a rereading of the text indicates that it is not only Anowa who is denied alternative avenues for growth and development. Kofi Ako's suicide should also be read as an act of escape from a system that denies him the opportunity of being different while at the same time castigating him for failing to reach the ideal. Historically, *Anowa* is set some 30 years or less after the signing of the Bond of 1844 between the British and Fante Chiefs in the Gold Coast. In fact, the play can be said to have its beginnings in the 15th century with the arrival of the Europeans on the coast of what is now known as Ghana and the beginning of the trade in African gold, ivory, pepper, and, then, slaves. Consequently, the way of life in the Gold Coast was impacted by contact with the White man and one important change was the ability to achieve "big man" status in the community through trading with Europeans on the coast.

In the town of Yebi, the setting of *Anowa*, men attain hegemonic masculinity by virtue of their importance in the community as a result of their wealth and power. Most often, this is acquired through hard work and diligence and, thus, the community prides itself on industriousness. Because Anowa's husband, Kofi Ako, is lazy, he is not hailed as a "real" man in Yebi society. In the

first scene, he appears in work clothes holding a fish trap and a bundle of bait, but no fish. The lack of fish is symbolic of his failure and is also an indication of his aversion to being industrious. In response to her husband's claim that Kofi Ako comes from a good home and would make a good husband, Badua, Anowa's mother, exclaims:

And if all there is to a young man is that his / family has an unspoiled name,
then what kind of man is / he? Are he and his wife going to feed on stones
when he / will not put a blow into a thicket or at least learn a trade? (p. 76)

Badua indicates that the first priority for a man is to engage in a form of economic activity so as to provide for his wife and children. Therefore, by this standard, Kofi Ako fails because he does not work.

Other people reiterate Badua's concerns about Kofi Ako, as reported by the Old Woman. According to her, people in the village claim that Kofi Ako is obsessed with his looks and spends too much time in recreation. He appears too interested in his physical appearance to be a man in a community that does not judge a man by his handsome features, but rather on his adherence to gender role expectations. It becomes evident that Kofi Ako cannot expect to reach his full potential in this community that will not allow him to be different from the norm. In describing the Yebi community, Haiping Yan (2002) describes it as a place of restraint and limitations, such that the young couple must leave and find a place of freedom where Kofi Ako can grow to his fullest potential. The highway where they trade in animal skins embodies an "open space where [Anowa] thrives as a woman free of limiting local conventions" (Yan, 2002, p. 247) and Kofi Ako can rely on Anowa to provide labor for their trade without ridicule from the community. In addition, the highway affords Anowa the opportunity to help Kofi Ako grow into the type of man that the village of Yebi considers ideal. As she tells her parents, "You will be surprised to know that I am going to help him do something with his life" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 77–78).

However, this desire to improve him is doomed from the beginning because, whereas Anowa is confident in her ability to succeed through hard work, Kofi Ako lacks this confidence. He tells Anowa that he wishes to get some "medicine" to protect them from harm: "[m]aybe you feel confident enough to trust yourself in dealing with all the problems of life. I think I am different, my wife" and slaves to do the hard work for him (Aidoo, 1965, p. 85). However, Anowa is against slavery, as she tells him, "Kofi, no man made a slave of his friend and came to much himself. It is wrong. It is evil" (p. 90). Her feelings are echoed in the words of the Old Man of Yebi, who repeats that slavery goes against the natural state of man and the purity of his worship, for the house that

engages in slavery comes to ruin. Nevertheless, Kofi remains adamant because it touches on the core of his being; his indolent nature hates hard work and he will do anything to get out of it. Therefore, he sees Anowa's refusal to listen to him as an attack on his manhood. It is then, in a determination to assert his manhood, that he decides that it is time for changes to occur in their marriage: "Anowa, I shall be the new husband and you the new wife" (p. 87).

Consequently, in pursuit of this determination, Kofi Ako acquires slaves to conduct his trading activities for him. The delicate nature of slavery in the Gold Coast at the time makes Ako's decision unfortunate because the presence of the forts dotting the landscape of the beach is a reminder of the complicity and active participation of the African people in "that degrading trafficking of human flesh" (Odamtten, 1994, p. 52), a trade that showcased man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Thus, for Ako to have reenacted slavery in his house makes him representative of the "disparate breed" of people who, for selfish reasons, actively helped to consolidate colonial subjugation. Vincent Odamtten (1994) indicates that Kofi Ako appears materially, economically, and psychologically dependent on the White man for survival because his success and attainment of hegemonic masculinity are not based on the cultural values of hard work and resourcefulness, but rather on the exploitation and sweat of his fellow men (p. 53).

