Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology **13:** 333–359, 1998.

Yebisa Wo Fie: Growing old and building a house in the Akan culture of Ghana

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Abstract. 'House' (*ofie*) in the Akan culture of Ghana is the most common metonym for people living together. *Mefie* (my house) means 'my family'. A house is someone's identity, it is a sign of security and happiness. A house is the concretisation of social relations and the sentiments accompanying them. A house, not least of all, is a status symbol. Building a house is building a powerful symbol. A house is something to which people attach some of the most cherished virtues of their culture: respect, love, memory, 'home' and beauty. In this article, building a house is seen as one of the most important achievements in a person's life. It provides elderly people with respect and security. The article is based on anthropological research in the rural Ghanaian town of Kwahu-Tafo.

Keywords: Akan, Elderly, House, Ghana, Respect, Reciprocity, Security

To Nana[1] Kwaku Nyame and Ɔpanyin[2] Kwabena Dadeɛ
'A house is everything'. (Kwaku Nyame)

Introduction

Nana Kwaku Nyame[3] has been a farmer all his life. He says he is ninety years old. He is now resting from a very active life in his house in Kwahu-Tafo, a rural town in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Nana Nyame is one of the elderly people I used to visit and converse with during a research on the meaning of old age in Kwahu-Tafo. He is a sociable person and whenever I failed to visit him for one or two days, he came to me and sat down in my room. Sometimes we conversed, sometimes I continued to work while he was quietly watching me. One of his favourite topics of conversation was 'building a house'. He would, for example, look at the structure of the house and examine the walls of my room and then start to give his comments.

He himself has built a house from the profits of his cocoa farm and he is proud of this achievement. The house is freshly painted (green) and looks strong although it is only a 'swish' building. It has eight rooms and two kitchens, a bathroom and a toilet. One day, in September 1995, my friend

and co-researcher Patrick Atuobi (P) had the following conversation[4] with the old man (N).

P. Nana, why is it that people give special respect to people who own buildings?

N. If you have thousands and thousands of money, *sɛ wo wɔ sika mpempem mpo a*, a thief can come for it and take it in a single night. But a thief can't steal a house. So no matter the amount of money a person may have in his life, no one will remember him after his death. But if he built a house, he will not be forgotten. Even after his death, people point at the building and say: This is the house of such and such. You will never hear someone mentioning the amount of money a dead person left behind. We only hear about the buildings he left.

P. I have seen that people who own houses are loved and held in high esteem by people, especially by the relatives. Why is it so?

N. I knew a certain man from Obo (a nearby town) who was very rich. He had a big cocoa farm and was one of the richest people in Obo. This man failed to put up a building in Obo so when he died he was buried in his village where he had his farm.

P. Did he have a house at the village?

N. Yes. He had a nice building at the village which could be compared to the buildings at Nkawkaw but because he did not have one in his hometown, people did not regard him. The comments people made after his death were that he did well but failed to put up a building. Without a building, your relatives will never hold you in high esteem, even if you have plenty of money ....

P. Nana, do you have a building somewhere?

N. In this town, the house I am living in.

P. Did you build it yourself or was it an *abusua fie* (family house) which you rehabilitated?[5]

N. I acquired the piece of land and built the whole house. I was by then having a big cocoa farm and harvesting between sixty and eighty loads of cocoa a year. It was the money from the cocoa farm that I used. So anyone coming to the house will say, I am going to Kwaku Nyame's house. The cocoa farm was destroyed by fire just at the time I finished the building. One of my nephews who is overseas sent in money which was used for the concrete structure around the house to protect it against erosion.

P. Nana, I sometimes come to your house and I notice that your niece and her children help you a lot. They provide you with your daily bread. Do you think the care they give to you would have been the same if you had not put up this building?

N. No, no, no, it wouldn't have been the same. If I had not built the house, they would not have cared for me so much.

P. Nana, you have built a house of your own. What do you think makes a building look nice?

N. It is the painting. As soon as you finish painting, the house becomes a complete house. *Sɛ wo penti ɛdan pɛ na adi mu awie*. Have you seen my house? If I would not tell you, you may think it was built with cement blocks, but it is a swish building. Because of the painting you don't notice that it is a swish building. Only a certain portion was built with cement blocks.

P. Apart from the painting what else makes a building look nice?

N. Glass. Glass windows. In fact the combination of glass windows and nice paint makes a building look very beautiful. To me, apart from these two, I don't think anything else can make a building beautiful. I love glass in buildings. *Nhwehwɛ, nhwehwɛ, nhwehwɛ sɛ wode ye apono ne mpoma a wo hu sɛ asomasi asi ɔdan*. If you see a house with glass doors and windows you realise that the owner has really put up a building ....

P. Can a building have influence on the funeral of a person?

N. Yes. People with houses have more properly organised funerals than those without a house [laughter]. If you don't have a house, any kind of funeral can be organised for you. *Sɛ wo nni ɛdan a, yɛyɛ ayie no biara a, sɛ wo kɔ wo baabi*. Imagine that man from Abene who died here recently. I heard of his death in the evening, the next day he was buried.

P. Would it have been different if he had had a house?

N. Yes, it would not have happend to a person with a house.

P. Nana, suppose, someone has a good character, and is quite respected but lives in an *abusua fie* to which he has not contributed anything. Do you think that inwardly people hold him in high esteem?

N. *Akora* (Old man) [here he referred to Patrick as Akora I think he did so because of the emphasis he was placing on his statement], building is the most important thing *Ne nyinaa ne sɛ wasi ɔdan*. Do you think your nephew will announce it to the public that you left such an amount of money after your death? Never, but when you build a house, the whole world will see what you have left and your name will never die.

P. But in this case, the house is his *abusua fie*.

N. It does not matter. Despite the fact that he lives in an *abusua fie* he did not build it so he is not worthy of any praise. Despite the fact that my cocoa farm was destroyed and I am now poor and sick, people still say, I am going to Kwaku Nyame's house and they respect me. No matter what you possess, without a building it is nothing.

P. Nana, now there is plenty of money in cocoa. Don't you think people would have respected you more if your cocoa farm had been there, instead of the building you have?
N. There is nothing more valuable than a house. *Ɔdan deɛ hwee nkwati no*.
P. Your cocoa farm burned and the property you now have is a house. How do you feel?
N. I am very content. Without the house my nieces and nephews wouldn't mind me. They would have felt reluctant to give me food. Now there is a place for me to lay my head.
P. Nana can you tell me the meaning of this proverb *Yebisa wo fie, na yemisa wo sika* (We ask of your house, not of your money)?
N. When a stranger is in town and is looking for someone, it is the fellow's house he will ask for.
P. Please can you explain why we give the proverb?
N. When a very worthy person dies, no matter the money he has, it will be a disgrace if he is laid in state in someone else's house. Such things show that money without a house is useless ....
P. But some people say children are more important. What is your opinion?
N. If you have children and you don't look after them well, it is useless. I know someone who has plenty of children but because he is poor, they don't come to him. If he had had a building, the relatives would care for him. If you have children and they don't have a place to sleep, what is your worth?

