

Older people in Africa stand at a crossroad. Their privileged position in the family and society is no longer taken for granted. Their knowledge may not be seen relevant any more by the younger generation. Children and grandchildren often move away to other places to seek their fortune leaving their elders alone. There are, however, issues in life for which the experience and advice of older people remain highly topical.

This precious book records the wisdom of six elders in Kwahu-Tafo, a rural town in the South of Ghana. It brings to the fore the beauty of old age. The editors have selected some of the most touching pronouncements on issues such as the art of growing old, respect, blessing and cursing, money, love, death and funeral; themes which will be of relevance for all generations and which will never become outdated.

*The editors, who also held the conversations with the elders, are two citizens of Kwahu-Tafo and a Dutch anthropologist who has been visiting the town for more than thirty years.*

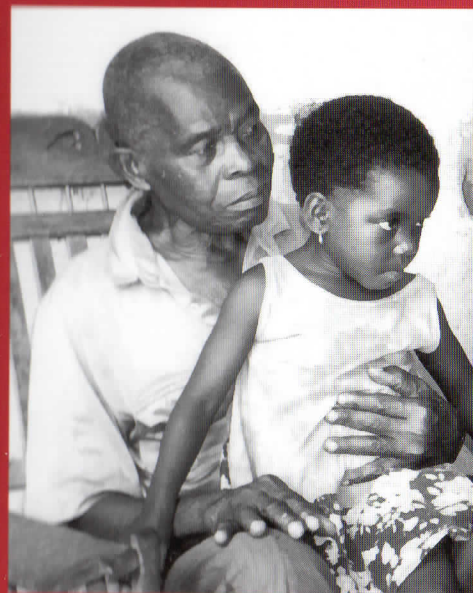


LIFE, LOVE AND DEATH

P. Atuobi, A. Obeng Boamah & S. van der Geest

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CONVERSATIONS WITH SIX ELDERS  
IN KWAHU-TAFO - GHANA



collected by  
Patrick Atuobi, Anthony Obeng Boamah  
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Cover photo: Kwaku Nyame with grandchild

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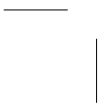
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## *Introduction*

“I have grown” is the literal meaning of *manyin*, the colloquial Twi expression for “I am old” in English. The difference between the English and the Twi idiom is significant. “I am old” conveys thoughts of decline and decay. In the same way that a car or a tool becomes old and loses its speed or effectiveness a human being decreases in strength. The English language does not make a distinction between objects and persons. All of them “become old”. *Manyin*, however, emphasises growth and progress instead of decline. The older a person is, the more he/she has “grown”, the more of a human person he/she is. Such a person is called *panyin* (elder). The “surplus” of old age is – ideally – observed in the virtues of the elder.

The elder has more experience than a young person and is, therefore, wiser. The elder has become mild and patient over the years and has become more self-restraint. He does not run after fashions and does not get angry. The elder has stopped working and travelling and devotes the last years of his life to the welfare of his family. He gives advice to the younger members of the family and makes peace when conflicts arise. No wonder that one proverb says: Unlucky the house where no elder lives (*Wonni panyin a, due*).

This little book contains fragments of conversations that we held with six elders in the town of Kwahu-Tafo between 1994 and 2000. The conversations took place in the context of a research that was carried out by Sjaak van der Geest who is an anthropologist at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The research focused on the life of elderly people and how they were cared for. Anthony Obeng Boamah and Patrick Atuobi participated in the research. They held conversations with elderly people, transcribed them and commented on them in discussions with the anthropologist. At that time Boamah was a clerk at the Technical Institute at Kwahu-Tafo and an amateur writer. He has now retired and is more than before devoted to writing. He has a keen interest in the local traditions and how these change under the pressures of modern times. Atuobi was trained as an agricultural teacher and is now a farmer. He shares with Boamah an interest in Kwahu culture and history.