As Kofi Ako begins to attain the status of the ideal man, he listens less and less to his wife. He gives over the running of the trade business to the slaves and prevents Anowa from working as well. Inherent in his attitude is a lack of desire to understand his wife and her feelings about being indolent. Disregarding the fact that it is Anowa's differences that made her choose him as her husband, he rebukes her for being different from all other women, who would welcome the opportunity to stop work and live the life of the idle rich. As evidenced from his earlier words that he is now a "new husband," Kofi Ako has evolved from being an equal partner with Anowa in their relationship to being dominant.

Celebrating Kofi Ako's success and wealth, the Old Woman and Old Man present dissenting views of masculinity. The Old Woman reiterates the fundamental determinants of the ideal man in Yebi as being successful, wealthy, and powerful enough to take control of his household and rule it (Aidoo, 1965, p. 101). Thus, by silencing Anowa and taking the initiative in trading in slaves, Kofi Ako has displayed that he embodies such a description. On the other hand, the Old Man claims that a man is not necessarily one who takes his own counsel and disregards the advice of his wife. Throughout the play, the Old Man is the voice of dissent from what is expressed by the Old Woman and Badua likely because, even in this traditional setting, there are challenges to the conception of ideal masculinity. Therefore, while the Old Man symbolizes

the progressive tendencies within that social dynamic, and echoes the voice of the author for change, the Old Woman stubbornly clings to the status quo, even in the face of the changes overtaking society (Odamtten, 1994, p. 51).

By phase three in the play, Kofi Ako appears to have achieved complete hegemony. He has wealth, numerous slaves, respect, and power. His friends are kings and other important and powerful men in society and his word is powerful in the community. In ironic contrast to his earlier words that “I am not buying these men to come and carry me. They are coming to help us in our work” (Aidoo, 1965, p. 89), he is carried on the shoulders of men to the sound of his own personal horn blower and praise singers later in the text (p. 104). But his wife remains depressed and worried, still wearing her old clothes and refuses to touch his money or use it on herself, despite his pleas. Since Kofi Ako prefers instant gratification to Anowa’s dreams of a better tomorrow, he has seized on the economic gains available through association with the British colonizers to attain the ideal dictated by his community. Vincent Odamtten (1994) argues that the advent of colonialism affords Kofi Ako the *de jure* right to further marginalize women (p. 71). The consolidation of power in the individual male, at the expense of women, is a correlate of the shift in power relations taking place in Fante society to the benefit of British imperial expansion.

Naana Banyiwā Horne (2010) states that, by the last phase of the play, Kofi Ako, “who has bought completely into the Victorian patriarchal values of the coastal Whites, seems particularly seduced by their aristocratic lifestyle—a lifestyle that thrives on leisure, the exploitation of the labor of others, lavish living, and the reduction of women from efficient workers [into] decorative pieces” (p. 191). He subsequently wants Anowa to be a decorative item that has no utilitarian use that he can showcase to his friends and enemies alike as a sign of his success and a symbol of his power. He considers the following description of Anowa apt, as her beauty should be an enhancer of his status in the community:

Beautiful as Korado Ahima
Someone’s-Thin-Thread.
A dainty little pot
Well-baked,
And polished smooth
To set in a nobleman’s corner. (Aidoo, 1965, p. 67)

However, this expectation contrasts sharply with what Badua wants for her daughter. Badua wants Anowa to be an ordinary, conventional woman, who will “Marry a man / Tend a farm / And be happy to see her / Peppers and her onions grow. / A woman like her / Should bear children / Many children” (Aidoo, 1965,

p. 72). Nowhere in this list does Badua make reference to a life of idleness—a concept very foreign to the community of Yebi. Yet, Kofi Ako wishes to assume the role of unquestioned sovereign in his personal and sexual relations with Anowa; a role that would effectively mask his inadequacies and insecurities. It is possible to see Kofi Ako's obsession with acquiring wealth as a possible substitution for his impotence. His desire not to take a second wife may also be seen as a way of avoiding the detection of this weakness.