The old man's account contains almost all facets of house-building I intend to discuss in this article. A house stands for a successful life, for respect, love, happiness and security in old age, it is a thing of beauty and it provides a sense of belonging, of 'home', both physically and symbolically.

People enjoy talking about houses, especially the men. Nana Nyame is one of them, *Ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ, who is one of the most highly respected elders in Kwahu-Tafo, is another example. When we ask him to tell us his life history he starts talking about bags of cement and the price of iron sheets (see Van der Geest 1997a). Building materials have become the main elements of his biography. The houses he built represent the history of his life. No wonder, because he is one of the most successful people in the town and has built not less than seven impressive houses, five of them in Kwahu-Tafo. Another old man who likes to discuss building is Agya Kwaku Martin (M). Already in his childhood he dreamt of building.

M. When I was a boy of about six or seven, I had a friend and I told him let's build a chapel. We took some empty match boxes and put soil inside it to

make bricks, we started the building. It came to about one foot. But then I was thinking, if I grow, the first thing to do is to build a house. Gradually when I became 45, I started this house. Before I was fifty, I had finished it.

S. Who taught you how to build a house?

M. My father had a house, so I learnt it from my father. He gave me one room in his house, but after some time, one of his nephews, Sefa, told me: If your father dies, you will see. I thought about it. What would this man do to me? Maybe he would force me to leave the house, so my mind fell on building. I was able to build a house and now I have my peace, comfort and everything. So I had the experience and the thought from my infancy.

My attention was drawn towards the building of houses during conversations with elderly people. I was trying to find out how they viewed themselves in a changing world. Security in old age took a central place in our discussions: understandably, because a substantial number of old people are finding themselves in an insecure situation (cf. Apt 1993, 1996; Brown 1995; Darkwa 1997). The few who are really well-off are those who are now being rewarded for their good work during their active life. Reciprocity is the key to understanding why some elderly people are well taken care of while others seem to be rather neglected (Van der Geest 1997b). It soon became clear that two achievements in particular were seen as proof that someone had lived well and now deserved the care of his/her children to enjoy a peaceful and comfortable old age. The first condition was that one had taken good care of one's children which today means nothing less than that one had taken them to school. Only those with proper education are believed to be able to get a good job to earn a sufficient income to look after their parents in old age. The second condition was that one had managed to put up a house for the family to live in. Elderly people who had been able to fullfil these two conditions during their life should not worry. Time and again people pointed out to us that, whatever would happen, someone who had succeeded in these two fields could be sure that his children, and all those who had benefited from their hard work, would take care of them. Thus, building a house came to take a central place in my research on old age.[6] I never planned it that way. It was one of the many surprises I encountered during my fieldwork.

Research

The fieldwork for this article was carried out in 1994 (four and a half months), 1995 (one month) and 1996 (one month) in Kwahu-Tafo, a rural town in

the South-eastern part of Ghana. The research consisted mainly of long conversations with elderly people and their relatives.

I started in 1994 with 27 elderly people, 13 women and 14 men. Two years later, ten of them had died, although at the time most of them did not give me the impression that their life would soon come to an end. It made me realise how fragile old age is in a community which lacks good health care (both preventive and curative) and more importantly, which lacks the money to pay for the care which *is* available. The frequent deaths also confronted me with the rapid disappearance of a wealth of local wisdom and wit which hardly interests the new generation. This 'handicap' of a continuously dwindling 'sample' increased my motivation and haste to 'tap' my informants' ideas about life, past and present. In 1995 and 1996, I tried to 'substitute' the elders who had 'gone' with new ones. As a result a total of 35 elderly people took part in the research.

Apart from the conversations, which were all taped and transcribed, the research study consisted of a kaleidoscope of methods. I often went to greet the old people informally and had brief conversations with them. These more casual visits enabled me to make important observations about the daily life of elderly people and the attitudes of other people in the same house. Most of these observations were recorded in an elaborate diary.

In addition, I discussed old age with many other people in the town including opinion leaders such as teachers and church members and with other key informants. Focus group discussions were held with young people and groups of middle-aged men and women. In three area schools students filled a questionnaire expressing their views on old people or completed sentences on the same issue. Some students wrote essays about the old or made drawings of them.

In this article I present a number of literal transcripts from the conversations. People's ideas on old age and building a house in particular are ambivalent and often contradictory. By making the elders speak directly to the readers I hope to convey this ambivalence in its most vivid form. A second no less important motive to present these texts is the beauty of their words. Summarising their accounts and referring to them in an indirect sense, would do injustice to them. My own terms seem bleak compared to theirs. The transcripts demonstrate that they are the real authors of this article. I feel a kind of interpreter.

The elderly

The elderly people I visited and conversed with form a diverse group. A few of them were well off, socially, psychologically, financially and in terms of

health. They were surrounded by caring relatives and received their attention and respect. Others were quite miserable because of poverty and loneliness. The extremes of happiness and misery occurred particularly among men. Those whose lives had been a success enjoyed the fruits of their work and did not have any worries. Those who had been less successful in their active days were now deserted by the ones they had failed to care for. A strictly applied measure of reciprocity accounted for this difference in well-being at old age. As a result of this principle, women usually found themselves more in the middle between the extremes. Even if they had not been successful in giving their children what they needed to progress in life, the children recognised that their mothers had tried their utmost and now returned their love to them.

Most of the elderly people were able to walk, only one of them spent the whole day in bed. Five of them were blind which restricted their movements considerably. Two more were almost blind. Only one old lady suffered from dementia and had to be 'watched' throughout the day.

The care they received from people in the house or children nearby included cooking food, helping them taking their bath, washing their clothes, assisting them in visiting the toilet, and doing all kinds of chores such as running errands, buying food and sweeping the room. Remittance of money becomes increasingly important as a form of indirect care, since many children are elsewhere to earn their living. Those who actually took care of the elderly varied from wives, daughters and daughthers-in-law to more distant relatives or anyone who happened to live in the same house.

The elderly get fewer visitors than one would expect. It is a common saying that old people are wise and have life experience and that the young are eager to get their advice. They also know the history of the town and the family. In actual fact, however, that wisdom and historical knowledge is seldom tapped. Many of the elderly complained that the younger generation was not interested in their stories and that they had little company during the day. Most 'visitors' just passed by; they greeted, asked about their health and continued their way.

