Everyday peacebuilding among Ghanaian men: ambiguities, resistances and possibilities

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Abstract: Dominant peacebuilding scholarship and praxis tends to focus on African men's adherence to violent fragile masculinities in conflict prone-societies, and African masculinities are often approached, analysed, measured and theorised through externally derived standards and concepts. This article, by contrast, investigates the extent to which men can contribute to everyday peacekeeping. It does so by drawing on ethnographic interviews with men in northwestern Ghana. It illuminates how discourses and practices of male headship and breadwinner, as everyday masculine subjectivities, may contribute to creating fruitful possibilities for everyday peacebuilding subjectivities of men at the micro-levels. The article argues that approaching African masculinities through externally designed frameworks risks impoverishing critical understanding of the tensions, ambiguities, resistances and contestations of multiple configurations of masculinities beyond liberal, western-centric conceptualisations of masculinities. It further highlights that critical intervention seeking to address the systems and structures that may legitimise, and re/produce violence and social disorder must invest in carefully rethinking the everyday struggles of men within their locatedness. Peacebuilding scholars should invest in broadening discourses and representations of masculinities by offering nuanced understandings of how men can and are embracing peaceful and nonviolent masculinities in their everyday meaning-making.

Keywords: Masculinities, peacebuilding, Ghana, gender, male headship.

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What can we learn from peaceful men? How might such insights contribute to sustainable everyday peacebuilding beyond the peace/war dichotomy? In attempting to answer these questions, this article draws on feminist and critical masculinity studies literature to nuance ongoing conversation in understanding the challenges, opportunities and possibilities of fostering peaceful and non-violent masculinities at multiple levels. The authors focus on understanding how everyday peacebuilding could be imagined and made sense of, particularly at the interpersonal level, where armed conflict may be absent. The authors are of the view that everyday peacebuilding can be meaningfully understood and analysed when approached at different analytical, conceptual and epistemological levels (Mac Ginty 2014). The article contributes to feminist and critical masculinity scholarship that highlights that men's violence against women and other men tends to be gendered and exaggerated during conflicts (Shepherd 2016; Hudson 2019). Feminist activists and academics whose scholarly foci foreground the entanglement of toxic militarised masculinities with armed conflicts have critiqued mainstream liberal peacebuilding operations and initiatives for always pursuing a one-sided project—making war safe for women and girls. Rather than making war safe for women and girls, feminists have long maintained that the rights of women and girls should be protected and upheld irrespective of whether such women and girls are located in societies affected by conflicts or not.

While it has become increasingly necessary that the prevention of violence against women and girls during and after conflict situations is paramount to global peacebuilding discourses, conflict prevention measures, particularly in societies without violent conflict, have received relatively little attention in policies and development interventions (Shepherd 2016; Basu and Shepherd 2018). It makes sense to posit that development practitioners and peacebuilders often tend to invest huge resources and deploy personnel to societies that are embroiled in war (be it civil or political), while simultaneously neglecting to explore an understanding why certain societies are peaceful. It is not uncommon for peacebuilding scholars to draw on a 'one size fits all' assumption, applying definition and theory on peacebuilding to contexts, geographies and cultures that are not similar to the global north.

Compared to work on conflict, violence and peace, and their complex connections, there is relatively less work on understanding how peaceful, non-violent masculinities could be nurtured and promoted at the local, interpersonal level, especially in a global southern context. Most peacebuilding literature tends to focus on highlighting the aftermath of armed conflict and how fragile masculinities are discursively sustained and reproduced during conflict or post-conflict societies. For peacebuilding policies and interventions to truly contribute to restoring social life and justice to a sustainable and meaningful form (Mac Ginty 2014), such policies and interventions need to be informed by greater engagement with the local context and its cultural dynamics (Hudson 2019). It is important that peacebuilding interventions need to approach society—even those societies that are not at in armed conflict—as potential zones for different forms of conflict.

For example, there could be conflict between people with access to power and authority and those without power and authority. Even in societies that may be described as relatively peaceful, both men and women are likely to struggle for and contest power in their everyday interactions. Dominant forms of masculinity are often associated with power, authority, aggression and violence within and across institutions, such as family and interpersonal relations. The denial of power, especially among men can trigger intra- and inter-gender conflict and the outcome can be fatal. Scholars need to creatively engage the contextual complexities, struggles, ambiguities, resistances and contradictions inherent in configurations and performances of masculinities and femininities in peaceful and conflict affected settings. Against this background, there is a critical need for peacebuilding interventions in all societies irrespective of whether such societies are at war or not. This brings to the fore an important question that Howell and Willis (1990) grappled with a decade ago: 'what can we learn from peaceful societies?' We would further ask: do peaceful societies stand to offer anything radically different from societies that are suffering from armed conflicts? How might we leverage on such insights and narratives in ways that may promote sustainable and positive peace discourses? These are important questions that are central to our analysis in this article.