Despite his success and prestige, Kofi Ako fails to attain Yebi ideal masculinity because he is impotent and sterile. Horne (2010) argues that, in Yebi, sexual potency is an imperative for men just as childbearing is for women. Therefore, for Aidoo to have created a male protagonist who is sexually impotent and a female protagonist who is unable to bear children is a strike against normative notions of masculinity and femininity, which Horne (2010) claims Aidoo interrogates from the beginning of the play (p. 179). In their last quarrel at the big house in Oguaa, Kofi Ako accuses Anowa of being a witch and she, in turn, calls him impotent, "Now I know," she says, "So that is it. My husband is a woman / now. [*She giggles*] He is a corpse. He is dead wood. But / less than dead wood because at least, that sometimes grows mushrooms..." (Aidoo, 1965, p. 122). The tragic irony of the situation is that, from the beginning, many people, with the exception of Anowa, had been suspicious of Kofi Ako's virility as a man. Badua references Kofi Ako's virility when she calls him a "watery male of all watery males," insinuating that his manhood is weak and diluted, but it is Anowa's public revelation of his impotence that causes him to kill himself (Horne, 2010, p. 187). His suicide, consequently, reinforces the prominence that society attaches to masculinity; that to be a man in Yebi, one has to follow certain prescribed modes of behavior and the failure to do so is cause for disgrace.

His suicide also should be understood as the result of his controlling desire to attain hegemonic masculinity. After enduring years of public ridicule because his behavior was less than manly, Kofi Ako grasps the opportunity to prove society wrong, yet in his drive to reach this ideal, he is unable to give life by having children and sacrifices his humanity by becoming a slave owner. The Old Man indicates that:

... money-making is like a god possessing a priest. He never / will leave you, until he has occupied you, wholly changed / the order of your being, and seared you through and up / and down. Then only would he eventually leave you, / but nothing of you except an exhausted wreck, lying prone / and wondering who you are. (Aidoo, 1965, p. 100)

Odamtten (1994) concludes that Kofi Ako's cupidity, his ideological capitulation to British bourgeois values, and the revelation of his psychosexual dysfunction

lead to the double suicide in the play (p. 78). His action tragically echoes what the Old Man has been advocating all along, the need for alternative definitions of masculinity in society. In his last statement, when the Old Woman blames Anowa for the death of Kofi Ako, the Old Man says, "Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.... It is men who make men mad. Who / knows if Anowa would have been a better woman, if we had not been what we are?" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 124), clearly lambasting society for its narrow-mindedness and rigid view of gender that refuses to see alternate lives for both its men and women.

Osam, Anowa's father and Badua's husband, only appears three times in the play, yet it is clear that his life is as constrained as his son-in-law's.¹ Osam's first appearance is in phase one of the play, where he is seen rebuking his wife, Badua, because she complains too much about Anowa being unmarried. All the same, he is equally worried about Anowa's rejection of the suitors who do come her way, "And may the ancestral spirits help me, but what man / would I order from the heavens to please the difficult eye / of my daughter, Anowa?" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 71). He admits that getting daughters born is his business, but not getting them married, which is an allusion to the matrilineal system of inheritance in Akan culture, where a father's duty toward his children has limitations.

The Akan inheritance and succession system is matrilineal and stipulates that property and status are transferred from a mother's brother to his sister's son. It is, however, a more complex principle than the usual examples given in anthropological explanations. In the past, a man raised his own children and his nephews and nieces with ease. His nephew was given particular attention and nurtured to succeed and inherit from the older man. It was a woman's brothers, the children's uncles, who played the most important role in the children's lives. Issues of education, vocation, and marriage were deferred to them. Fathers did not play such an active role in their own children's lives, they gave them a name and provided them with a good education and moral upbringing, but their position was otherwise limited (Nukunya, 2003, p. 33). A man's duty is toward the children of his sisters, his nieces and nephews, as they are considered his relatives and belong to his clan. However, transformations occurring in Ghana since the 1970s have affected many aspects of the lineage organization.

Therefore, by leaving the upbringing of his children to his brothers-in-law, Osam aspires to be the ideal Akan man. Yet, this does not give him the peace of mind he seeks. He remains constrained, impotent, and frustrated by the system, as he is unable to seek the help he wants for Anowa. He has been a strong proponent of Anowa apprenticing to become a priestess since childhood because of her non-conformist behavior, when she was identified as a born priestess, but Badua and her brothers rejected that idea. Badua wants her

daughter to be a “human woman,” who would settle into the acceptable role of womanhood—that of wife and mother—in society.