The most outstanding 'care' for an elderly person occurs after his/her death when the family gathers to organise a fitting funeral (cf. Van der Geest 1995). At the moment of writing these lines (May 1998), most of 'my' elderly informants have undergone that final act of care.

The town

Kwahu-Tafo with its approximately 5000 inhabitants lies 150 km from the capital Accra. Most of the inhabitants are – at least partly – engaged in farming and trading. What they grow is mainly for their own consumption or sold

on the local market. People complain that the soil has become infertile and produces only cassave and corn. Most cocoa trees in the area died during the drought of 1983.

Among the Kwahu, trading is a way of life. The number of people who engage in small trading is amazing. It is often said – with some exaggeration – that when a Kwahu person builds a house, he will reserve one room for a store. Houses as we shall see can be built with money earned from farming or trading. More recently an increasing number of houses is built with capital earned abroad.

The town is not an obvious location for an essay on building houses. It is one of the less 'impressive' towns on the Kwahu Plateau as far as houses are concerned. Towns like Obo,[7] Obomeng, Abetifi, Twenedurase, Pepease, Mpraeso, Atibie and Bepong have more prestigious buildings. Entering Kwahu-Tafo one is rather struck by the large number of dilapidated houses, particularly in the centre of the town. As a result of erosion, due to the rains assisted by daily sweeping and weeding around the house, the level of the town has sunk more than one metre in many places. The foundations of the old houses which were not well maintained have been undermined and the outer walls have fallen. In many of these houses, some of which used to contain up to ten rooms, only one or two rooms remain. An unknown number of houses has completely collapsed. Only some heaps of mud or an open space, often littered with garbage, remind one of the old house. New houses are now being built one metre below the level of the old ones.

However, many new houses are never built. Throughout the town, one finds heaps of cement blocks which have been there for more than ten years. They testify to the unfulfilled ambitions of farmers and traders who started a building project which they could not complete due to economic or other misfortune. It is likely that many of these failures date from 1983 when a severe drought struck the country and most of the cocoa trees died. Half-finished houses, walls without roofs, which are now being used as garden fences or as places to keep goats at night, tell the same story. But the more frustrating and difficult it becomes to build a house, the more admiration is given to the one who succeeds. From that perspective, it is no surprise that in Kwahu-Tafo people who built a house are highly regarded.

Kwahu-Tafo has electricity (though only a minority can afford to wire their houses) and piped water (though people mostly rely on the old wells) and hosts a large number of schools and churches. There is also a clinic run by foreign missionaries.

The Kwahu, who are the original inhabitants of the town, are a subgroup of the Akan, a people of about seven million who live in the southern part of the country.[8] Their language Kwahu is a dialect of Twi. It should be taken into

account that the Akan are matrilineal. Most Akan will consider their marriage bond less important than their membership of the matrilineage, the *abusua*. Marriage is a temporary affair while the *abusua* is permanent. The greater weight of the *abusua* can be detected from many phenomena in Akan society. Marital partners are unlikely to stay together in one house if their maternal homes are nearby. In that case, both partners usually prefer to live with their own folks and carry out their marital duties from separate residences. Customary wedding ceremonials have little social significance and in most cases are attended by only a handful of people. Payments and gifts are limited. Divorce is common and easy and can be initiated by the man as well as by the woman. On the average, a person will experience one to two divorces in his/her lifetime.

In a sense, the interests of the conjugal family are opposed to those of *abusua*. It is felt that a woman who attaches herself completely to her husband, does so at the expense of the *abusua*. The *abusua* looks somewhat askance at a 'successful' marriage. 'Interference of relatives' is one of the most common reasons for divorce (cf. Bleek 1977).

Strictly speaking, the husband is an outsider in his own nuclear family since he belongs to another *abusua* than his wife and children. Unless he is well-to-do, he is likely to remain somewhat marginal with regard to family affairs such as the upbringing of the children and the maintenance of the family.

Marriage, someone told me with a bit of cynic exaggeration, is a necessary evil. If people could have children without getting involved with a partner from another lineage, they would probably prefer not to marry. As a matter of fact, many don't and prefer to engage in less formal relationships. Many women 'stop marriage' when their task of bringing forth has been completed. *Mabrɛ awadeɛ* (I am tired of marriage) is a common expression. It is not surprising, therefore, that marriage is considered a less secure ground in old age. Women often prefer to return to their lineage of origin when they grow older. It is the *abusua* where elderly people are most assured of good care. Out of 24 elderly people whose marital status I checked, I found that ten had divorced or lived in permanent separation, eight were still married and six were widowed.

The 'classic' life cycle of a Kwahu man existed in trading during the first half of his active life and farming during the second half. The first could also consist of practising a skill such as tailoring or sandal making. During that period a man would stay in Accra of another commercial centre. He would run a shop or help a relative who owned a shop or he would practise his skill on the market or in his workplace. Nowadays, many Kwahu men become taxidriver. Getting to the age of fifty a Kwahu man was likely to return to

his hometown taking up farming and assuming responsibilities in the family (see also Bartle 1977). Formerly, a Kwahu man who went into government service was criticised for not respecting his uncle (because he refused to help his uncle in trading). A successful man was expected to build a house in his hometown.

Much has changed nowadays. It is no longer possible to speak of a typical Kwahu life cycle. The new generation has more options for employment and many young people have the ambition to travel abroad. The pressure to return home when getting old may have diminished but has by no means disappeared. Farming is no longer an attractive option, but staying in one's own house surrounded by relatives and taking up political and moral leadership within the *abusua* still appeals to a man of age (cf. Miescher 1997: 510–516). The status of elder (ɔ*panyin*) in one's home community is regarded as a honourable closure of an active life (cf. Van der Geest n.d.).

Matrilineality causes several complications for the topic of this essay. Strictly speaking, a man who builds a house for his 'family' or mother, does not build it for his own children. It is his sister's children who are likely to inherit the house in the future. In that case, building a house is indeed a sign of love, as we will see in a moment. In actual fact the situation is more complex however and most transactions concerning property are highly ambiguous. Depending on their interests in the case, relatives may insist on sticking to the traditional (matrilineal) rules or choose for a patrilineal and/or bilateral interpretation of property rights.

As a result, the composition of the inhabitants of a house could vary considerably. In principle, a house belongs to the *abusua*, so one would expect a man's matrilineal relatives to occupy the house, mainly his sisters and their children and grandchildren. However, a man who has built his own house can decide that his children should stay there, but he will be criticised for not allowing his matrikin to join him if they are in need of accomodation. A man may therefore compromise and divide the house between his wife and children and his matrilineal relatives. Miescher (1997: 506) mentions the case of an elder in the nearby town of Abetifi who erected three two-room apartments under one roof, one for his children, one for poor members of his *abusua* and one for other dependents. In general one could say that the poorer a man is, the more likely he is to stay with his matrilineal relatives in a house of the *abusua*. Conversely, the wealthier a man is, the more dependents he will attract, both from his own *abusua* and from outside. The situation becomes more complex when the man dies and different parties inherit different parts of the house. The house where I stayed during my research was, for that reason, occupied by members of several different lineages.