A growing body of studies across diverse contexts (both peaceful and conflict-prone societies) has highlighted how men as a gendered category may not only cause problems for women, but how dominant constructions of masculinity may undermine men's own interest in peacebuilding and nonviolence. Peacebuilding interventions and policies are likely to yield less dividend or even cause more harm than good if these contradictions in navigating dominant constructions of masculinity and men's pursuit of peace and justice are not attended to. Most liberal internationalist peacebuilding operations and interventions often failed to pay attention to the particularities and social conditions of the local context, especially in Africa (Hudson 2009). While it is clearly evident that men and boys are the main perpetrators of violent conflict and that women and girls are disproportionate victims of such conflicts, peacebuilding interventions may invest some time reflecting on the circumstance(s) that may encourage men to embrace and practice peace and nonviolence masculinities. In view of this, there is a need to shift attention from what seems to be unitary representations of men as a category that troubles peacebuilding discourses to understanding how, when and why different versions of masculinity may provide useful possibility for men to imagine peaceful ideals at the intimate level. Paying close attention to these contestations and contradictions is important in resisting deterministic and simplistic definitions of peace demonstrated in most peacebuilding literature. Understanding what it may mean to have peace at the intimate level in a context where there is no war or armed conflict, such as Ghana, is a potentially powerful resource in understanding why men may resist embracing peace or may express desires to pursue peace and social justice. Such understanding is important in any intervention aiming to work with boys and

men to imagine less hegemonic, nonviolent and healthy masculinities amidst contra-dictory demands on them as a social category.

The emergence of masculinities in liberal peacebuilding studies

The relationship between violent fragile masculinities and peacebuilding has been at the centre of much academic debate within mainstream feminist International Relations, peace psychology, and feminist peace and security studies (e.g. Theidon 2009; Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2013; Sjoberg 2014). One of the most closely discussed topics in contemporary peacebuilding discourses is patriarchy and its oppressive ideologies, including violence (Hudson 2009; Enloe 2005). Despite the strong focus on patriarchy among scholars and activists, how people gendered as men may relate and negotiate patriarchal masculine ideals in ways that may challenge and/or dis-rupt conventional reading of patriarchy remains poorly understood, especially from the global south. As we argue in this article, the notion of patriarchal masculinities is too often read with some kind of selective gaze using a liberal feminist norma-tive agenda of gender equality, social justice and transformational peacebuilding (Hudson 2017).

Patriarchal masculinities have often been associated with dangerous ideologies, and practices, violence and exploitative norms. This approach to theorising the gendered practices of men, particularly in gender inequitable contexts, is perhaps understandable considering that patriarchy continues to frustrate feminists' com-mitment in imagining a world of sustained peace, of social equity, and a world without gender-based violence. Yet, the question of how men might negotiate patri-archal masculinities in positive, peaceful and nonviolent ways remains insufficiently theorised within the existing literature. Even as research on masculinities, especially from sub-Saharan Africa has nuanced global knowledge production on what it may mean to be a 'man' beyond Euro-American standards (Ratele 2013), most gender programmes continue to approach and engage men, especially from the postcolo-nial global southern context as an utterly problematic category in anti-violence ini-tiatives and peacebuilding programmes. In particular, dominant liberal scholarship on gender transformative peacebuilding has offered an incoherent understanding of the complex tensions, struggles and contradictions embedded in men's every-day negotiation and meaning-making of, for example, male headship as a form of male subjectivity and agency. Our argument is that attempting to understand the everyday struggles of men in negotiating patriarchy, and the repertoire of agency available to men in such negotiations, allows us to grasp how different versions of masculinities may offer possibility for imagining local peacebuilding discourses and practices among men. We would further suggest that dominant liberal peacebuilding

frameworks have largely failed to properly situate, engage and theorise men's nego-tiations of patriarchal masculinities in ways that may promote locally grounded peacebuilding practices and dynamics. It is important to understand that the every-day struggles and meaning-making of women and men as gendered subjects are much more complex, even in communities in which there is no direct experience or active involvement in conflicts, especially from the global south.

Another critique of dominant liberal peacebuilding scholarship is that sexual and gender-based violence against women in wartime is often approached and treated as 'spectacular' violence disconnected from the everyday violence struggles of femininity in peacetime (Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2013). Our sense is that detaching the violent experiences of women from other zones of unequal power relations and gendered hierarchies in intimate relationships may impoverish critical interrogation of the broader social and political context in which violence against women easily becomes normalised. Violence against women committed by 'civilian' or 'unarmed' male part-ners, either in peacetime or after a conflict had ended, must be understood as being part of a broader continuum of violence that women navigate daily (Boulding 2000; Hudson 2009). Such understanding allows us to foreground the perpetration of vio-lence by men against women as driven by complex intersecting factors, including eco-nomic and political struggles, social norms and patriarchal ideologies bound up in masculinities and femininities.