In addition, Osam is prevented from rejecting Anowa’s choice of a husband when she eventually chooses Kofi Ako. Even though Osam tries to play the devil’s advocate when Badua complains about Kofi Ako, he does not consider him marriage material. To avoid Badua’s brothers blaming him for Anowa’s choice, he remains as detached as possible from the discussion of his daughter’s marriage. Odamtten (1994) maintains that Osam accepts the status quo and has no desire to do otherwise (p. 60). He wants to find the easy way out of every problem, shifting responsibility onto others and blaming everyone but himself when things go wrong. By refusing to change the status quo, he contributes to the entrenchment of these societal prescriptions and becomes a stumbling block in the face of change. By foregrounding Osam’s failure to save his daughter, Aidoo (1965) condemns the practice of hegemonic masculinity that dissuades other men from going contrary to the norm. It becomes apparent, therefore, that both Kofi Ako and Osam are products of their environment and culture and are forced to behave in accordance with societal demands of being men. However, as they are unable to live up to these standards, and cannot envision a different path to manhood, they remain locked in their limited conscriptions. With the suicide of Kofi Ako and the loss Osam experiences, Aidoo (1965) appears to denigrate hegemonic masculinity and calls for more varied and egalitarian representations of manhood that are favorable to both men and women.

Ayi Kwei Armah’s novel *The Healers* (1979) is a personal narrative of a young man, Densu, struggling to find his place in the ethos of society. He is repulsed by life in the royal palace and the meaninglessness of the ceremonial games and rituals of his people. Dismayed by the spirit of competitiveness and materialism that has captivated his people, he seeks a nobler cause. His search leads him to a group of traditional healers interested in mending divisions in society and bringing together the entire Black race. The history of the fall of the Asante empire to the British serves as a backdrop to Densu’s story. In this novel, Armah shows how divisiveness among Africans made colonialism possible and highlights the destructiveness of the overemphasis on physical and martial prowess among the Asante.

Armah’s book is a mixture of historical facts and fiction, but Derek Wright (1989) asserts that historical details in the novel do not always merge with the visionary presentation of a timeless struggle between manipulators and inspirers, or with the personal story of Densu. He argues that the Asante historical theme is introduced quite late in the story and it remains a backdrop to the intrigues at Esuano, the primary setting of the novel. Wright’s observation is one of the many criticisms that Armah’s novel has received, reception of which has

not been favorable. Bernth Lindfors (1992), for example, questions Armah's portrayal of Africa's past as made up of the world of the good versus the bad guys. Simon Gikandi (1992), on the other hand, argues that there appears to be an air of puritanical holiness around Armah's group of heroes and avers that this portraiture of the healers as an idealistic, saintly group of characters is not consistent with their philosophy of uniting the Black race (p. 320). Ode Ogede (2000), however, contends that *The Healers* is not realistic fiction and should not be examined within that frame because the novel will fall short in such an exercise (p. 127). Consequently, instead of seeing these protagonists as unrealistic, fanciful flights of fancy by the author, they should be seen as representations of an ideal that he envisions.

Ogede's (2000) point is of particular importance to masculinity because it hints at the subversion inherent in Armah's novel. Armah's protagonists represent a different ideal he wants to see in society and, thus, hegemonic masculinity is not what his characters strive for; rather, they are seen moving away from hegemony as much as possible. Robert Fraser (1980) indicates that Armah's novel highlights the Akan concept of manhood as superiority in fighting and militarist ideals, a competitive spirit, personal excellence, and the ability to wield power and command prestige (pp. 90–93). From society's emphasis on competitiveness and prowess in fighting, it becomes apparent that, for one to be considered a man, one must exhibit all these features. It is in subverting this representation of normative masculinity that Armah creates male characters whose lives are far from the societal ideal and who do not want to achieve the standard of excellence set down by it. In the defeat of the Asante army and the subsequent looting and destruction of Kumase, Armah (1979) shows how an overemphasis on hegemonic masculinity is destructive. Through the employment of caricature, manipulation, murder, and depression, Armah showcases the evil nature of hegemonic masculinity and advocates alternative masculinities that are less manipulative and more inspiring.