My choice of Kwahu-Tafo as research site had little to do with the above mentioned features of the town, however. My main reason for coming to this place was that I had carried out research there 21 years before and hoped to renew old ties. Seeing old friends again made my stay in the town gratifying but it also turned the research into a complex social adventure, not so different from the difficulties which Ghanaians face when they return home after a long period abroad. At such a moment they realise that "the family is big" (*Abusua yɛ dom*)[9] as the proverb goes.

The virtues of a house

'House'[10] is a rich metaphor.[11] It can stand for the feeling of togetherness shared by a group of people. 'House' (*ofie*) is the most common metonym for people living together. *Mefie* (my house) means my family. A house is someone's identity, it is a sign of security and happiness. A house can represent a particular period in one's life and bring back the memories of that time. A house is the concretisation of social relations and the sentiments accompanying them. A house, not least of all, is a status symbol. Arhinful (1998), who interviewed 22 Ghanaian immigrants in Amsterdam about their relations with relatives at home, found that 15 of them had built of were putting up houses in Ghana. Some of them indicated that the desire to build a house had been the driving force which motivated them to travel abroad. The possession of a house is a sign of success. Building a house, therefore, is much more than putting up a structure of stones. Building a house is building a powerful symbol. In Kwahu-Tafo, too, the house is something to which people attach some of the most cherished virtues of their culture: respect, love, memory, 'home' and beauty.

Respect

When *Ɔpanyin* Opoku was young, he first worked as a tailor in several towns and then settled in Kwahu-Tafo to farm. He was successful in life and managed to build his own house. Opoku, who is now *ɔkyeame*[12] at the chief's palace, is a highly respected person. We asked him why people have such high respect for those who built a house. He replied:

> It is difficult to put up a building so anyone who manages to build is regarded as a special person among his relatives. The fact that you have given your relatives or children a place to sleep is an honour to the person who put up a house. It is a great honour also if you don't live in someone's house or in *abusuafie*. Children and a house are the most important things in a person's life.

Asked about the meaning of the proverb *Yebisa wo fie, yɛmmisa wo sika* (We ask of your house, not of your money), he added:

> A person's money is in his own possession. *Obi sika wɔ ne nkoa kotokuo mu* and he can use it as he likes. So it is valuable to him alone. But a building can be utilised by many people so that is what people value and always demand. You will never hear someone saying "I am going to the money of so and so." What we hear is: "I am going to the house of this or that person." We often hear people saying: "If you are a man, come to my house", but we don't hear: "Come to my money." We say with pride: "This is my house" and not: "This is my money."

A house produces respect more than money because it suits two important requirements of respect (*ɔbɔbu*): visibility and sociability. Something needs to be seen in order to engender respect (or its opposite, shame, *aniwu*). What remains hidden also remains out of the realm of human judgement (admiration or condemnation), by definition. Respect is a key moral concept in Akan culture. Human behaviour only becomes 'good' or 'bad' in the social sense of the terms, if it is seen. Doing good without others seeing it is almost a contradiction, it does not make sense. The 'ostentatious' way of performing good deeds, such as giving gifts, praising someone and celebrating a funeral are the expression of that basic moral feeling. If gifts are given in private, secretly, it usually has the explicit aim of preventing others from *seeing* it, which means: preventing jealousy or further demands. Concealing good deeds, therefore, does not contradict but confirms the inherently visible nature of Akan morality. When we asked *Ɔkyeame* Opoku what respect is, he answered:

> I see respect in good manners. How a person talks to others. The humble way in which he approaches others shows how respectful a person is .... There is more than one method of showing respect. You can know how respectful people are through their actions. When two people are quarrelling the one who refuses to listen to the advice of an old person who tells them to stop, distinguishes himself in the face of people as a disrespectful person .... How respectful people are can easily be detected, even from the way they walk. In others, walking can show how proud they are. *Obi wɔ hɔ a, ɔnam a na ne honan redidi atɛm. Wohu sɛ ɔyɛ ahantan* (Lit. Someone is there, if he walks, his skin is insulting people. You see that he is proud). There are many ways of judging how respectful a person is.

The visibility of respect has a reciprocal character. Not only what produces respect has to be visual but also its response. The respect one has for some-

body must be *shown*. Not showing respect is understood as not having it. Social etiquette takes a central place in everyday life. It can be observed in the way people greet one another, in the way young people behave towards the elderly, women towards men, children towards parents, pupils towards teachers, and so on. Bitter conflicts may arise as a result of perceived disrespect. Much litigation is spent on cases of 'disgrace'. The eye, one could say, is the decisive marker of morality.

Obviously the house fits that moral philosophy. It is eminently visible. Several of our informants stressed this aspect of the house to contrast it with money. The latter may be hidden in one's pocket or in the bank, a house cannot be hidden. "You can point at it", as Nana Nyame said. You can enter it, you can run towards it for shelter, you can lay a dead body in state in it, you can paint it to make its appearance still more attractive and increase the respect for it (i.e. for the one who built it). A house is the most concrete metonym of a person. Nana Nyame characterised the difference between 'money' and a 'building' as follows: "Even after his death, people point at the building and say: This is the house of such and such. You will never hear someone mentioning the amount of money a dead person left behind, we only hear about the buildings he left."

People who failed to build a house during their life are less respected than those who succeeded in doing so. For those who are staying in the *abusua* house their failure to build a house may be less visible. They are lucky enough to have a house of their own even though they did not build it. Some even try to give the impression that they *did* build the house which they only inherited.

Those men who are not lucky and have to stay in someone else's house, renting a room or – worse – staying in their wife's (or in-laws') house, find their social esteem drastically cut. Such a person will not be called an *ɔpanyin* (elder, gentleman), according to *Ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ. An *ɔpanyin* is the proverbial elder who has reached full human maturity. He is kind, gentle, civilised, unselfish, wise, devoted to the family and has self control. In brief, he is respected (Van der Geest n.d.).

Whatever laudable virtues someone may have, staying in another person's house will prevent him from being considered an *ɔpanyin* (cf. Stucki 1995). We asked *Ɔkyeame* Opoku: "Will someone who is in a very responsible position in a big corporation or government service but without a house in his town, have more respect in the eyes of people in his town than an ordinary person who is also without a house? He answered: "In the eyes of people he won't be respected. No matter your position outside your home, you will not receive the full respect if you fail to put up a house in your hometown." *Ɔpanyin* Pusuo, who was a mason before he became blind, added: "If someone who has not built a house is bluffing, people don't respect him."

