

Comparative and Constructive Analysis of Akan Marriage Performance: The Past and the Present

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.70975>

Received: 12 August 2023; Revised: 27 August 2023; Accepted: 04 September 2023; Published: 05 October 2023

ABSTRACT

This study examined Akan marriage performance by comparing the present and the past constructively. Marriage is a significant institution in the Akan culture of Ghana, playing a crucial role in shaping societal values and norms. This study aims to conduct a comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance, exploring the changes that have occurred over time and their impact on contemporary practices. Comparatively, it was established that, Akan marriages were often arranged by parents or extended family members with little input from the individuals involved. However, in modern times, there is a shift towards more self-choice marriages, where individuals have greater freedom in selecting their partners. Constructively, it was revealed that, many Akan couples today strive to strike a balance between honouring traditional customs and incorporating modern elements into their marriage ceremonies. This blend allows them to maintain cultural connections while also adapting to contemporary realities. The study confined itself with primary source of data. Other authorities' works that are related to marriage performance; old and present, were consulted and reviewed to match up with the current study. Descriptive and survey design was adapted for the investigation. Purposive sampling technique was used to elicit significant information for the analysis. Data were collected through interviews and observations. One hundred and fifty (150) participants were involved in the investigation. Theories that support the investigation are Karl Marx (1848) social change theory and Walt Rostow (1960) modernization theory. These theories provide different lenses through which to analyze and understand the comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performances, considering the historical, cultural, social, and gender dynamics involved.

Keywords: marriage performance, comparative analysis, traditional practices, contemporary practices, cultural transformation.

Public Interest Statement

Marriage is a vital institution in society that shapes cultural norms, social dynamics and individual's life. The Akan people, an ethnic group predominantly residing in Ghana and Ivory Coast, have a rich tradition of marriage practices that have evolved over time. The interest was to explore and compare the performance of Akan marriages in the past and present, highlighting both the positive aspects and areas that need improvement. The analysis seeks to foster a better understanding of Akan culture, promote dialogue and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the significance of marriage in contemporary society. As youth and the aged had diverse notion on the issue under discussion.

INTRODUCTION



Akan marriage refers to the traditional marriage, customs and practices of the Akan people, an ethnic group

mainly found in Ghana and Ivory Coast. The Akan comprises several subgroups, including the Asante, Fante, Akuapem and Akyem among others. While there may be some variations in marriage customs among these subgroups, there are also commonalities that define the overall Akan marriage tradition. Marriage is a fundamental institution in many societies, shaping individuals' lives, family structures, and social dynamics. The Akan people of Ghana, a vibrant ethnic group, have a rich cultural heritage surrounding marriage practices. This comparative and constructive analysis aims to explore the performance of Akan marriages, comparing their past and present dynamics. In the past, Akan marriages were characterized by strong communal involvement, adherence to cultural norms, and the recognition of familial obligations. These practices fostered stability, unity and a sense of belonging within the Akan community. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that historical practices cannot be idealized without considering their limitations and potential impact on individual autonomy and gender equality.

Contemporarily, Akan marriages have undergone significant changes due to various factors, including globalization, urbanization and influence of modern values. While some traditional practices persist, there has been a significant shift towards more individualistic choices, increased emphasis on personal compatibility, and a desire for equitable partnerships. These changes reflect broader societal shifts and evolving gender roles, providing opportunities for empowerment and self-expression. However, it is essential to assess whether these changes fully address the needs and aspirations of all individuals within the Akan community. This investigation seeks to shed light on the comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance, spanning from historical practices to present-day realities. It examines both the positive aspects and areas that need improvement. The hope was to foster a more inclusive, respectful and empowering marriage culture within the Akan traditional society. Through open dialogue, community engagement and the recognition of individual agency, Akan marriages can evolve in ways that honour tradition while embracing the changing needs of individuals in contemporary society.

