

LIVING PLACE/LOVING PLACE REMEMBERING KWAHU

sjaak van der geest

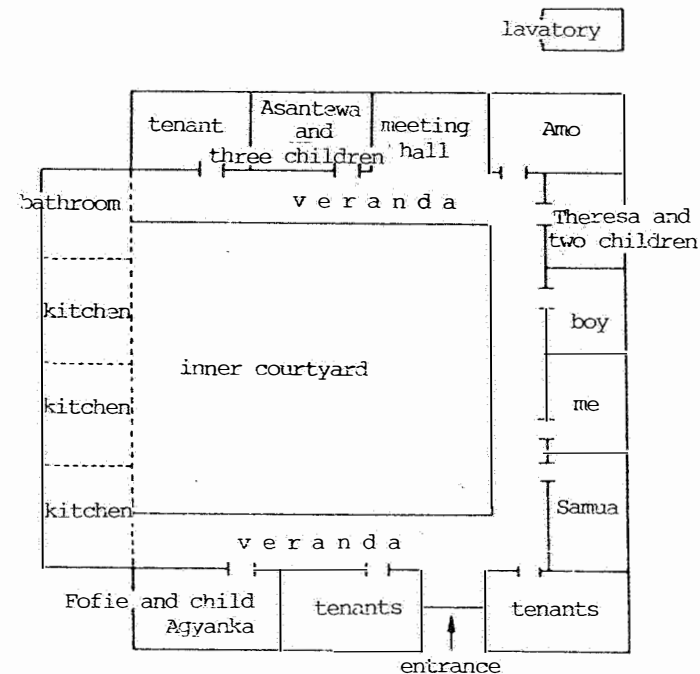
A traveller from Accra to Kumasi will be struck by the steep face of the Kwahu tableland near Nkawkaw. The road churns slowly up with its endless hairpin-windings and ends up in the town, where I have lived for eighteen months, doing my anthropological research.

The saying goes that anthropologists write their autobiographies when reporting on their findings. I have to admit that there is some truth in it. My research concerned love, not exactly Perfect Love, Love as a Virtue; much more love in its widely suspected context, its prohibited and illicit love affairs, such as the amatory adventures of the young generation.

Anthropologists are Peeping Toms in fact, and I admit I am one of them.

Secretive love is the most exciting way of loving. Hermann Hesse describes it when his projected Goldmund-character states: "What worth were any love without its secrecy? Could there be any love without love's dangers?" I listened spellbound in the town to the love affairs of the youth who wanted to discuss them. As it turned out, they were a majority; for secrets are considerably more exciting when you can communicate them to others. I did not stop at listening only, I shared and underwent it. That was the time, when I remarked the architectural shape of my own house; when I suddenly realised how perfectly the houses in that town were constructed for the practice of clandestine love.

I rented a room, some two by four meters. The house where I was lodging had an accommodation of ten of such rooms, which all faced the courtyard (ref. layout).



The main gate bolted at night, gave access to the innercourt. All the rooms had a shutter linking the outside world with the courtyard. They were partly occupied by tenants like myself, and partly by relatives of the old man, who was the owner. Two youngsters, older than fourteen, had their own rooms. Both girls and younger boys shared a room with their mother. The majority of the houses in the town looked the same: they were constructed in a square. Some only in semi- or quarter-square; but I must remark on this particular point that these constructions were not intended to stay that way, they were in fact in the process of being completed by their owners until they would be squarely 'our house'. The rectangular enclosure rendered some privacy and gave shelter against (non-existing) thieves, but not against love-making.

Nightly encounters between lovers were not difficult to arrange. A shy knock on the windowshutter sufficed as a token to the young man that his girlfriend wished to be admitted. He consequently tiptoed to the main entrance and admitted her. The creaking ga-

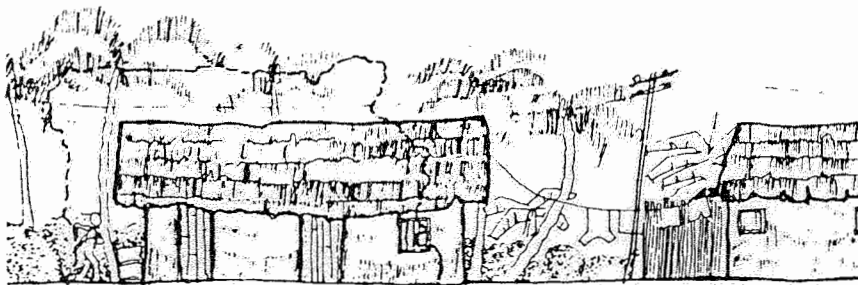
te was neutralised by the aggressive music which streamed out of the communal radiobox in the courtyard till midnight. Whoever happened to live in a housing complex without a gate commanded the easiest odds. Lovers had free access.

At the crack of dawn, before sunrise the girl would sneak back to join her brothers and sisters, who were still in deep sleep. Her mother would most likely have spent the night with her own husband or lover. In the latter case the girl would have to hurry, for her mother was usually also intent to be back home before morning.

The open accommodation-system in my town rendered a safe protection for each encounter. The silent transition from exterior to interior enhanced the suspense and romance of love. That interaction between architecture and romance has undoubtedly deeply impressed me because I am a Dutchman.

I could not help thinking of Dutch houses, with their frontdoors, frontbell, and porchlights, hall, coat-rack and creaking stairs. Our houses, designed as forts against the outside world. Houses which have become chastity-guards for us all.

In Kwahu the place for living was a place for loving. I trust the poetess forgives me for using this impudent pun.



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'IF YOU STAY INSIDE, YOU MUST BE SICK' AN INTERVIEW WITH RAPHAEL FOLEY KOFI LAWU

afua mary and maria verhoeven

It takes some time before they find their way in the beautiful round labyrinth, where the Institute of Housing Studies has its seat. After walking round and round they are greatly relieved to meet the gentleman with raincoat and suitcase.

"Excuse me, are you the ladies who are coming to interview me?", he asks them. Just before his graduation and just after completing his thesis, Afua Mary and Maria Verhoeven interviewed Mr. Raphael Foley Kofi Lawu, state officer in a World Bank-project in the Volta Region.

In 1982 Raphael Kofi completed his Estate management course at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi. After National Service, he took an appointment with the Volta Regional Agricultural Development Project (VORADEP), where he is working since. VORADEP is an agricultural World Bank-project set up in conjunction with the Ghanaian government.

"Within this project I'm in charge of the housing programme. We are going to build a complete village for the staff and substaff of the project in Ho. Besides, offices are going to be built and farm service centres for the benefit of farmers. The Dutch government offered me a fellowship for a post-graduate course in building process and resource management. I came to Holland in August '86 and I have just completed my study."