The anthropological research revealed that the lives of old people in Kwahu-Tafo are not as “rosy” and peaceful as the opening paragraph of this introduction suggests. Several of them were quite lonely and resented that the young of today did not come to “tap” their knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, not all elderly people are as wise, patient, civilised and gentle as they claim. Not all of them have “grown” into the nearly perfect human beings that proverbs and popular beliefs portray to us. Younger people may even avoid the company of elders because they find them unkind or because they regard their wisdom irrelevant for the problems of today. The appendix provides an overview of some of the anthropological publications based on the research that discuss the ambiguities of old age in more detail.

The purpose of this collection is, however, to bring to the fore the beauty of old age. We have selected some of the most touching pronouncements of six elders on issues such as the art of growing old, respect, money, love and death; themes which will be of relevance for all generations and will never become outdated.

The town of Kwahu-Tafo lies on the Kwahu-Plateau, almost 200 kilometres north of Accra and has a population of about five thousand. In the town five roads meet. They lead to Mpraeso, Bukuruwa, Kotoso, Adawso and Nteso. There are several schools and churches in Kwahu-Tafo, plus a clinic with a maternity ward. The choice of Kwahu-Tafo for this research is arbitrary. Similar conversations could have been conducted in other towns, in the south of the country and also – with different details – in the north.

Originally, the conversations were recorded as they had been held, as dialogues. However, for this publication we have edited the texts in such a way that the questions asked by us have been left out so that the reader only “hears” the elders speak. We have taken care that the meaning of their statements was not changed.

Unfortunately, editing these conversations was delayed. As a result, none of the six elders has lived to witness their publication. We hope, however, that their words of wisdom in this little book will keep their memories alive for their children and grandchildren and for all who read these conversations.



## Biographies



### *Nana Kwaku Agyei*

Nana Kwaku Agyei was born in Kwahu-Tafo and was taken to Akim Kyenekenku, near Oda, his father's hometown, when he was a young boy. After his father's death he returned with his mother to Kwahu-Tafo. He started farming, tapped palm wine and hunted animals. He married a woman Nyantakyiwaa and had one daughter with her. They divorced and he married Yaa Ansomaa. They had three children, but one died. After 32 years that marriage also ended in divorce, according to Nana Agyei, because he was poor and could not maintain his wife properly. Besides his farming activities, he was a herbalist and an attendant at the chief's palace. He beat the 'gong-gong' in town and rendered all kinds of services at the chief's court. During his old age Nana Agyei was extremely poor. When we first contacted him he was staying in a room which people, non-relatives, had given to him. The last months of his life he was more comfortable as he stayed with two of his sisters in a new house built by his nephew. He died on the 17th of January 1995. Nana Agyei was a witty conversationalist and always tried – successfully – to impress us with his knowledge of proverbs.



### *Maame Yaa Amponsaa*

Nana Yaa Amponsaa was born in 1905 in Kwahu-Nkwatia where her mother married a man from Kwahu-Tafo. She came with her mother to Kwahu-Tafo and stayed there during her youth. When she grew up she started farming and later on became a trader. She bought maize which she sold in the big towns. She stayed with her first husband in Asakraka and with the second in Kukurantumi. When she married for the third time with someone from Asokore, she moved with him to his hometown. That marriage also ended in divorce and then she decided not to marry any more. After this she once again settled in Kwahu-Tafo and has since been farming there. She continued going to farm till a very old age. She had five children, three of whom are still alive. She herself did not attend school, but she managed to send all of her children to school. On the 30th of March 2001 she died peacefully. Her children estimated her age to be 113, but we believe she was about 95. She was buried on 7th July 2001.