Adopting a culturally grounded approach in making sense of local peacebuild-ing practices and dynamics equips us to avoid the risk of falling back to the trap of discussing men's enactments and negotiations of masculinities as dislodged from other zones of structural struggles and gendered subjectivities. As researchers, we should not only focus on the excesses, damages and dangers of patriarchal mas-culinities to peacebuilding. Rather, a critically sympathetic and culturally driven analysis of men in their multiple locatedness should sharpen our analysis of the everydayness of peace or peace in the mundane, especially at the interpersonal lev-els. We suggest that researchers need to pay attention to how the everyday struggles and subjectivities of masculinity may shape peacebuilding and nonviolent practices at the local level. Without a critically sympathetic analysis of masculine subjectiv-ities and everyday experiences of men, liberal feminist peace studies are likely to remain partially nourished in offering sophisticated alternative accounts on mas-culinities and local peacebuilding dynamics, especially in a postcolonial context. In order to promote liberatory Africa(n)-centred peacebuilding discourses, scholars and policymakers need to invest in understanding the complex entanglements of femininities and masculinities and what these entanglements may mean for local peacebuilding practices and dynamics within a specific cultural context (Hudson 2009: 289).

The present study

This study explores men's ideas and meaning-making of constructions of masculinity in ways that may offer possibilities in imagining everyday peacebuilding at the micro-levels. Studies on men and masculinities are not new in Ghana, yet there is little discussion on how constructions of masculinity may contribute to everyday peacebuilding, especially at the interpersonal level. The bulk of the studies are yet to adequately foreground men's understandings and negotiations of masculinity from northern Ghana broadly, and northwestern Ghana specifically, in promoting peace. northern Ghana is plagued by multiple stereotypes and misrepresentations. It is common to hear scholars and media analysts present inaccurate opinions about men from Northern Ghana as problematic, aggressive, nonpeaceful and violent people. When there is a public discussion on gender equitable masculinities, men from this part of Ghana are largely presented with a different lens. Such analysis continues to locate the identities of men from Northern Ghana as perpetrators of violence against women and 'enemies of feminist transformative agendas' (Dery 2020). As critical postcolonial scholars, we are concerned about how less accurate presentation and analyses of the embodiments of men from this part of the country may unintentionally perpetuate colonial discourses on African male subjectivities as dangerous, repressive and hyper aggressive. Our discomfort with less nuanced analysis, which easily tends to homogenise and pathologise men from Northern Ghana, provides important motivation for this study.

Northwestern Ghana is one of the sixteen administrative regions of Ghana. The region consists of eleven districts. Out of the eleven districts, the present study took place in the Lambusie-Karni district. Lambusie-Karni district was selected due to its fair representation of both Dagaaba and Sissala, the two leading ethnic groups in the region. Three communities were selected for the study due to their social characteristics and diverse economic activities. Due to historical and political neglect, northwestern Ghana is currently one of the poorest and under-developed regions of Ghana. Rainfed agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of the indigenes of the region, although alternative sources of livelihood have emerged over the years. Even with deteriorating economic conditions, coupled with increasingly unpredictable rainfall patterns, gender norms, expectations and roles, especially boundaries between masculinity and femininity are enforced and propagated over generations (Dery 2019). Through interactions with various socialisation agents within and outside the family, boys and girls are exposed to gendered practices and norms from an early age. As boys and girls grow and become adults, they are likely to endorse, (re) produce, contest and/or disrupt entrenched gendered norms and practices, particularly relating to masculinity and femininity.

Although gendered practices and behaviours have largely become individual-oriented (every family may have its own set of rules and norms on what it may mean to be a 'man' or 'woman'), such practices and behaviours are carried out in conformity with existing systems and structures which may enable or constrain what individual social subjects may choose to (re)produce. For example, men in patrilineal northwestern Ghana are widely believed to be the heads of the households, breadwinners and family decision-makers. On the other hand, women are considered to play supportive roles relative to dominant masculine roles and activities of men (Dery 2019). Although women in northwestern Ghana make important contributions to the marriage economy through their participation in agriculture and petty trading, pervasive gender practices and norms may deny women equal access to power and authority within and outside the family.

In order to gain a better understanding of how men make sense of their masculinities and how such understanding may shape everyday peacebuilding practices and strategies, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by the first author between July and December 2019. Through organised meetings, potential participants were invited to participate in the study. The main inclusion criteria for the study were that participants needed to identify themselves with the male sex, and have grown up and resided in their respective communities for a significant duration of their lives. They also needed to be in an active heterosexual marriage with or without a child. To ensure that the inclusion criteria stated above were met, each participant had to be pre-screened with a set of demographic questions. Overall, 15 able-bodied men (5 in each community) between the ages of 25 and 30 were recruited and interviewed after the data collection process had reached a point of theoretical saturation. During the interviews, the following questions were used as guidelines: How would you describe a good husband? What qualities describe such people? Based on these qualities, how would you expect your peers to describe you? How would you describe families you perceive to be peaceful? How different are such families from your own family? How do you ensure that there is peace in your family?