Akan marriages are typically characterized by elaborate rituals and ceremonies that reflect the cultural values, beliefs and traditions of the Akan people. Marriage is considered a significant event and it is seen as a union not only between two individuals but also, between their families and communities. It is a celebration of unity, continuity, and amalgamation of lineages. Pre-Marriage Customs included; The process of courtship is crucial in Akan marriage. It involves a series of visits by the man and his family to the woman's family. During these visits, the families get to know each other, and the man expresses his interest in marrying the woman. Once the man's intentions are made known, the knocking ceremony takes place. This ceremony involves the presentation of gifts, including drinks, money, and sometimes clothing, to the bride's family. If the gifts are accepted, it signifies the family's approval of the marriage proposal. After the knocking ceremony, an engagement period follows. The man's or the suitor's family presents gifts such as rings, cloth, and other items to the bride-to-be. The engagement is a formal declaration of the intention to marry and symbolizes the commitment between the couple. The ceremony starts with pouring of libation, where prayers and blessings are offered to honour ancestors and seek their guidance and support for the couple's union.

The couple exchanges vows, expressing their commitment and love for each other. Rings may also be exchanged as a symbol of their marital bond. Various traditional rituals and customs are performed during the ceremony. These may include the pouring of a libation to the gods and ancestors, the sharing of food and drinks, and the display of traditional dances and music. The couple seeks blessings from the elders of both families, who offer words of wisdom, advice, and blessings for a prosperous and harmonious marriage. The families and guests present gifts, including money, clothing, and household items, to the couple to help them start their new life together. Post marriage. The couple is expected to integrate into the community and participate actively in social and cultural events. Akan marriage is deeply rooted in tradition and cultural values, emphasizing the importance of family, community, and respect for elders. While modern influences have brought some changes to the Akan marriage customs, many people still embrace and celebrate their

cultural heritage through these traditional practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Change theory explores how societal changes impact marriage practices and rituals over time. It can be used to analyze how the Akan marriage performance has evolved from traditional practices to the present day, considering factors such as urbanization, globalization, and cultural shifts. Modernization Theory explores the process of societal modernization and its effects on cultural practices.

Tolstoy (1877) delves into the intricacies of marriage through the characters of Anna Karenina and her husband, Alexei Karenina, as well as the contrasting relationships of other couples in Russian high society. It can be used to assess how Akan marriage performances have changed in response to modernization, examining the influence of education, urbanization, technology, and economic factors on the rituals and dynamics of Akan marriages.

This literature review examines the comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance, exploring the changes and continuities in Akan marriage practices from the past to the present.

Austen (1813) explores the themes of love, marriage, and social status through the experiences of the Bennet sisters and their pursuit of suitable husbands. The Akan people have a rich cultural heritage, and their marriage rituals and customs hold significant importance in their social fabric. Exploring historical and contemporary sources, it sheds light on the evolution of Akan marriage practices by examining the factors influencing changes and the elements that have remained resilient over time.

Ibsen (1879) tackles societal expectations, gender roles, and the institution of marriage. It follows Nora, a married woman, as she confronts the oppressive nature of her marriage and seeks her own independence.

Scott (1925) explores the complexities of marriage. The relationships between Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan, as well as Tom and Daisy Buchanan, highlight themes of love, infidelity, and the pursuit of happiness.

Woolf (1927) delves into the inner lives and thoughts of characters, exploring the impact of personal relationships, including marriage. The Ramsay family's dynamics and the portrayal of marriage in the novel reflect Woolf's exploration of gender roles and societal expectations.

Williams (1947) examines the destructive nature of relationships and the illusions people create in marriage. The turbulent relationships between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski highlight themes of desire, power, and vulnerability.

Garcia (1985) explores the endurance of love and the complexities of marriage. The story follows the lives of Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza as they navigate societal norms and their own desires.

Smith (2005) provides a humorous and insightful examination of marriage, family dynamics, and cultural clashes. Set in a university town, the story explores the marriages of two families and the challenges they face. These works offered diverse perspectives on marriage performances, providing readers with rich insights into the complexities and dynamics of marital relationships.