### *Nana Mary Yaa Dedaa*

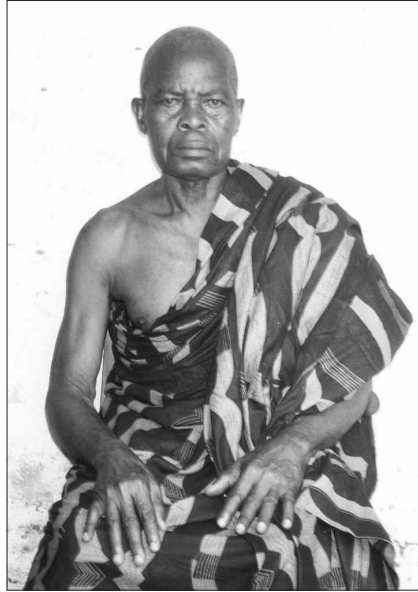
Nana Mary Dedaa said she was born in Kwahu-Tafo on a day that somebody's sheep gave birth to a being half sheep, half man. She did not know the date of this event. She lived with her father who was farming in the village of Asubone, now covered by the Volta Lake. She was betrothed to a man in Asubone and two years later, after she had her menstruation, the man performed the marriage customs. They had five children together. After her husband died she married a policeman at Aboam and had five children with him as well. Their marriage ended in divorce. She married and divorced again. From her stories we detected that she has had a lot of experience with men, apart from her three marriages. During our conversation she was staying in Kwahu-Tafo, but because her family house had collapsed she had been given a room in another house. Nana Dedaa, who has been a farmer all her life, was still very active, selling things, doing chores in the house and visiting friends and relatives. She had stopped going to farm. In 1999 she paid a visit to her son in Nkawkaw where she fell sick and died. Her body was brought to Kwahu-Tafo and buried there.





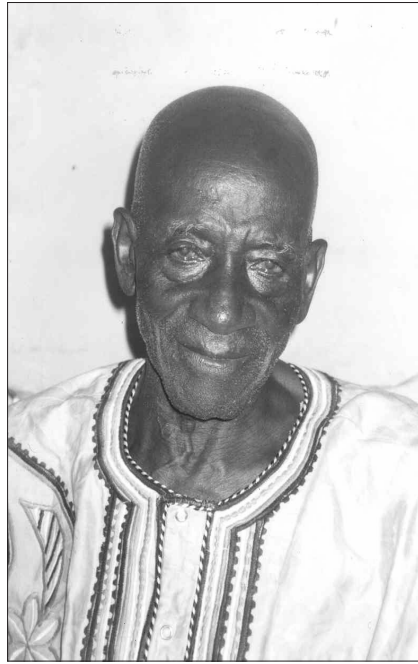
## *Ɔpanyin Kwame Frempong*

Elias Michael Kwame Frempong was born on 30th January 1906 at Kwahu-Tafo. He was the eldest of nine children. His father was Kwabena Gyekye of Aduamo, a member of the Dwamena clan, his mother Rosina Gyapomaa of Kwahu-Tafo, hailed from Sovie-Konda in the Volta Region. At a young age he helped his mother to make cocoa farm at Agyabura. He started school at the age of seventeen and completed his schooling at Obo Government School in 1927. He joined the Gold Coast Co-operative Movement to become a cocoa buyer for the company. He was transferred to Kwahu Tafo, Adawso, Kragyei and other towns for the same job. In 1948 he joined the Gold Coast Convention Party to fight for independence for the Gold Coast (Ghana). He was also a member of the Presbyterian Church. He became a secretary to the Kwahu Singing Band Union and was a local preacher for some time. He later left the Presbyterian Church and joined the Aladura Brotherhood. Some time later he left the Aladura Brotherhood and joined the Jehovah Witnesses. At the end of his life he returned to the Presbyterian Church. Having been educated, he sent all his children and nephews to school. He was the first man to bring a motorcycle to Kwahu-Tafo. In 1953 he travelled with seven others to the famous shrine of Kankan in Guinée to seek help to become successful in life. This journey, which made him pass through Mali and other countries, broadened his horizons and contributed to his philosophical outlook. He went to Accra in 1956 to trade. When his mother died in 1958 he settled in Kwahu-Tafo. He married three times and had 15 children, 12 grandchildren and 63 great grand children. He died at the age of 90 on the 24th February 1996 at Atibie Government Hospital and was buried on the 23rd March 1996 in Kwahu-Tafo. In a tribute to him on the occasion of his funeral he was called a man with a vision and a “great pillar of the family who dedicated his life resources to the education of almost all the members of the family.”