A teacher, a respected person one would think, felt he was not taken seriously because he did not have a house of his own. When he finally managed to build a modest house, he wrote to me; "It took me forty days to dig the foundation and to roof the house. People were surprised and made all kinds of comments and remarks .... [I am now] a whole man and a force to reckon with in the society."

A similar observation on people's concern about the material tokens of respect was made by Miescher (1994: 5–6) who did research on the cultural construction of maleness in the nearby town of Abetifi. One retired teacher remembered that he felt ashamed he did not have any furniture in his room when he started teaching. Whenever he got a visitor he rushed to the door and met the person outside. Only after he had acquired some furniture which fitted his status as a teacher, did he begin to invite people into his room.

A woman from Kwahu-Tafo who was trading in Koforidua, the regional capital, was little respected by the people in that town. After all she was not trading in prestigious goods such as cloth or electric wares. She was just an 'ordinary' trader. One day some of her acquaintances came to Kwahu-Tafo to attend a funeral and saw the house she had built there. From that moment, she received a lot more respect. Now they knew she was 'somebody'.

When I returned to Kwahu-Tafo after 21 years and visited the house I had stayed in, I found that the ceiling of my old room was no longer there. I had it repaired and when the *abusua panyin* (head of the family) came to thank me, he remarked that I had done well but my gesture did not have much significance since it was inside the house and no one could see it. I should now bring money to rebuild some of the rooms for everybody to see.[13]

A house is the proof that one has been successful in life, financially and socially. One has been able to turn economic success into a social good. The house shows that one has worked very hard. That is why people praise the builder. Economic success may be achieved by farming, trading, *aban adwuma* (government work)[14] or – increasingly now – by work overseas. We asked several people, what in their eyes, was the most honourable and prestigious way of gaining success. All agreed, it was by farming. Ɔ*panyin* Pusuo:

> Farming is very difficult. It takes much time and energy to make a cocoa farm and get enough money to build a house so it is the farmer who has done best. A trader can get money easier and earlier.

I asked several people what brought more honour to a person, having children or having built a house. Children, some said, are a gift from God while building a house requires a lot of effort from the builder, so the latter deserves more praise. Ɔ*panyin* Dadeɛ:

D. You can't buy or beg for a child. It is a gift but it takes great effort to put up a building. If God is willing, a person can have many children.
S. Does it mean it is a greater achievement to put up a building?
D. Yes.
S. What about if you have children and you don't have a place to shelter them?
D. That means the father is useless.

The moment that a house has its ultimate effect of respect and social prestige is during funerals. Having a house is having a place where one's body can be laid in state and one's funeral can be celebrated. It should be a worthy place. Its beauty, size and cleanliness contribute substantially to the success of a funeral. As Stucki (1995: 123) remarks, "A person who can even build a small house by the time his or her mother dies will be held in esteem. When the people come to the mother's funeral they will say 'You have done well' ".

Many of the elderly people we conversed with saw their funeral as the most important reason for having a house.[15] Nana Ntiriwaa, an old lady, was complaining about her house which is collapsing. Her main worry was not the present discomfort and insecurity during her life, but the shame of having no proper place for the funeral: "If I die now, there will be no decent place where I can be laid in state. It is a great worry to me!"

It is even more a worry to the *abusua*, because a funeral is first of all a homage of the *abusua* members to themselves rather than to the deceased (cf. Van der Geest 1995). A poorly organised funeral, therefore, is a disgrace to the *abusua*, not to the deceased. The first thing the *abusua* should do to make the funeral 'successful' is to make sure that the place is worthy to receive visitors from the town itself, and especially those from afar. Some of those visitors have to be accommodated and fed for one or more days. The impression they get during their stay – in particular the quality of their lodging – will determine their respect for the *abusua* and the children of the deceased. People will, for example, whitewash the building, paint it, make the necessary repairs, et cetera, to make the place more attractive. Some will even add major improvements.

When *Ɔpanyin* Kwadwo Gyima, a former sandalmaker, died, his son in Japan sent money to build a whole new veranda for the house before the funeral took place. After the death of Mr. Mensah, a former head teacher of the Methodist Middle School, his children organised a complete face-lift of the house to prepare for the funeral. They roofed a part of the house, repainted and wired the entire building and repaired the road leading to the house.

Ironically, all these improvements were things which the old man had wanted to do during his life but could not. He got them done only after his

death. Fixing up the house is a good investment for a successful funeral. If there is no house, there can be no proper funeral. Nana Nyame mentioned the example of the man from Abene who died in Kwahu-Tafo where he had no house: "I heard of his death in the evening, the next day he was buried."

In order to make it possible to finish all such preparations before the funeral it has become a common practice to put a dead body in a mortuary ('fridge') for a few weeks or months. It also allows the children and *abusuafoɔ* to contact distant relatives who are likely to be well-to-do and able to help financially. A funeral provides an exquisite opportunity for acquiring money to renovate or complete a house.

The respect one derives from building a house is so great that in the past elders who had not been able to build a house themselves forbade the young people to build one. They did not want to be disgraced by a young man who achieved what they had never managed to do. The young people often gave up their plan for fear of witchcraft. It was commonly believed that such an ambitious young man might be killed. When I (S) asked *Ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ (D) about this belief, he said, he built a house when he was still young and did not mind the threats and rumours:

D. At first some people were afraid of witches. They thought they would die if they put up a building. When I started building, people were giving me such advice. I told them that if I put up a building and I die, they will put my body in it. When Aboagye, a police man, was going to put up his building, he was afraid so he consulted me. I told him that a person can die when working or offering some labour therefore there is nothing wrong if one dies by building a house. *Onipa tumi di paa wu na sɛ wo so dan na wo wu a, ɛnyɛ hwee*. He was still afraid so I took the responsibility of the building and constructed it in my name for him. Now he is not very well but he is living in his own house. He is still grateful to me for what I did for him.
S. Why do people think that it is not good for a young person to build a house?
D. It is mostly out of jealousy. They frighten you to stop you from building because of jealousy.
S. How old were you when you built this house?
D. I was a young man *aberantɛ*ɛ. I had three children then.

Love

The prominent visibility of a house is one important reason why so much respect is derived from it. But respect goes deeper than visibility. When we discussed the meaning of the proverb *Yebisa wo fie* . . . . it was stressed all the

time: money in itself does not make people respect you. It is the way you spend your money. If you are a miser, people will call you a witch. If you spend your money on useless things, people will despise you. "If a person has money, but fails to put up a house and uses it for other purposes, it shows that he is an irresponsible person (ɔyɛ *onipa hunu*)", according to the old lady, Nana Amponsaa. But if you use your money to do good, people will respect you. Ɔ*kyeame* Opoku: "The fact that you have given relatives or children a place to sleep is an honour to the person who built the house."