All interviews were recorded in Dagaare, and subsequently translated/transcribed into English by the first author. After transcribing the interview data, participants were given the opportunity to cross-check and validate the transcripts to enhance validity of the data. Being mindful of the potential dangers of the positionality of the first author as a member of the same cultural group (a native speaker of Dagaare), the process of allowing participants to validate the transcripts contributed to maintaining the integrity of the data after translation. After transcription, the first author manually coded the data through a close reading and re-reading of the transcripts for meanings and patterns. Various codes were categorised into key and meaningful themes. Our analytical framework draws on Michel Foucault's reading of discourse, subjectivity, agency and power. Informed by a discourse analytical approach, our

analysis engages the different shades of masculine struggles, ambiguities, contradictions and tensions embedded in participants' narratives, and what possibilities these constructions may offer to the everyday peacebuilding strategies among men.

As a caveat, our findings do not aim to be representative of the larger population in northwestern Ghana. Rather, our findings are intended to showcase and articulate how men's narratives speak to the complex nuances, struggles and ambiguities of being 'men' in this part of Ghana, and what possibilities such articulations may offer to everyday peacebuilding dynamics and practices.

Ambiguities and struggles of masculinities

In all 15 interviews, participants frequently spoke about the discourse of a capable male breadwinner as an important measure of successful masculinity. For most participants, failure to live up to the expectations of a self-sufficient breadwinner is believed to emasculate men from their supposedly dominant and powerful position vis-à-vis the position of women. Yuorkuu explains this in the following account:

> Most men are happy to be called the men of the family, but few are able to shoulder what headship comes with because of the economic hardships. The situation has made some men irresponsible and even violent these days. They think that violence is the solution to their frustrations. That is wrong. As a teacher, I don't earn much, but I always ensure that I provide for my family. That is part of our culture. In our culture, a man brings in someone's daughter as a wife, and you must take care of her.

The narratives of Kuubeinie explain further the struggles of masculinity and the contest for social power in heteronormative relationships:

> These days, things are really hard. The crop yields are barely enough, but men have an image to protect as the breadwinners. When a man fails to protect this image, society sees him as a failure. You know my friend, Andy? People don't respect him the same way they would respect me. Andy is only a man with two balls in-between his legs [laughed]. It is a shame, you know. He cannot take care of his many children. His wife is always unhappy because she wears the same old clothes. So, Andy and his wife always quarrel a lot. There is no peace in their family.

Another participant, Yelfaa, thought that a man's failure to provide the material needs of his wife can incite violence:

> I am not bragging, but my late father would be happy in his grave. I have been able to put smiles on my family. As the man of the house now [the breadwinner], this makes me feel fulfilled. I walk with my shoulders high. I am not like other men who cannot provide for their families. We all know that there are economic hardships, but men need to maintain their manhood. Otherwise, your wife will become frustrated with you. She may start behaving in

> ways that will make you feel disrespected. This is the main cause of 'small small' quarrels in our families.

While the real topic in the accounts presented above speak to the struggles associated with patriarchal masculinity, these interlocutors co-construct a discourse to suggest that men have an implied responsibility to live up to the demands of their culture. Such demands encourage men to live up to their cultural mandate and embody true meaning of manhood by being diligent breadwinners, despite the economic hardships. For example, most participants believed that men who are unable to measure up to the standards of a self-sufficient breadwinner have lost their masculine dignity and respect in the eyes of society. Such men were often described as 'men with two balls in-between their legs'. In the Dagaaba parlance, such descriptions are metaphoric expressions to describe men who lack the basic credentials required for fulfilment of dignified masculinity. Literally, 'a man with two balls in-between their legs' could be interpreted to mean 'an incapable and unaccomplished man', 'an irresponsible man', 'a man without purpose', 'an emasculated man' or 'a man with low social profile'. It is derogatory, shameful and highly infantilising for a man to be described as only possessing two balls in-between his legs. This description speaks to low social profiling of a man vis-à-vis more hegemonic and respectable masculine constructions. For example, Kuubeinie discursively positions Andy to have performed far below the ruling standards that legitimise the preferred version of hegemonic masculinity such as a self-assured breadwinner. This is so because men, and not women, are tasked by their culture to meet the material needs of their families.