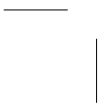
### *Nana Kwaku Nyame*

Nana Kwaku Nyame was born in Kwahu-Tafo around the year 1905. He was very small at his birth, so his parents feared that he would die. They said: "It is only God who can save him." Two months later they realised that the child was going to live and they called him Nyame (God). His real name was Atuobi. Kwaku Nyame never went to school. He was a farmer throughout his life. He farmed near Nkyenenkyene, Aboam, Bebuso and Aburaso, all Kwahu villages. The greatest shock in his life was the dying of his cocoa farm during the drought of 1984. He married five times and had seventeen children altogether, but only ten of them are still alive. During the later years of his life Nana enjoyed a long stay in the house he himself had built in Kwahu-Tafo where he was surrounded by nieces, nephews and grandchildren. Kwaku Nyame died on the 19th of April 2001 and was buried three days later.



### *ɔkyeame Kwame Opoku*

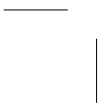
*ɔkyeame* Kwame Opoku was born in Kwahu-Tafo in 1919, the year that the great influenza epidemic struck the country. When he was a boy he was sent to Konongo to learn tailoring. After his apprenticeship as a tailor he settled in Nsawam and later in Konongo. He then stopped his work as a tailor and opened a store in Nkawkaw. His business was successful. He then moved to Aburaso, a farming village of Kwahu Tafo, and started a cocoa farm. During that period he was also buying and selling cocoa. He says: "I never had many hardships in my life" (*Manhu yea bebreɛ*). He married three times and when we met him he was living with his third wife, Akosua Ntiriwa, with whom he had six children. In total, he had sixteen children and he was able to send all of them to school, although he himself hardly attended school. Kwame Opoku had been an *ɔkyeame* ('linguist') at the chief's palace for about thirty years. His work as an *ɔkyeame*, he used to say, had opened his mind and broadened his knowledge on a lot of customary and legal matters. He died on March 17th 2002 and was buried on the 27th of April of that year.





## Themes of conversation





## *Growing old*

One of the bad things of old age is that you will not get your desires. You cannot do what you want to do, so you have to depend on others to help you. A good thing of old age is that you can predict what will happen because you've experienced many things.

Being old means that you have had many experiences during your life. You've grown grey hair. You can no longer do any effective work or the work you used to do when you were young. Your veins have become weak. There are stages in the life of every person; we have young, mature and old age. During old age your desire for certain things in life disappears. You don't enjoy things in life anymore (*Se wobɔ akwakora a, w'ani nnye neema bi ho*).

People do not come to me for advice because everybody wants to move with his peer group and so the young don't come to me. If anybody at all will come to me, it will be an old person like me. I got only three visitors today, my son, a relative from Ankoma and an old friend.

I don't do much during the day. That is one of my problems and I have been thinking about it. If you don't do anything in your life, then that is even in itself a burden. You sleep, wake up, sleep, it is monotonous (*Wosɔre, na ade akye, na ade asa, na woada, eno koraa ye ateete*). [Kwame Frempong]

We usually refer to an older person as *ɔpanyin*, but at times a person can be called *ɔpanyin* because of his position or deeds. If you are an *ɔpanyin* because of your age, but your behaviour is bad, you can be referred to as an *ɔpanyin hunu* (useless/worthless *ɔpanyin*).

Let me take myself as an example of a 'good *ɔpanyin*'. Most of the time people come to me for consultations and advice when they want to do something. I give them good advice and their problems are solved. Due to annoyance, at times some people take very harsh actions, but I am able to calm them down through a good talk and later on they realise the good I did to them through my words. Anyone with these qualities is an *ɔpanyin pa* (good elder). A good *ɔpanyin* may own a building and clothes and some farms. It is rare for the young to own such properties.

An *panyin* can tell the young people or children what will make them successful in life and which bad things may lead them into trouble. An *panyin* has more *nyansa* (wisdom) and *adwene* (thoughts), but a worthless old man (*panyin hunu*) does not have these.

We have several terms for an older person. There is *akwakora posoposo* (frail, old man), which may be due to sickness. This is a person who is so old that he can't come out of his room. Poverty too can make someone an *akwakora* (old man) because there will be no nice things for him to wear, so he always looks dull (*Woaye moamoa*). People regard such a person as an *akwakora* even though he is not very old. Some people may appear like *akwakora* though they are not so old.