As different societies, cultures, and times define their own form of masculinity, the community of Esuano sees the ideal man as one who is physically strong, intelligent, shrewd, and cunning. Consequently, every year, all the young men in the community who have attained adulthood engage in the ritual games of wrestling, swimming, running, and shooting to choose a sole winner who will become a symbol of what society considers the ideal man. In addition to these attributes, because of the historical events surrounding the time period, the ideal man is also one who is willing to work with the White man in subduing his own people, so as to consolidate his power in the community. The novel is set around the period when the Fante were in partnership with the English at the Cape Coast castle. As a result

of the many attacks on the Fante by the Asante, the former sought refuge with the British. This situation created a sort of dependence on the British by the Fante and gave the British the opportunity to further advance their expansionism and consolidate power on the Gold Coast. Consequently, for fear of losing their dwindling power, many traditional leaders curried favor with the British by implementing the latter's expansionist policies, even to the detriment of their own people (Daaku, 1970, p. 167).

Although Densu is physically strong and intelligent and wins many of the games in the competition, he refuses to rise to the next step, which will assure him a place among those who embody hegemonic masculinity in Esuano. His pacifist nature does not allow him to cause harm to his fellow man when the other has done him no wrong; subsequently, he does not take part in the most violent of the ritual games and refuses to accept the kingship at Esuano. Densu appears at odds with the general expectations of society from the very beginning of the novel. He does not believe in competitiveness for the sake of glory and fame and, thus, finds the ritual games a sham of what they are supposed to be. Instead of games that promote the overall unity of the people, celebrating their survival as a group, they have become an avenue for self-glorification; an opportunity to have a single person emerge as the winner, isolated for the admiration and envy of the defeated competitors. Therefore, when it is time to participate in the games, Densu chooses his own unique methods of dealing with his dilemma. When Ababio, Densu's guardian, tells him that he should follow the status quo, Densu rejects this call and tells him, "I want to be a different kind of man" (Armah, 1979, p. 38). His awareness of wanting to be different from the other men in Esuano grows into reality after his encounter and conversations with the healer, Damfo.

Armah presents the community of Esuano and the larger world, then, as made up of manipulators and inspirers. Those who seek power, wealth, and esteem are the manipulators and others, like Densu and Damfo, represent the inspirers; there is no middle ground. The greatest manipulator is Ababio. The descendant of a slave, Ababio takes after his obsequious grandfather, who became powerful by asking the king of Asante to spit into his mouth. Ababio is a fitting successor to his grandfather's legacy, as he assumes the throne at Esuano through deceit and murder, even though he is not a member of the royal family. Physically, Ababio is a short man, around 50-years-old, bald, and fat, the result of overindulgence in rich food. His frame is small and, consequently, his obesity makes him look like a deformed sphere balanced unsteadily on thin legs. His physical description is an apt metaphor for his nature as a greedy person. Full, overstuffed like a python after feeding, and yet insatiably looking for more.

Ababio is not the only character depicted in such an unflattering way. The other Fante kings, who work with the British for paltry rewards such as shiny bottles of alcohol from Britain, are likewise caricatured and made to look foolish and infantile. When describing the kings at the meeting with Wolseley, the narrator says of Nana Tsibu, of Assen, “This one had glistening hair, and had skin of such smoothness it was hard to think of him as a grown man and not a large pampered baby” (Armah, 1979, p. 250). The reference to his smooth skin is an indictment of his indolent life; similarly, another king cannot walk in his royal sandals and appears gratified when the carriers bring the palanquin to carry him. Other kings disregard the traditional cloth of the people and dress like the British, but Densu says what they wear is “unlike anything [he] had seen on a white man... a strange assortment of white men’s clothes,” indicating the absurdity of their outfits (Armah, 1979, p. 251). Those who wear the White man’s clothes also take on European names, like Blankson, Moore, Thompson, and Robertson. The spokesperson for the kings explains to Densu that, “Among the royals that’s the new style. Look. There is Opanyin Benstir, from Gomoa. Only these days he likes to call himself Bentil. Mr. Bentil, Field Marshal” (pp. 250–251). In this caricature of most of the men who embody hegemonic masculinity in the community, Armah shows his rejection of this practice. Conversely, Densu, Appia, and Anan, who reject Ababio’s call to hegemony, are not caricatured, but are described as having perfect symmetry of form and structure with no jerkiness or sudden twitches to their movements, indicating a permanent calmness in the way they hold their body. The lack of blemish or deformity indicates a singleness of purpose and a purity of heart.