Talking about respect, people said: respect is love. Talking about love, Kwaku Nyame remarked: love is respect (ɔ*dɔ ne obuo*). There is hardly a better way to show one's love for others than by building a house. No one builds a house for himself alone. It will be there for others, in the present time, and even more so in the future after the builder has died. Such love is reciprocated as is well expressed in one of the most favourite proverbs which the elderly used to quote for me: *Obi dɔ wo a, ɔba wo fie* (If someone loves you, he comes to your house) (cf. Christaller 1879).

A man may build a house for his *abusua*. Such an enterprise is a clear act of love because it means that his own children will not occupy the house. Eventually it will be his sister's children who are going to benefit from his generosity.[16] He may also build for his own children and/or his wife. But few people can build three houses, so we asked Ɔ*panyin* Dadeɛ what he would advise a man to do if he were to build one house. He aswered:

D. A person is from an *abusua* before he married and had children. If you give the house solely to your children, the *abusua* will hate your children after your death.[17] So you should share the rooms among the three parties. If you do that, there will be peace after your death.
S. Don't you think such a thing would rather invite quarreling?
D. Even if it causes quarreling, it is the best way to go about it. A person who can't cope with the situation and causes constant quarrels, will be asked to leave the house and put up his own.

For a woman the choice is less difficult. If she builds for her children, she also builds for the *abusua*. But relatively few women are able or willing to put up a house.[18]

There is only one thing a person can do which shows more love and brings more respect than building: giving your children a good education and enabling them to acquire proper jobs. By doing so a man is 'building' their and his own future: security.

Security

A house is not only a sign of love. It is also an object of self-interest, an investment for the future when the builder will be old and dependent. Dadeɛ: "If you want to sleep tomorrow, you must put up a house today." By building a house and inviting people to stay in it, you secure yourself company and helpers when the time comes that you may no more be able to move about. More importantly, you can put a claim on those people because it is thanks to you that they stay there.

Agya Kwaku Martin: "…I was able to build a house and now I have peace, comfort and everything." If the opposite is the case, your situation may become very difficult when you grow old. Nana Dedaa: "When you become old, you don't have money and you have not put up a house, you become a disturbed person, especially if your children fail to cater for you." Everybody agreed, however, that there is one investment in the future which gives still more security: providing a good education for the children.

We asked *Ɔpanyin* Pusuo which of the following two people did better: the one who used his money to build a house or the one who spent it on the education of his children. His answer was clear: "The one who educated his children did better because the children can get money to build a house for the father. The children can help during his old age. They will provide money and cloth and when he gets sick they will take care of him." A person who looks miserable because he is poor and does not have a house to stay, may still be a wise and happy person because he sacrificed himself for his children and the children will reward him when he gets old. Dadeɛ: "A person should work hard to achieve both." We asked: "Is the honour (*animonyam*) of one not higher than that of the other?" He replied:

> It all depends on how you look after the children and on how other people observe it. A person may be very poor but people notice that it is due to his attention for his children and giving them education that he is in such a state. There is honour when a person looks after his children. *Emma no deɛ no animuonyam wɔ mu papa*. Even if you go naked but you look after your children, they will one day cover your nakedness. *Wo bɔ adagya mpo a daakye wɔbefra wo ntama*.

Memory

We asked *Ɔkyeame* Opoku why he poured libation for the ancestors and why he reserved food for them since he himself would eat it in the evening. Did he think that the ancestors were still somewhere, alive, and that they would really eat and drink? For the first time in the course of our many conversa-

tions we noticed uncertainty and hesitation. Then he frankly admitted that he did not know. No one had ever returned from death to tell him what death looked like. So why did he pour libation? To remember the ancestors, he said.

To be remembered after one's death is a continuation of the respect one enjoyed during life. It is the only certainty we have about people's fate after death: some are forgotten and some are remembered. Forgotten are those who did not achieve anything important in their life. They did not leave something behind which makes people think of them long after they have gone: a farm, precious property, children in a high position or a house. Remembered are those who left their imprint behind when they died. One of the most effective ways to make people remember you is to build a house. "With a building", Nana Nyame remarked, "the whole world will be a witness to what you left and your name will never die." *Ɔpayin* Dadeɛ also used big words to praise the name of the builder:

> When you build, you become a person (*wosi fie a, na woayɛ onipa*). If you have a room full of money and you don't put up a building, it is of no use. When you die, only one person will take it and no one will mention your name anymore. With a building your name will never be lost (*wo din renyera da*). Because of this building, my great-great-grandchildren will mention my name that *Ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ built this house. It will go on till the end of the world.

Yebisa wo fie (We ask of your house) continues after death. They will still say: I am going to *Ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ's house, even when he died a very long time ago. I asked him if he was sure that people would go on using his name when referring to his house. Yes, he was absolutely certain.

S. Can you give an example of a house in the town which is still bearing the name of person who built it, even though that person died years ago?
D. *Ɔpanyin* Sarpong's house is an example, whoever is going there says I am going to *Ɔpanyin* Sarpong's house but he is no more. There is a story about a building at Nkwatia which was built by one Yaw Opare and it is still bearing his name though he died when I was a child.

But in many, probably the majority of cases, it is different. A house which is commonly referred to as *Kwasi fie* (Kwasi's house), was not built by Kwasi Gyasi but by his uncle Kwame Berko. Gyasi succeeded him and occupied the house for a very long time. That's why people referred to it as Kwasi's house.

The builders themselves, however, expect that their name will remain forever and will contribute to their status as a *nana* (grandfather) who will be remembered because of his good deeds. Miescher (1997: 510), in his study among elders in the town of Abetifi, reaches the same conclusion. More important than giving shelter to people is that the house serves as a mneomonic device:

> The building becomes a memorial in cement and concrete and will outlive the deceased person. The house will remind the deceased's descendants of his (her) former physical existence, hence offering a way to transcend death by creating a space of afterlife in the memories of others.

Home

If one builds a house, it should not be just anywhere, but in one's hometown. Building houses in various places but not in the hometown is shameful and senseless. The house symbolises and expresses belonging, so it should be in the place where one belongs. The house stands for *Heimat*.