I am quite happy and content to be old, especially when I think of the fact that at this age, I am able to have my daily bread and enjoy myself. I pray for my children and give them advice. Nobody controls me because I am an *panyin* and have the power to do what I know is good for me. All that makes me very happy. I don't owe anyone, I have a wife and a good place to lay my head so I am very happy. I am never worried or disturbed about death because it is the will of God that a man should die. I am not afraid to die. Some of the worries of old age are the difficulties in walking, the inability to get the food you desire and the necessity of going to toilet in your room.

I am old and I can never be young again. I have already enjoyed the happiness of the young. I am content to be old and I boast about my age. On many occasions I challenge the people I meet that I am older than they. Because I am proud of my old age and show it wherever I go, I am given a chair first whenever I go to a place with people. I wouldn't like to be young again.

Old people who try to look young worry themselves for nothing. What they do is no pleasure to anyone. When your time has past, it is gone. *Se wo bere twa mu a na atwa mu*. If you behave like a young person, no one respects you. People rather laugh at you. If you are an old woman, people say: "Look! She wants to be an *ababaawa* (young girl) again" and they laugh. If you are a man, they will say: "Look at that old man, he wants to be a young man, he does not have any sense in his head." *Onni adwen biara wo ne tirimu*. In my opinion, if you are old, show it. Such people usually don't stay at home to advise the young and if they are women, you find them putting on fashionable clothes and moving with young men, going to beer bars and refusing to cook for the

children in the house. A respectable old lady can dress nicely, but the fashion will correspond with her age. She won't dress like a young person. Those who do so are respected. Some old women dye their grey hair and make jelly curls and do perming which is not good. People call such women *aberewa yomo* (hair dye old lady). [Kwame Opoku]

A proverb says: "The elder does not complain of hunger" (*ɔpanyin mpere akom*). It is not good for an *ɔpanyin* to complain about his hunger as it will not make the young respect him. (*wo anim aboa*; lit. 'your face has become pale'). No matter what ordeal you may be passing through you have to keep it to yourself because you are an *ɔpanyin*. It is only children who complain. I may complain to you about my poor health or lack of money, but I wouldn't do that at home in the presence of my grandchildren and nephews. At home I do not complain. If I have money I just call the children to buy food for me. But if my niece or grandchild sees that I don't send anyone to buy me food, they provide me with some. I know they will never let me go hungry, so I don't complain.

You are an *ɔpanyin* mainly due to the wisdom you give to the young and also because you respect yourself (*wubu wo ho*). When you respect yourself the young will also respect you and fulfil your needs. I remember that I recently met a young man who willingly dashed me some money because he said that he liked me. [Kwaku Nyame]

As you grow old the beauty in you goes down. Your skin and face start to wrinkle. If you take good care of yourself, the beauty in you remains longer. Both men and women can maintain their beauty for a long time if only they are careful about their looks. Anyway, no one can look as beautiful as he was in the days of his youth, but at least some of it will remain with good care.

Apart from his face, the neatness and manner in which an old man dresses can make him handsome. Wisdom too can draw people close to an old man, especially the gentle manner in which he receives people, and the useful advice he offers also makes him attractive to people, both men and women. Money alone does not attract people. Goodness and the way of talking to people and receiving them make an old man attractive. With all the money in the world at your disposal, if you don't like people, no one will come to you. I, for example, am not rich even

though I am not poor, yet people always come to me because I respect them, I joke with them, I welcome them, 'I open my face to them' (*Metew m'anim kyere won*) and give them good advice when necessary. As you came just now you have seen the number of people who have been here. [Kwame Opoku]

## *Wisdom and experience*

Somebody who has grown is an *panyin*. He has lived in the house much longer than you. You came to meet him. *Panyin* is a big word. It is a person who knows what is going on. He must receive respect and obedience. An *panyin* is somebody who is not yet *akwakora* (old man), he hasn't attained many years, but he can say great things. He can offer good advice. He gives good example. He is a model. If you hear him talk, you will say this person is an *panyin*. [Kwaku Agyei]

When someone tells me about his problems in life I ask him to examine his own life and do away with all negative habits, for example, drinking, smoking and womanising. I will also advise the person to be humble (*onnye abantan*). Young people say that the advice of old people is not relevant to them, that they don't need it; they are wrong. People can always learn something from the old. Even if the youth of today have a good education, most of the things they should know to write their examination can be obtained from the old people. Many students come to me seek some information when they are preparing for their exams. It is to their advantage if they approach the old for their wisdom, but it is true that when you grow old they think you have no value to them. *Se wonyin a afei womfa wo nye hwee*. Only your own children will value you.