The act of manipulating others for one’s own ends is one of the hallmarks of men like Ababio. Significantly, this trait is missing in Damfo, the healer. Damfo is the closest thing Densu has in the form of a father-mentor figure. From the first time he heard of him, Densu has felt an attraction to the healer and his work, finding in him a kindred spirit who understands his feelings about royal power and the corruption at the court. Damfo lives in the eastern forest with other healers and does not come to Esuano very often. He does not find the affairs of court interesting or engaging, preferring to work with others in the eventual reunification of the Black people. One interesting trait about Damfo is his lack of force or manipulation. He does not try to make his wife, Ama, remain with him in the eastern forest when she grows discontent with the austere life and goes back to Esuano. Similarly, he persuades Densu to take a year off and return to Esuano to think through his decision to become a healer. In his work with Araba Jesiwa and Asamoa Nkwanta, he draws them out so they can come to a realization of their own situations.

In this regard, he is a foil to Ababio, who is a traitor of his people. When the crown prince, Appia, disagrees with his desire to work with the White man so as to consolidate his power, Ababio kills him. He is so consumed with power that he would do anything to gain more. His conception of manhood is of being competitive and taking care of oneself at the detriment of all others. He tells Densu, "You're a man, and I'm talking to you about just those things that make a man a man" (Armah, 1979, p. 28). Therefore, when Densu fails to accept his terms, he frames him for murder. Densu is aware of Ababio's manipulation of others for his own gain and would like to have nothing to do with him and his schemes, but Ababio refuses to let him be, wanting to use him for his own ends. Ababio exhibits the very qualities at court that Densu finds repulsive, such that, when the former is found guilty of the murder of Prince Appia and the kingship of Esuano is offered a second time to Densu, he refuses, preferring the life of a healer to the power at court.

It is apparent in this novel that Armah equates hegemonic masculinity with violence/murder. When Ababio comes up against the young men, Anan, Appia, and Densu, who do not want to be associated with his brand of masculinity, he kills them. These young men are portrayed as different from the norm. Anan prefers the calm of nature to the noisy manipulations of the town and was the first to reject Ababio's call to the throne. He also looks to the eastern forest for a chance to be with people who understand him. Similarly, even though Prince Appia takes part in the games, does his best, and is crowned winner in the end, he does not believe in violently competing with others to win. He refuses to win the wrestling match by maiming Kojo Djan, even though the latter places himself in that position, and he incurs Ababio's wrath when he refuses to work with the White man to destroy his fellow Black people. Consequently, Ababio has Appia and Anan killed and tries to get Densu imprisoned for a crime he does not commit.

Nevertheless, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) assert that violence and other noxious practices are not always the defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, since it has numerous configurations. However, they claim that since the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on practices that permit men's collective dominance over women and other men to continue, it is not surprising that, in some contexts, it actually does refer to men's engagement in toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). It could be said that Armah's equation of hegemonic masculinity with violence is his way of vilifying the practice.

Forged in the crucible of Asante's militaristic exploits, Asamoa Nkwanta is another character that symbolizes the extremes of hegemonic masculinity in

the novel. Asamoia Nkwanta is the commander-in-chief of all the Asante armies. Next to the Asante king, he is the most revered and feared man in the kingdom. His prowess and courage has won many victories for the kingdom. Robert Fraser (1980) sees him as the epitome of the virtues and vices of a proud, imperialistic, but morally complacent society (p. 93), a society that believes in fighting and dominating others. As the commander of all the armies of Asante, he is in the forefront of its machinery of domination and oppression of those weaker than itself and subsequently, never expected that his favorite nephew would be treated like a common slave and murdered during the customary killing of slaves that is done when the king of Asante dies. Consequently, Asamoia Nkwanta is outraged at this injustice done to him and refuses to lead the Asante armies. Asamoia Nkwanta holds his nephew dear to his heart because, in the matrilineal system of succession, his nephew inherits his position at his death. Uncle-nephew relationships in this context assume a dominant position; its implication being that a nephew is purer than a son in terms of lineage, for whereas the maternity of a child is not in doubt, the same cannot be said of the paternity (Nkansa-Kyeremateng, 1996, p. 108). Hence, Asamoia Nkwanta had been grooming his nephew to take over for him.