Britwum (2012) advocates that Akan marriages often begin with a period of courtship, during which the couple gets to know each other. The families of the prospective couple get involved in the marriage process. The families may exchange visits and gifts to signify their interest and support for the union.

Busia (1995) examines the payment of a dowry, known as "bride price" or "bride wealth" as a customary

Anhyidoho (2000) attests to the fact that, Akan marriage customs involve various rites and rituals, such as the exchange of vows, the breaking of kola nuts for blessings, and the sharing of palm wine to symbolize unity and fertility.

Ampfo (2001) Akan weddings often involve a traditional ceremony known as “Ayefor?.” This ceremony is characterized by cultural practices such as the pouring of libation, prayers, blessings, and the tying of the couple’s wrists with a symbolic cloth to signify their union. Akan weddings are joyous occasions celebrated with family, friends, and members of the community. Festivities that usually characterize Akan marriage ceremonies include singing, dancing, drumming, and feasting on traditional dishes. It is a time for the community to come together and celebrate the union of the couple.

Arhin (2001) explores Akan marriages as not just a union between two individuals but also a merging of families. The families play an essential role in the marriage process; providing guidance to the would-be couple, supporting the prospective couple, and always wishing them well.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for the study was qualitative approach. This design allowed a comprehensive understanding of the Akan marriage performance, considering both subjective experiences and measurable trends. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Akan individuals who have firsthand experience with marriage in both the past and present. These interviews provided valuable insights into personal experiences, cultural practices, and societal changes. Participants were purposively selected based on their knowledge, expertise, and experience in Akan marriage. This included individuals from various age groups, marital statuses, and geographical locations. In all, one hundred and fifty (150) participants were observed and interviewed in their natural setting for the investigation. Fifty (50) participants from Atebubu Municipality, fifty (50) participants from Mampong Municipality and fifty (50) from Akrokerri community in the Adansi North district of Ashanti. Participants were provided with clear information about the study’s purpose, procedures, and their rights. Written consent was obtained before conducting the interview or observation. All personal information and data collected were treated with strict confidentiality. Participant identities was anonymized to ensure privacy and protection of their personal information.

Research site

The data were collected in the Bono East and Ashanti Regions of Ghana. Majority of the population in these municipal, metropolitan and district were traders. Other sectors, for instance, politics, health and education, and their cultural activities take the center stage of their activities. The sites were suitable for the investigation because these towns are Akan settlements. Close attention was paid to all respondents during the interview and the observation to monitor the effect of Akan marriage performance; past and present on them.

Data collection tools

The tools used to collect data for this investigation were interview and observation. The interview and the observation were conducted in the selected municipal, metropolitan and the district in Bono East and Ashanti Regions. On the 10th day of January, 2022 to 28th day of December, 2022, ethical consideration was adhered to. One hundred and fifty (150) respondents were interviewed in their own environment to avoid fear and panic. Within the period, all marriages performed at these research sites were captured into this investigation therefore data were generated out of the performances.

Table 1. Sample Size

Gender	Number
Male	100
Female	50
Total	150

Table 2. Distribution of sample by schools and age bracket

Region	Number of respondents	Age bracket
Atebubu Municipality	50	35- 70yrs
Mampong Municipality	50	24 – 68yrs
Akrokerri Community	50	28- 80yrs

DISCUSSION

Comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance, both in the past and the present, reveals interesting insights into the cultural dynamics and changes within the Akan society. The Akan people are an ethnic group known for their rich cultural heritage, which includes unique marriage customs and practices. By examining the historical context and comparing it to contemporary trends, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Akan marriages have evolved over time.

One important aspect of Akan marriage performance is the traditional marriage ceremony, known as “Awaregye?.” In the past, this ceremony was a significant event involving elaborate rituals and customs. It served as a symbol of unity between two families and involved extensive involvement of the extended family and the community at large. The ceremony was typically held at the bride’s family home and included rituals such as the pouring of libation, the exchange of gifts, and the payment of dowry. These practices were rooted in Akan cultural values and emphasized the importance of family and community cohesion.