A man from Kwahu-Tafo went with his wife to Kumasi to trade. They earned a lot of money and the man put up a multi-storied building in Kumasi. He then wanted to build a house in Kwahu-Tafo but his wife objected because she feared the husband would be bewitched if he built the house, so he gave up his plan and did not build. Sometime later the woman died. She had been a popular woman and a member of many associations. Her body was brought to Kwahu-Tafo and many of her friends came to attend the funeral. The body was laid in state in her father's house which was a dilapidated building. Her friends, who saw her body in that embarrassing situation, made a song with the following line: "*Wowɔ Kumasi no yɛhuu wofie, yɛbaa wo kurom, yɛanhu wo fie*" (You were in Kumasi, we saw your house, we came to your town, we did not see your house).

One day Nana Kwaku Nyame got a visit from one of his nephews who wanted his advice. The nephew told him that recently he had taken some of his friends in Accra to a funeral in his hometown Asakraka. The room which was given to him and his friend caused him a lot of embarrassment as it was in a very deplorable state. This incident had prompted him to put up a proper building in his hometown to enable him to receive friends and other guests. He therefore intended to sell a house he owned in Nkawkaw and use the money for the building in Asakraka. Nana Nyame told his nephew that he found it a very good idea. You may have many houses all over Ghana, he said, but if you have none in your hometown, it is shameful (ɛyɛ *aniwu*).

While I was writing this article, a vehement quarrel erupted in the house where I was staying. It was impossible to understand what they were saying.

The speed was too fast and the vocabulary was largely unknown to me. A friend translated some of the abuses. One was particularly relevant to this article. A woman shouted at another woman: "You hopeless girl. You are from this town and you are hiring a room. Are you not ashamed?" (*Wote wo kurom a, wohire dan. w'ani nwuiɛ?*). In other words there must be something wrong with you if you are a native of this town and do not stay in your own house.

Stories of people who had plenty of money but failed to build in their hometown abound. They have become proverbial to illustrate foolishness (*nkwasiasɛm*). Nana Nyame referred to the man of Obo who was buried in his village because he did not build a house in Obo. Another example is Kofi Fofie. Fofie, who died some time ago, was a native of Nkwatia (a nearby town), living in Kwahu-Tafo. Around 1950 he started to build a huge house in Kwahu-Tafo. When he was about halfway, the Nkwatia chief heard about the building and let him know that if he failed to put up a building in his hometown Nkwatia, he would not allow his body to return to Nkwatia after his death. Fofie stopped the building and started a new one in Nkwatia. The remains of the first building can still be seen in Kwahu-Tafo.

Stuckie who did her research in Asante, makes the remark that someone who does not have a building in his hometown, has no reason to return there.

> In one case, a woman that I met in Kumasi told me that she sees no benefit in returning home, since she was not allocated any land for farming in her hometown. Consequently, she would have to buy food there, just as she would in Kumasi. In any case, she had been in Kumasi a long time and wanted to stay in town. She felt that a person like herself who had become old and has no building in her hometown must stay in Kumasi "until the end" (Stucki 1995: 134; see also Stucki 1992).

Her remark about buying food is an excuse. The real reason is that by failing to build a house at home she has lost her belonging. Staying away "till the end" is a painful defeat, a shame. When people grow older, they must "have accumulated sufficient resources to return to the hometown before they become decrepit, and be ready to assume leadership roles when the elders die" (Stucki 1995: 66).

Beauty

A house is not just a place to live in. It is a thing of beauty which lends its aesthetic qualities to the entire town (cf. Bartle 1977; Miescher 1997). *Ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ, the most successful builder among the elders we interviewed, explained to us how he developed the plan for a house.

> I usually show the draughtman the types of building I like and he brings his suggestions before we arrive at a final decision.

People go around, look at the houses being built and get inspiration for their own plans. When we asked Dadeɛ which building in Kwahu-Tafo he liked most, he remarked:

> A building is like a human being. If you dress it well, it will look nice.

But he first declined to make a choice. When he finally pointed at one particular building, we asked him what he liked about the house. He replied:

> The building looks very simple (*krokrowa*) with its kitchen, toilet and bathroom. In fact, it looks beautiful.

Dadeɛ is a practical man and loves simplicity. He does not like storied buildings (there are four of them in Kwahu-Tafo), "I admire ordinary buildings." Nana Pusuo, who is now blind, emphasised the painting:

> When you paint it, provide it with windows, you use curtains .... The facial board and the wood must also be painted.

Nana Nyame, as we have heard, has a special love for glass: "If you see a house with glass doors and windows, you realise that the one who owns it, has really put up a building." Interestingly, there is no house with a glass door in the whole of Kwahu-Tafo. Windows with glass 'louvres' exist however and they are particularly prestigious.

If the men were able to name some technical details which gave beauty to a house, the two women we interviewed mainly thought of the people in the house:

> You will have to keep the house neat and also stay in the house peacefully with your children and other relatives. When we see that, everybody will say this person has put up a beautiful house.

But for the men too, the greatest beauty of a house is that it is a '*home*', a place where one can stay in peace. When we asked Dadeɛ to comment on the statement "A house shows beauty", he said:

> You have met me sitting quietly in my own house. You can't tell if I have money or not. Somebody who comes here may think I am very rich but I may not even have a pesewa.

He meant to say: I have a house and the rest is not important. I have done what I came to do and now I can rest in my house. My children will take care of me.

Conclusion

Ɔpanyin Dadeɛ is one of the few people in Kwahu-Tafo who has an inscription on his house. A bible text from Psalm 127 *Sɛ Yehowa ansi dan no a, wɔn a wɔyɛ ho adwuma yɛ kwa* (If God does not put up the building, those who work on it, do so in vain). I asked him to explain what he had written.

D. It was God who built the house, not me.
S. So putting up a building is not your work but God's work?
D. It is my work but I do it through God. I always pray: "God, I am not doing the work but you are doing it. You have the strength and you should do it for me." Then he does it for me.

This modesty, however, does not prevent people in Kwahu-Tafo from often mentioning his name to praise him for what he did. His house testifies to the fact that he has lived a worthwhile life. They praise him for his good sense of business and his love for people, both his own children and relatives and his friends. All the virtues of a house, mentioned in this essay, descend upon him: respect, love, security, memory, 'home' and beauty.

An old lady, Nana Dedaa, summarised her idea of a peaceful old age in a house of her own as follows:

> You will be happy if you are not poor. If your children take good care of you and you have put up a house of your own, you will always be happy. When you die, they celebrate your funeral nicely and get you buried.

This paper has no happy end, however. The dream of having a safe place to stay when one becomes old and dependent does not always come true. Two years ago, Agya Kwaku Martin told me proudly how he already as a child, took up the plan to build a house and how he, at the age of 45, was able to turn this plan into reality. "And now I have my peace, comfort and everything." Two years later, he was one of the most lonely and miserable old people in my entire research study. He was practically blind. His wife had died and all his children, twenty, were living outside Kwahu-Tafo. He spent the whole day lying on a bed without a sheet or cloth. The room was dark and dirty and smelled badly. The house he built for security in his old age is occupied by 'cruel tenants' who don't care for him and don't visit him. One of his sons has brought his ex-wife, the son's mother, back to Kwahu-Tafo to cook for him. She lives at quite a distance and brings him (almost) every evening food. "But there is no love." In the morning and afternoon he sends a child of one of the tenants to buy kenkey, the cheapest food available. He complains that the child tries to steal his money.