In the character of Asamoia Nkwanta, Armah denounces hegemonic masculinity for the attendant devastation on its practitioners. Michael Schwalbe (1992) indicates that any strategy for the maintenance of power is likely to involve a dehumanization of other groups and a corresponding withering of empathy. As a result, Asamoia Nkwanta has grown insensitive to the evils of slavery since he is part of Asante's militaristic campaign that consistently makes slaves of other people. It is only when he is touched personally by this tragedy that he begins to grasp the enormity of the practice, which is particularly pertinent given that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying life experience (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Deeply depressed and unable to function in the system that has betrayed him, Asamoia Nkwanta goes to the healers' village in Praso for healing. He remains fixated on images of his murdered nephew and his inability to save him and does not recognize that the system of slavery is the root of his problem. Consequently, the healer Damfo tries to bring him to the realization that his belief in an ideal masculinity that dominates the weak is inherently wrong.

It may be inferred that Asamoia Nkwanta begins to understand Damfo's point about royalty and the role it plays in the domination of both men and women, setting high the warrior image as the ultimate form of masculinity in Asante; however, his subsequent actions after he gets well indicate that the warrior ethos has been too ingrained in him for change to happen overnight. Therefore, even though Damfo

considers Asamoa Nkwanta a good man who has been trained in the service of Asante's royalty and whose desires lie with serving royal power, he does not think that Asamoa Nkwanta can work to unite the Black people despite what the other healers hope he would become. Y. S. Bofo (1992) agrees with Damfo that, in spite of present events to the contrary, there is still enough evidence to support the idea that Asamoa Nkwanta is trapped in the service of royalty; consequently, his healing is not ultimately successful, linked as it is to the healing of society. The failure of Asamoa Nkwanta to change could be read as Armah's way of dissociating his protagonists from royalty; so that even though Asamoa Nkwanta's change would be a victory over Asante's narrow conception of masculinity, Armah refuses to accept that option, rather, preferring to work with a select few who have been removed from society and set apart. Consequently, the only forum for change in the perception of manhood is more likely to come from the healers themselves. And while this is laudable, as it presents a different version of masculinity against the hegemony lauded by society at large, it is also problematic as it is narrow and, like the profession of healing itself, does not permit the admission of more members.

There is little doubt that, as many critics have affirmed, Ayi Kwei Armah's protagonists are of the "other worldly" kind. They are men who are isolated from society, seeking to escape the "rot of the land" and maintaining a purity of mind and purpose that is saintly and slightly puritanical. The difficulties with his characterization may lie in his interrogation of normative masculinities in society and a desire to represent a different form of masculinity at variance with the norm. Nevertheless, it is evident that, in the desire to do this, Ayi Kwei Armah fails to provide many alternatives to the paradigm. In *The Healers*, he creates male protagonists who symbolize his ideologies, such that they become paragons of every virtue that is missing in the other corrupted individuals. However, by casting characters as either "manipulators" or "inspirers," he does not provide a middle ground for other manifestations to emerge. Therefore, his protagonists are not well fleshed out and have no resemblance to the ordinary man. They do not develop into rounded characters, remaining fixed and one-dimensional throughout the novel.

In both texts, each society has its own traditional practices that establish hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the people of Yebi in *Anowa* esteem hard work and perceive it as the path to wealth and power, and subsequently hegemony, while the community in *The Healers* reveres strength and courage as the hallmarks of the ideal man. However, in both texts, the presence of the White man impacts traditional masculinity and creates a type of hegemonic masculinity that is destructive, as it provides avenues for men to quickly achieve it by exploiting their own people. Thus, the actions of Kofi Ako indicate how domineering,

destructive, and oppressive it is to embody this hegemony. His portrayal also criticizes society for refusing to provide and accept other modes of masculine identity that are liberating to both men and women and to offer avenues for growth and development. Likewise, Armah's healers reject this form of masculine expression that contributes to the fracturing of the Black people. Armah desires a world devoid of all forms of dominant masculinities. Subsequently, in spite of the different portrayals by the two authors, the common thread that runs through their works is that normative hegemonic masculinity limits and restrains the potential growth of the male character and, thus, societies should make available and acknowledge other versions of masculinity and regard them all as legitimate for male development.

NOTES

1. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to him as Osam because there appears to be some confusion with his name; he is variously referred to as Kofi Sam (p. 70) and Kobina Sam (p. 75) by his wife. Since he cannot be both—Kofi refers to males born on a Friday and Kobina refers to a male born on a Tuesday—I assume that this must have been a typographical error that was undetected and, as such, I will simply use his second name in referring to him.

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