Presently, while the core elements of the traditional marriage ceremony remain intact, there have been notable changes in Akan marriage performance. One significant shift is the influence of modernization and globalization. With increased exposure to Western cultures and values, some aspects of Akan marriages have been modified or adapted. For example, the emphasis on elaborate ceremonies has diminished in some cases, as couples opt for simpler and more streamlined wedding events. This shift may be influenced by factors such as urbanization, changing lifestyles, and economic considerations.

Another aspect of Akan marriage performance that has undergone transformation is the role of women. In the past, Akan marriages were often arranged by parents or family members, and women had limited agency in the process. However, in recent times, there has been a shift towards greater autonomy and choice for individuals in selecting their partners. Education and economic empowerment have played a significant role in this change, as more Akan women are pursuing higher education and careers, enabling them to assert their preferences and make independent decisions regarding marriage. The institution of marriage itself has evolved within the Akan society. In the past, marriage was primarily seen as a means of cementing alliances between families and ensuring the continuity of lineage. Today, while those considerations still hold important, there is an increased focus on love, companionship and compatibility between partners. Marriage is increasingly viewed as a partnership based on mutual respect and shared goals.

A constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance reveals both positive and challenging aspects. On the

positive side, the evolution of Akan marriages reflects a greater recognition of individual agency and the importance of personal happiness within the institution of marriage. The increased emphasis on love and compatibility signifies a more nuanced understanding of relationships.

Additionally, the changing roles of women within Akan marriages demonstrate progress towards gender equality and empowerment. However, challenges also exist. The influence of globalization and modernization may lead to the erosion of certain traditional practices which hold cultural significance. It is essential to strike a balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing societal changes. Akan society becomes more diverse and cosmopolitan. Therefore, there is the need for ongoing dialogue and negotiation between traditional customs and contemporary values to ensure the continued relevance and sustainability of Akan marriage practices.

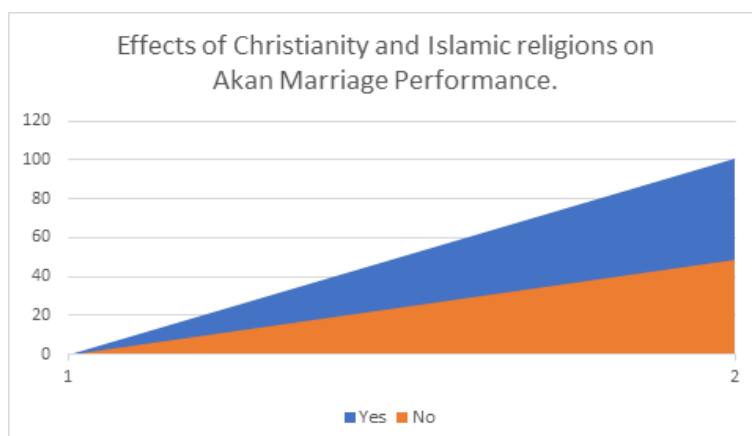
Comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance provides valuable insights into the cultural shifts and dynamics within the Akan society. While some aspects have changed over time, reflecting the impact of globalization and modernization, certain core elements of Akan marriage customs remain intact. The evolving roles of women and the increased emphasis on love and compatibility highlight positive progress, but also pose challenges that require careful navigation. By recognizing and appreciating the past while embracing the present, the Akan people can continue to shape their marriage customs in a way that maintains the sanctity of the Akan traditional society. Technology and globalization have influenced the way Akan couples navigate marriage. The internet, social media, and increased mobility have expanded opportunities for individuals to connect and form relationships beyond their immediate communities. This has led to a broader range of choices and interactions, potentially affecting traditional marriage practices and expectations.