The struggle to attain a position of respectable masculinity is further complicated by cultural arrangements and economic performativities inherent in heteronormative marriages. Most participants constructed an essentialising discourse that positions husbands and wives as needing to occupy and perform clearly defined roles in the family and society at large. For example, Yuorkuu's use of the word 'must' in the following excerpt: 'In our culture, a man brings in someone's daughter as a wife, and you must take care of her' highlights how masculinity and femininity are directly linked to clearly defined gendered roles and expectations within the context of heteronormative marriage. Throughout the interviews, there seems to be a shared discourse that a man's ability to provide for his family affords such men greater cultural legitimacy, power, respect and credibility over men who fail to demonstrate command of traditional indexes of manhood. Even as participants complained of economic hardships, there seems to be a clear commitment in upholding dominant gendered practices associated with successful masculinity. For example, a man's ability to demonstrate command of his breadwinning mandate ensures that such men walk with their shoulders high. Even as it remains highly difficult to attain, this practice gives men who are able to fulfil their breadwinning duties the bragging

rights over other men, illustrated by Yelfaa's comment: by contending that 'I am not like other men who cannot provide for their families', he appears to be engaging in categorical allocations, where he tries to distinguish between 'good' and 'respectable' men from 'bad' and 'irresponsible' other. Yelfaa's commentary is torn between the difficulty in overcoming ongoing economic hardships and maintaining dignified masculinity. The interlocutor seems to offer basic understanding of gender equality and the need for men to always ensure that women are not frustrated by men's failure to be man enough by local standards.

The context in which Yelfaa thought that his late father would be happy with his accomplishments as the new breadwinner and head of the household in extremely important. The interlocutor draws our attention to the central role of the non-human world in enforcing specific practices and behaviours relating to masculinity. Additionally, how Kuubeinie tells the story of the shame and derisions associated with his friend's (Andy's) failed masculinity highlights hierarchies of masculinities with differential access to cultural privileges. The narratives of both interlocutors offer us a useful opportunity to grasp how multiple masculinities may jostle for dominance, cultural legitimacy and power within the social cultural context. Both interlocutors' accounts are illustrated with concrete examples of specific situations in which a man could easily have his manhood damaged. Yelfaa's categorical claim that 'I am not like other men who cannot provide for their families' allows him to distinguish himself from failed masculinity. The politics around Yelfaa's disclaimer should be noted as he was interacting with a male interviewer. Both Yelfaa and Kuubeinie did not only offer narratives that speak to the hierarchies of masculinities, but they moved on to detailing the possibility of peace and violence to coexist in the cultural space of marriage. Understandably, there is likely to be peace, happiness and nonviolence if men are able to put smiles on their family's faces. Despite the growing economic strains, it is important to focus attention in understanding how different categories of men may negotiate social conditions and material realities in ways that make everyday peacebuilding possible and meaningful. Drawing on the narratives of participants in this study, everyday life in northwestern Ghana is full of struggles and enormous ambiguities as men contend with the everyday subjectivities that make life meaningful. It involves a constant negotiation with entrenched gendered norms and practices, especially contending with poor crop yields and inadequate economic opportunities.

While most participants appeared to disapprove of intimate partner violence, there seems to be a shared perception that economically marginalised men have s higher tendency to be accepting of violence. Traditionally, a man's ability to provide for his family gives him a sense of self-fulfillment, adequacy, dominance, recognition and respect within and beyond the family space. Consequently, when traditional indications of respectable masculinities are far from the reach of men

or when men's positions as the breadwinners of their families are perceived to be threatened by economic stresses ('when you're struggling to remain relevant and things are not working in your favour'), violence may become a legitimate alternative to manage masculine reputation. This is so because men, by their cultural positions, are not supposed to feel disrespected either by social or economic circumstances. While such insights are very important in enhancing understanding of the potential causes and everydayness of intimate partner violence, they potentially excuse, diminish and even justify the violence of men against women, as explained by Naab: 'Personally, I don't sanction violence but sometimes, that can be shit, especially when you're struggling to remain relevant and things are not working in your favour. It can be highly frustrating'. Such a perception highlights that violence may be warranted and even predicted if a man feels that his wife has not respected and recognised him as the cultural figure of the family due to his economically marginalised status.

Taken together, there is clear evidence of most participants wanting to deconstruct masculinity as a result of pervasive economic hardships. However, participants' commitment in upholding traditional routes to successful manhood means that their everyday activities do not necessarily challenge hegemonic versions of masculinity rooted in a capable breadwinner persona. The narratives of most participants seem to deconstruct the violence of men which emanates from their patriarchal positions as holders of the seat of power in the home. Accordingly, violence and other problematic behaviours of men are wrong interpretations of men's cultural position and roles. Yet, a critical analysis of the transcripts reveals that such articulations do little to trouble gendered binary and stereotypes. Most of the men in this study reinscribe stereotypical views on respectable masculinity and femininity. In contending that 'In our culture, a man brings in someone's daughter as a wife, and you must take care of her', women continue to be positioned as being dependent on their husbands for their material needs. In situations in which such natural arrangements are weakened by economic stresses, men are likely to become violent.