Kwaku Martin used to be a popular man in Kwahu-Tafo. He had been a teacher and bookseller and had many friends who enjoyed his company. His conversation was always witty and interesting. But his friends have died or cannot leave the house and his children are occupied with other things. It is rumoured that he did not care well enough for them. The only person visiting him now is the barber, but he is not a friend. He asks 500 cedis for shaving his beard .... Two weeks ago I received the news of his death and funeral. Agya Kwaku Martin built a house but it was not enough. His case shows the variability in the position of elderly people at Kwahu-Tafo. There are no water-tight guarantees of security in old age. People explained to me that the old man's sorrowful end was due to the fact that he had not done enough for his children when they were young. His case contradicts Nana Nyame's romantic claim that a house "is everything." A house is not everything. Kwaku Martin's end confirms Nana Pusuo's remark that it is more important to educate one's children than to build a house. If the children have been educated they will get a good job and earn enough money to build a house for their father.

The generosity of building a house is that a man does so for his children and matrikin. Building a house while neglecting one's children, therefore, is a contradiction and a foolish investment. The house should crown all the other successes in life. Such a house brings indeed honour and security to its builder.

Acknowledgments

The research for this article was carried out with the help of many people. Most prominent was the assistance given by my Ghanaian co-researchers Kwame Fosu, Samuel Sarkodie, Patrick Atuobi, Anthony Obeng Boamah and Michael Buabeng. Benjamin Boadu and Yaw Darko Ansah typed most of the research material. I am also deeply indebted to Monica Amoako, Martin Asamoah, Abena Ansah, Abena Josephine Anson, Isaac Oppong and *Abusua Panyin* Daniel Osei Yeboah for various kinds of help, support and care they offered to me during the time of the research. One anonymous reviewer provided useful suggestions for the improvement of this text. Last but not least I should thank the old people who are both the 'objects' and the authors of this essay. I have dedicated this essay to two of them, Nana Kwaku Nyame and *Ɔpanyin* Kwabena Dadeɛ. Both of them explained to me the pains and pleasures of building a house.

Notes

1. Nana (lit. 'grandparent') is an honourific term for an elderly person. Another respectful term to address an elderly man is *Agya* (father). An elderly woman may be addressed as *Maame* (Mother).
2. *ɔpanyin* (elder) is a complex term. In a strict sense it refers to an elderly man who has been successful in life and enjoys people's respect but the term is also more loosely used for any elderly man (cf. Van der Geest n.d.).
3. Contrary to anthropological convention I have not disguised the identity of the main characters of this essay. I learned that they preferred to see their name in print, even if some of the information was less flattering. I have respected their wish.
4. I want to emphasise that we had *conversations*, not 'interviews', with the elderly. If some of the questions seem suggestive, they do so because they are part of a natural conversation in which people *share* their views and grow to a consensus. I expect to gain more from such an approach than from interviews which turn the other into a respondent who should be handled as 'objectively' as possible.
5. *Abusua* is the matrilineage. The term can refer to a very large group of related people (a 'clan'), or to a more restricted group of matrikin, three to five generations deep. *Abusua fie* is a house which was built by an ancestor and now belongs to the *abusua* (in the restricted sense). Members of the *abusua* can live in it free of charge.
6. In the twenty portraits of elderly Ghanaians in Apt's (1996: 102–39) book the building of houses also takes a prominent place. A house as a secure place to stay and as proof of a successful life is constantly on their minds.
7. The town of Obo, built by wealthy traders, even contains a large number of two- and three-storied buildings. Bartle (1977) wrote an extensive study of this unique place.
8. Other Akan groups include the Asante, Fante, Akyem, Akuapem, Bono and several other smaller groups. Some of the important studies of Akan culture are those by Rattray (1923, 1927, 1929), Danquah (1944), Field (1960), Fortes (1969), Arhin (1979), and Oppong (1982). Studies dealing with Kwahu society include Bleek (1975, 1976a, 1976b), Bartle (1977) and Miescher (1997).
9. The complete proverb runs: *Abusua yɛ dɔm na wo na ɔba ne wo nua*. Lange (1990: 59) translates it as follows: "The extended family is an army and your own mother's child is your real brother/sister." Depending on the occasion the proverb refers to the advantage or the disadvantage of the large size of the *busua*.
10. There are mainly two Twi terms for 'house'. *ɔdan* refers primarily to the physical structure of the house and is preferably used in combination with the verb *si* (to build, to erect). *Ofi* or *ofie* is used more often to refer to the house as a home, a dwelling of people (cf. Christaller 1933).
11. The biblical title of Appiah's (1992) collection of essays "In my father's house" is a good example. 'House' stands for almost anything ranging from the culture of Africa to the personal legacy of his own father.
12. *ɔkyeame* (often translated as 'linguist') is an official at the chief's court. Yankah (1995: 3) describes the function of the *ɔkyeame* as "speaking for the chief":

> Being a counsellor and intermediary to the chief, he is responsible, among other things, for enhancing the rhetoric of the words the chief has spoken. In the absence of an okyeame's editorial art, the royal speech act is considered funtionally and artistically incomplete.

13. I am conscious that I will have to build a house in Kwahu-Tafo if I want to convince people of my bond with the town. A building will be more effective than anthropological books and articles about them.
14. Every type of paid employment in a large organisation is called *aban adwuma*, whether governmental or private.
15. For women there is still another criterium for judging how well they have done. After their death their trunk is opened to inspect the number of cloths and beads they have been able to collect during their life (cf. Boelman & Holthoorn 1973: 244; Bartels 1990: 66; Stucki 1995: 66, 123).
16. "...those who build a house are likely to be classified as elders. Such individuals are expected to focus their efforts on enhancing their own *abusua*, rather than solely helping their own children" (Stucki 1995: 119). Thomas de Mello (personal communication) pointed out that income from family land is supposed to be spent on a house for the *abusua* whereas money earned in trading or any other job is more likely to be used for building a house for the children.
17. Stucki (1995: 119) reports the following case: "...a man put up a building for his children, but only had plans to build for [the] family [*abusua*] by the time he died unexpectedly. His junior brother inherited the building, drove the man's children from the house, and refused to pay their school fees."
18. This was, at least, true for Kwahu-Tafo, which does not have so many wealthy female traders as other Kwahu towns.

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