The world is now a wide place. People are many. At first people were not so many so they did everything together. Now after school the youth only think of how to secure employment and make a living. They don't care about the old and are not prepared to go to them for advice. They don't like to leave their learning and come to you for wisdom. They think they should learn and get something from school instead of going to the old. [Kwame Opoku]

*Aburo a ahoa wonti ani* (When you see the brown leaves of the corn cob, you need not tear open the leaves to see if the corn is ready for harvesting). The leaves are brown so the corn is ready for harvesting. Why do you tear the leaves open? It means you are stupid. [Kwaku Agyei]

I know many proverbs, but people do not come to learn them. They don't come. The young do not learn proverbs because the proverbs will not earn them money, but in the future it would help them. When you are entering a town and you hear the *abɔmmaa* drums: *Nammɔn-tenten reba, nammɔn tenten reba, nammɔn tenten reba*, the drummers are informing the executioner that there is someone to be executed. If you understand the proverb you will not be caught and executed. You will run away to save your life, but if you don't understand the proverb you will be caught and killed. [Kwaku Agyei]

## *Blessing and cursing*

Old people can bless and at the same time curse. As you grow older you are getting nearer to God so whatever you say is the truth. It is a spirit from God that comes into you. Whatever you will tell a young person, whether it is a blessing or a curse, it will affect that particular person (*Adeɛ biara a wobeka no, se eye nnome a ebenya no, ena se eye nhyira nso a, sbenya nhyira no*).

I believe that the power to bless and to curse is from God because when someone is old he knows what is evil and good. When he follows what is good that power is from God. It implies that whatever he says is a blessing and will affect you. If it is a curse, it will also affect you. Let me give you an example of an old person whose blessing came to pass. If we go into the word of God we can see the example of Isaac blessing his children Jacob and Esau. Because Isaac was closer to God by his mere age he realized that Jacob had come to deceive him in order to receive the blessing.

I can also give you an example from my own family. I love my son and he also loves and respects me. Because of this I always pronounce blessings on his life so that everything he does is successful. I have realized myself that it is true. I have not officially called him to bless him, but when I am conversing with people I mention his name and say good things about him, which means I am blessing him. Moreover, people often say that my son is close to my heart and I am also close to his heart (*Oda m'akoma ho, na me nso meda n'akoma ho*).

I have also cursed people and the curse came true. Someone who does not obey his father, is not successful in life. Recently, someone was summoned to appear in the law court and he falsely accused me that I had initiated the summoning. I never listened to that false accusation, but I said something in my heart, which later happened to that man. [Kwame Frempong]

There are some old people who do not talk nicely to the young. What an old person should do is to offer good advice to the young people around him. If he frightens them with threats and curses it is not nice. Some old people speak with wisdom, but there are some who do not talk sense due to their old age.



The old have the power to predict the results of certain actions.

The old are able to do so because of their vast experience. Most of the actions of the young were once practised by the old so they are able to predict the results of such actions. If the young receive the warnings and advice of the old in good faith, it will be good for them.

There are people with evils spirits (*honhom bone*). They can curse, but a person with a good spirit never curses. We are all the time praying that our children should become prosperous, how then can we say something bad against them? Any old person who would do that is not a good person. Someone who is not a bad old man can't tell his child that he will never succeed in life. (*Se wonye ɔpanyin bone a worentumi nye saa*). The power in an old person to bless is always derived from God. Before someone gives his blessing he will say: "May God help you to succeed in life." So it is through God that an old person gives his blessing.