Our findings are consistent with the work of Silberschmidt (2001); Sherman (2005); Groes-Green (2009); Jolly (2010); Gamlin & Hawkes (2018) and Dery (2019). These studies highlight that the struggles of men to perform respectable masculine ideals cannot be discussed outside of complex historical and contemporary structures and conditions. Combining many years of political neglect, colonial exploitation of labour, and constrains of neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes, the narratives of participants are shaped and constrained by hegemonic masculinity ideologies of neoliberal Ghanaian society.

In the next section, we provide a critical reading of the idea of the respected man as an incomplete subject. Drawing on the discourse of incompleteness and

interdependence as advanced by Francis Nyamnjoh, we attempt to unpack how men's talk of themselves as husbands, household heads and breadwinners may contribute to fostering meaningful peacebuilding at the family level.

'A family is like a forest': the incompleteness of men and women in marriage relationships

In many interviews, participants expressed the view that men and women are incomplete beings hence masculinities and femininities complement and influence one another. Since men and women are believed to be incomplete subjects, participants suggested that male headship should encourage men to accommodate and welcome the views of their wives as partners. In order for peace to prevail, men as heads of the home must always recognise their incompleteness. This recognition does not mean invalidating their position as breadwinners and heads of the households. Even though the rhetoric of male headship was largely taken for granted, participants suggested that the notion of marriage underscores the reality that men and women are by nature incomplete and interdependent beings. Yiryel explains this in the following excerpt:

> Growing up as a boy, we all know that men were considered the heads of the family. Men were in charge of taking decisions concerning the family, but as the man of the house now, I see a family to be like a forest; some trees are tall, and others are short. Each tree has its own strength. I have always believed that no one is superior to the other in marriage. However, some men always think that they being the heads of the family mean that men are superior to their wives. That is wrong. That is not marriage. Marriage means to cover [complement] the inadequacies of the other.

Dapilah thought that the true meaning of male headship should inspire men to embrace democratic notions of gender:

> In the absence of my father, I see myself as the leader of my flock. As such, I always welcome the views of everyone in the family. I unite everyone and do not discriminate. I do not see my wife as being inferior to me, but most men in this community often get this wrong. In those days, it was considered inappropriate to involve women in the decision-making processes. Times have changed and we [men] must change this mentality. It is the main cause of violence in our families. Personally, I used to control everything all by myself, but it was not helpful. Everything was falling apart. There was no peace. There were 'small small' quarrels here and there. It was such a shame.

For another participant, Yornye, men should aspire for gender-conscious ideals which have the potential to foster peace in place of practices of violence. He explains further:

> We all know that men are the heads of the family, but there is more to be done than just being breadwinners. I always tell my friends that knowledge is like medicine; it is found in different bottles. When I sell the farm products, I always ask my wife what we should use the money for. Maybe, she tells me to save it towards the children's school fees, renew the health insurance, buy some livestock, or buy a plot of land in the city. For me, this has been important for building peace in my family.

In families where men were perceived to be authoritative heads, it was alleged that such families were likely to experience crisis. Yelfoglo illustrates this as follows:

> You know my neighbor, Bobtuo? He is the kind of man who wants to dictate to his wife, hey you [wife], do this and she does it with no complaints. Personally, I don't think this is what being the head of the family means. When Bobtuo's wife tried advising him on any issue, he would rebuke her saying; 'I'm the man of the house'. Men like Bobtuo need to accept the fact that men, by their nature are incomplete. It is because of this incompleteness that a man marries a woman to make him complete.

From the excerpts above, the idea of male headship is constructed in opposition to male domination. Rather, the idea of male headship is used to criticise the excesses of male social dominance, oppressive ideals and violent performances of traditional masculinity. The idea of male headship does not necessarily imply male domination and female suppression. However, men's misunderstanding of their positions as heads and breadwinners of their families may encourage some men to abuse their cultural positions as men of the household. By framing men as 'leaders of their flock', men should be inspired to mobilise and welcome the diverse strengths and ideas of different family members towards a common goal of promoting peaceful and nonviolent relationships. These concerns are illustrated through a repertoire of proverbs and idioms such as 'Knowledge is like medicine; it is found in different bottles' and 'A family is like a forest with different trees ... Each tree has its own strength'. Going by the logic of these cultural proverbs and metaphors, and how they speak to the incompleteness and interdependence of social subjects, men in particular are encouraged to maximise the strengths and ideas of family members, including women.

On the contrary, when men misunderstand that they being the heads and breadwinners of the household means being the sole decision-maker ('I'm the man of the house'), this erroneous representation of male headship may indirectly invite problematic practices, including violence. For most participants, such misappropriation of the tenets of male headship is the main cause of intimate partner violence in the home. Most participants believe that there must be mutual understanding and healthy sharing of ideas between couples. Most participants draw on egalitarian notions of gender to encourage men to rethink the practice of male headship and the breadwinning role as constructive masculine ideals with some potential for peacebuilding at the interpersonal level. The comment, 'He is the kind of man who wants to dictate to his wife, hey you [wife], do this and she does it with no complaints. Personally, I don't

think this is what being the head of the family means', seems to offer a basic argument that invites men to adopt a women-centric, pro-feminist approach in performance of their duty as heads and breadwinners of the family.