Table 3. Inclusion of Christian or Islamic ceremonies

Are Christianity and Islam the cause of the changes in Akan Marriage Performance?	No of respondents	Percentage
Yes	101	67%
No	49	33%
Total	150	100%

From the table, grater part of the respondents (101) representing 67% supported the assertion that Christianity and Islamic religions were contributory factors to the change in the Akan marriage performance. Many Akan people practice Christianity or Islam alongside their traditional beliefs. Consequently, some Akan couples may opt to have a Christian or Islamic wedding ceremony in addition to or instead of a purely traditional ceremony.

Pictorial representation



Despite these changes, certain core values and principles remain integral to Akan marriage performance, both past and present. These include the emphasis on family and community, the recognition of marriage as a social institution, and the importance of maintaining harmony and unity. Akan marriages continue to be viewed as more than just the union of two individuals but as a broader network of relationships between families and communities.

FINDINGS

Comparative analysis

Marriage Arrangement: In the past, Akan marriages were often arranged by parents or extended family members, with little input from the individuals involved in the marriage itself. However, in modern times, there is a shift towards more self-choice marriages, where individuals have greater freedom in selecting their partners.

Ceremonial Practices: Traditional Akan marriage ceremonies involved elaborate rituals and customs, including the exchange of gifts, libations, and the presence of family elders. While these customs are still observed in many Akan communities, some modern couples opt for simpler and more streamlined ceremonies due to time constraints or personal preferences.

Polygamy: Historically, polygamy was widely accepted among the Akan, and having multiple wives was seen as a sign of wealth and prestige. In contemporary times, polygamy is less common due to changes in societal norms and legal restrictions.

Constructive Analysis

Gender Equality: Present-day Akan marriages have seen an increased emphasis on gender, equality and mutual respect between spouses. Women are taking on more active roles in decision-making processes, and there is a growing recognition of the importance of shared responsibilities within the marriage.

Individual Agency: Akan society is becoming more individualistic, with individuals having greater agency in choosing their partners based on personal compatibility, love, and shared values. This shift reflects a broader trend towards a more individualistic approach to marriage in many cultures worldwide.

Blending of Traditional and Modern Elements: Many Akan couples today strive to strike a balance between honouring traditional customs and incorporating modern elements into their marriage ceremonies. This blend allows them to maintain cultural connections while also adapting to contemporary realities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance reveals significant changes and continuities between the past and present. The Akan people, an ethnic group in Ghana, have a rich cultural heritage with distinct marriage customs and practices. The investigation had examined the historical context and contemporary dynamics, to give us insights into the transformations that have occurred over time. In the past, Akan marriage was predominantly arranged by parents or family members. Marriages were seen as alliance between families, emphasizing social and economic considerations rather than individual choices. However, in the present, there has been a noticeable shift towards greater autonomy and agency for individuals in choosing their partners. While family input still holds important, personal preferences, love and compatibility play a more prominent role in contemporary Akan marriages.

Another aspect of Akan marriage that has evolved is the role of women. Traditionally, women had limited

decision-making powers and were expected to be submissive to their husbands. However, in recent times, there has been a growing recognition of gender equality and women's rights. Women now have more opportunities for education, employment, and participation in decision-making processes within marriages. This change has contributed to a more balanced power dynamics and a greater emphasis on mutual respect and partnership in Akan marriages today. Akan marriage ceremonies and rituals have also undergone modifications. In the past, elaborate and lengthy traditional rites were common, symbolizing the joining of two families. While some of these customs persist, modern Akan weddings often incorporate elements of both traditional and Western influences. For instance, traditional marriage rites may be followed by a church or civil ceremony, reflecting the impact of globalization and cultural integration.

The comparative and constructive analysis of Akan marriage performance demonstrates a shift from traditionally arranged marriages to a greater emphasis on individual choices and gender equality. While the influence of globalization and changing societal values have introduced new dynamics, there are also enduring elements that reinforce the significance of family and community. Akan marriages continue to evolve, reflecting the complexities of modern life while retaining the cultural heritage that defines their unique identity.

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