A person can bless the people he loves and curse those he hates. Even someone with an evil spirit can use it to help a person he likes to succeed. Anyone who curses does it with *bayie* (witchcraft). If whatever the person may say happens, it is *bayie*. We call some people *anogya*. What such people say always happens (*Oka biribi a na aye ho*). That is *anogya*. Any person who can spoil something with words will be called *bayifo* (witch), even if he is not one.

I am quite old, but I don't have the power to curse and spoil things. All I can do is to pray to God for the success of the children under me.

If you struggle and you don't succeed, you are called a-good-for-nothing. If an old woman is in the house and the young in the house don't prosper, they will regard her as a witch. But if the young in the house are successful, they won't regard the old woman as a witch. If old women use witchcraft for the success of their children, it is referred to as good witchcraft, *bayi pa*. People seldom mention it even when the term is mentioned. It is said as a joke, but the young in the house constantly insult those with *bayi bone* (bad witchcraft) and on some occasions they even threaten to attack them. If you are an *ɔpanyin* and your children are all failures, you will be called a witch.

Most of the accusations are not true. The young do it because they are desperate. When they face difficulties they tend to accuse the old wrongly. When I was young and struggling in life I used to insult my mother whenever I got drunk and I constantly accused her of witchcraft. My mother used to tell me that she was not a witch and that she was

rather praying for me to succeed in life. When I worked harder things changed for the better and if my mother were to be alive today I would happily stay with her. *Se ebia wo a, na obiara ye wo bonsam.* (When you have problems, you regard everyone as a devil). It is like when you have lost an item; you think of everyone as a thief. [Kwame Opoku]

## *Respect and reciprocity*

I see respect in good manners and 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 some people are through their actions. When two people are quarrelling the one who refuses to listen to the advice of an old person who is telling them to stop reveals himself in the presence of people as a disrespectful person. How respectful some people are can easily be detected even from the way they walk. Walking can show how proud some people are. *Obi wɔ ho a, nam a na ne honan redidi aɛm. Wohu se nye 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.

Here is a riddle we should try to solve. An *panyin* who was sitting with his friends called one of his children, Kofi, and commanded him to go to the farm to perform a job, but Kofi told the father that he wouldn't go. The *panyin* then invited the second son, Kwadwo, and gave the same instructions to him. Kwadwo told the father he would go but did not go either. So in this case, which of the two children was most disrespectful?

The one who was most disrespectful is Kofi who said he would not go because he disgraced his father in the presence of strangers, which is very bad. The second one, Kwadwo, was respectful because he showed respect and honour to the father in the presence of his friends. If you respect and no one sees it in your actions, how can we know that you are respectful? Respect that is hiding in a person is useless. [Kwame Opoku]

They say: *Apurokuma rete abunu yi na erekum akwaduo ne ayuo yi na eberɛ dee yebeye no den? Apurokuma* is the fruit of a certain tree. Even when the *apurokuma* fruits are green, antelopes are killed under the tree. So what will happen when the fruits ripen? When the fruits have not ripened animals do not frequent the place, yet some do. When the fruits are ripe then all sorts of animals will be attracted to the place. The proverb means: If a child does not respect during his childhood, what behaviour will he display when he becomes an adult? [Kwaku Agyei]

The elders have a proverb: *ጋpanyin a wanyin dan mma* (An elder who has grown old depends on his children). It means that the young are responsible for the care of their elders. It should not be the parents alone that care for all the relatives. If through the blessing of God it happens that someone has children, they are responsible for his upkeep. If your relatives take care of you, they won't do it as well as your own children. Moreover, the quality of the attention your own children will have depends on how well you looked after them. Children are willing to look after their parents, but lack of proper work may prevent them from doing so.

If a man has not divorced, the wife provides him with food and water, but if they have divorced, the relatives have to care for him. That care is not satisfactory, however, unless you have some property that the relatives can get after your death, or if you were able to help some of the relatives in their education or in some other way. If you did not live a proper life in your youth, your relatives may not even give you food. When you call a nephew he will say "Don't worry me, you *akwakora bofo* (bad old man)." Sadness usually kills such old people.

If you took good care of your children and they are well-off, they will put up a house for you and take you out of the *abusua fie* (family house). The relatives may wish that you die so that they are free from the problem you present, but if you were able to take good care of your children, they will look well after you.