The meanings of male headship and breadwinnerhood as articulated by participants in this study seem to be in sharp contrast to what are perceived to be traditional practices of masculinity and femininity in the past. While the narratives of most participants are far from being gender equal in the true sense of the word, their narratives do not quite fit the traditional patriarchal conceptions of male headship and the breadwinner figure. References were made to specific phrases as illustrations of the changing landscape of masculine identity constructions: 'This was not the case years back'; 'In those days'; and 'Times have changed'. Even though each of these phrases is accompanied by narratives of ambivalence and ambiguity, our attention is drawn to how these phrases represent attempts to reconfigure and redefine patriarchal male headship, pointing to the possibility for alternative imaginations of masculinities and femininities to emerge. For example, Dapilah reconstructed the meaning of male headship, emphasising its unifying and peaceful imperative over authoritative and violent dispositions. He recounted how his own misinterpretations of male headship undermined peace and development in his family: 'Everything was falling apart. There was no peace'. It seems quite clear from this illustration that Dapilah has an interest in redefining his position from a previously dominant, violent and authoritarian breadwinner to one who embraces peaceful and more egalitarian notions of gender.

While most interlocutors offered important accounts on the need for men to foster democratic ideals, feminist scholars would be very much concerned about their framing of masculinities and femininities overall. Their perceptions continue to position men and women, husbands and wives, as inherently different from one another, with different roles. Being predominantly farming communities, and by their patriarchal position as heads of the family, Yornye thought that men should sell farm produce, while women are consulted on the uses of the money derived from such sales. If participants such as Yornye truly mean and practice what they shared during the interview on the need for men to embrace democratic and gender egalitarian values, why did he not imagine allowing his wife to sell their farm produce? We would suggest that Yornye is less concerned about the possibility of allowing his wife to take charge of the sales of their farm produce because by cultural consideration, he is the man of the house. By this logic, Yornye makes a direct connection between male headship and authority. Such perceptions operate to fix men and women in inherently unequal positions and power hierarchies within marriage.

In most of the interviews, the patriarchal belief that men are naturally born to be holders of the seat of power in the home seems to be taken for granted. For example, most participants deployed the discourse of male headship in ambiguous and self-contradictory ways. The particular ways in which participants such as Yiryel and

Yornye deployed male headship seem to compromise their ability to scrutinise how dominant framing of male headship reproduces patriarchal assumptions, stereotypes and hierarchies between men and women. Through the discourse of 'we-ness', as deployed by most participants, it is pretty obvious that male headship is a bona fide position for male bodied people. In other words, male headship is something that society bequeaths on male bodied people as 'men' and 'husbands'. Yiryel and Yornye co-construct a discourse to personalise male headship and its associated power ('We all know that men are the heads of the family'). Ultimately, the notion of headship thus becomes a cultural construct whose legitimacy and meaning are at once structured and further enhanced by cultural socialisation and performativity over generations.

From the ongoing discussion, it is clear that some men are likely to imagine some elements of gender equality and democratic relationships. In view of this, interventions that aim to promote less oppressive, democratic, peaceful and inclusive ideals should target such men as critical change agents. Such interventions should tap into men's willingness to trade-off traditionally masculine ideals for emerging but important values such as involving women in the decision-making processes. Even as the narratives of most participants point to the emergence of democratic and less hegemonic masculine ideals, we need to be extremely careful in taking these changes at face value. We need to think about these emergent masculinities as not entirely gender equal or progressive, but rather ambivalent ideals that are gaining steady reception among some categories of men (Walker 2005; Ratele 2014). The promises of democratic masculinities may not necessarily disrupt traditionally hegemonic ideals on manhood. Instead, these emerging changes continue to mask complex forms of power relations and social hierarchies linked primarily to the male factor in society.

Concluding thoughts

This article explores the social construction of peace, particularly as it relates to men's experiences and negotiations of their identities as men and husbands. The article contributes to an understanding that building durable peace requires being sensitive to the everyday making of masculinities. It draws attention to dominant understandings among men in this study that a self-assuring and capable male breadwinner typifies respectable and successful masculinity. In conditions where men may struggle to remain relevant breadwinners and husbands, it may be difficult for them to formulate and imagine ideologically reasonable practices, actions and behaviours that promote peace and nonviolence. Needless to say, that when men struggle to become respectable husbands and breadwinners as dominant routes to validate their manhood, violence may be imagined as the solution to men's frustrations. Understandably, men earn their respect as heads of the household when

society (including women, children and other men) recognises and treats them beyond merely possessing 'two balls in-between their legs'. Possessing 'two balls in-between one's legs' does not in itself validate a man's identity as a respectable man of the house. When the economic conditions and cultural structures necessary for men to become respectable and responsible social subjects are lacking or non-existent, peace may mean nothing to ordinary men, even in settings where there are no active conflicts. In order for gender training and interventions to address the violence of men and promote peaceful masculine subjectivities, such interventions should not only focus on challenging and disrupting oppressive notions of masculinity in contexts with ongoing conflicts, but more importantly, there is a need to pay critical attention to the everyday struggles of men in becoming responsible and respectable husbands in the eyes of a relatively peaceful community. The everyday economic and cultural struggles of men must be incorporated in the design and implementation of transformation programmes that target working with men in progressing towards profeminist masculine subjectivities, including peaceful and nonviolent masculinities. Any attempt to analyse and understand the violence of men and men's everyday peacebuilding strategies outside of these struggles is likely to miss a crucial aspect of what it may mean to be a 'respectable man' within a post-colonial global southern context. Being sensitive and critically sympathetic to the meaning of peace and how everyday peace could be imagined among men who are not in situations of direct conflict, as the analysis has demonstrated, is a novel contribution to the peacebuilding literature. The findings contribute to the literature in ways that are different from non-intersectional political-economy and International Relations perspectives.

An important contribution of our findings that needs to be emphasised is that different men are likely to embody and embrace different discourses of masculinity based on their social locatedness. Even though different categories of men may not face the same difficulties in becoming responsible and respectable men and breadwinners due to their class identities, it emerged that there are varieties of masculinities to which men could aspire to. One of such models is the discourse of the incomplete breadwinner. The discourse of the incomplete breadwinner exposes men to the possibility of imagining alternative configurations of manhood, including the ability of men to be peacemakers in their homes. The results of this study suggest that male headship can have different interpretations and meanings among men. The possibility of different categories of men to make sense of male headship differently means the existence of different forms of agency for men. To some men, such agency may mean authority, violence and dominance. For others, male headship as agency may mean being responsible, egalitarian, nonviolent, peaceful and receptive to the views of other family members. To this strand of men, male headship may not necessarily mean that men are superior to women. Even though this notion has

emerged to be a central discourse in how men talk about their identity constructions, it remains taken-for-granted that only men are naturally born to be heads of the home.

The findings in this study suggest that achieving lasting peace should not only concern situations of violent conflict or societies experiencing direct violence as a result of war, but that achieving credible peace is central to achieving gender justice, development and social equity. Approaching peace as centrally connected to social justice allows peacebuilding interventions and programmes to attend to, for example, the problems of poverty and social inequalities that men circumvent daily. Such an approach allows us to problematise how unequal access to economic opportunities and resources may shape everyday peacebuilding among men. This way, building sustainable peace should be a matter of being critically sympathetic to the range of struggles that men negotiate daily in their position as men and husbands. Peacebuilding interventions are likely to be elusive or unsustainable in a global southern context, such as northwestern Ghana, if the everyday struggles and subjectivities of men are not foregrounded as part and parcel of development interventions. In efforts that seek to work with men, particularly economically marginalised men, in progressing towards profeminist subjectivities, including fostering peaceful masculinities, the everyday struggles of men in becoming better and respectable husbands should be taken seriously as a gendered socioeconomic justice issue. This way, interventions will not only focus on men as decoupled from their socioeconomic realities and everyday struggles. Instead, men should be approached as gendered subjects with different investments to local discourses of respectable masculinity. Additionally, this approach equips us to develop a perspective about the everyday practices of men as linked to ruling ideologies of masculinity which may (dis)encourage men from being peacebuilders. Men's everyday struggles to put smiles on their wives and children, and the social cost associated with failure to live up to such cultural mandate of breadwinnerhood, troubles mainstream liberal feminist understanding of peace, especially from a postcolonial global southern context. Achieving everyday peace may mean a man's ability to buy new clothes for his wife. This not only helps to validate his position as the man of the house, this practice plays a central role in minimising feelings of frustrations and violence among husbands and wives.

Based on the findings from this study, feminist peace researchers from a global southern context, such as Ghana, should take seriously how widespread economic hardships among men raise critical concerns about the meaning of peace for the ordinary citizen who is not exposed to direct conflict. Based on the findings, we argue that approaching men through an intersectionally driven analysis is necessary in developing a better sense of how the struggles of masculinity may offer possibilities for everyday peacebuilding practices, although such possibilities may remain ambivalent. From our analysis, the meanings of peace as imagined by participants in this study

are not necessarily tied to violent conflicts as it is often the case within mainstream feminist International Relations and liberal feminist scholarship. Peace is not a static construct tied to conflict situations, but a much more fluid, complex, context-dependent and dynamic construct, which is constantly in the making based largely on economic struggles.

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