It is the same with a woman. If you were not able to provide help for your relatives when you were young, they will neglect you when you are old unless you have children. There are some children who will give six pence to the father and two shillings to the mother, but it all depends on the love of the child. Some children love their father even more than their mother. There are some children who may be against their mother if she is the cause of the divorce. Such children usually take better care of their fathers than their mothers.

There are some old people who are miserable and look neglected. It all depends on how you started out in life. If you laid a good foundation, you will reap good results, but if you failed to look after the people around you, they won't spend their money on you when you are old. Such miserable old people are those who failed to work hard in their youth. When we were young our father made us work very hard. At that time we thought he was troubling us, but now we are happy because we

have a place to lay our heads and something to wear, thanks to our hard work.

If you took care of some of your relatives together with your children, those relatives should care for you during the absence of your children. That is why you should care for both sides if you can afford it. We say *Wusum brodee a, sum kwadu; wunnim nea ebegye wo ]k]m mu*. (If you support the plantain, support the banana also). Maybe the banana will save you when there is hunger. [Kwame Opoku]

*Kote bɔne ka etwe mu*. (A bad penis gets stuck inside a vagina). This means: A bad penis breeds bad children. If you live a bad life you find it difficult to marry. When you beget a child he/she will not have a decent life. If you have good character your children will prosper. [Kwaku Agyei]

## *Money and poverty*

If I had enough money I would have gone to the hospital so that I could get rid of all these pains and be stronger. At first I could go to the farm and weed, but now I can't. Look at Kwaku Mireku: he was sick and was given injections for ninety days and now he is better and can even go to farm. Without money he could not have done it. If you are old and you have money, you can put on fine clothes that will make you look younger, but just look at my condition. Even if there is a nice cloth for me, I can't put it on (*Ntama mpo merentumi mfura*). [Nyame is bent over with waist pains and walks with a stick]. There are also a lot of problems to worry about because of a lack of money and these make you look older. With money there would be nothing to worry about (*Anka adwendwen remma*). *ɔpanyin* Dadee is a good example of someone who still looks young in spite of his old age, because there is nothing for him to worry about. We are the same age, but because of his money you don't even notice it when he is sick. But if you don't have money, worries alone can make you sick. (*Wunni sika a adwendwen sei yi bema wo ayare*).

Poverty can spoil a person. *Ohia see onipa*. Of course, with food and conversation, with people around you, you can feel very happy even without money. If you have your wife and children around you when you fall sick it does not have a serious effect on you (*Se yaree ka wo a entumi wo*). But with money and no people around you, you become miserable. I will never regret to be an old man, but without money and without people to care for and converse with you, even the soul in you becomes sick (*wo kra mpo wo ho a na eyare*). [Kwaku Nyame]

Money does not bring happiness to an *ɔpanyin*. It is the young who are always eager to get money. When you are an *ɔpanyin* money does not have much value to you. (*Se woye ɔpanyin a, wo ani mmere sika*). You always remember that money is the root of all evil (*bɔne nyinaa ti ne sika*). When my children are around and provide me with food it is enough for me. Now I have no plans to put up a building or buy a car, so I don't need money for anything.

Money is a young man (*Sika ye abrantee*). With money you can buy fashionable things that can make you look young. But at my age I don't have the desire to put on any fashionable cloth. Why should I? I don't want to appear like a young man because there is no need for it. The main reason why some people like to put on fine cloths is to attract men or women, but I don't need a woman for anything. Such things lead people to immoral practices. So at this age, even if I have only one cloth, I am happy with it. [Kwame Frempong]

## *Love and friendship*

The inscription on my house reads: *Onipa nua ne nea me no ka* (A person's brother is the one who loves him). If a brother does not love you there is nothing you can do. A person who loves you should be everything to you. No matter how a brother may be, you can't do away with him. (*Wɔye oo, wɔnye oo, worentumi mropa*). Whether a brother is good or bad, he will succeed you in the future, but a friend never will. At the same time, the love between friends can be deeper than the love between brothers. I have a friend and the love between us is more special than the one between my brother and me. I am able to disclose all my secrets to him (*Mitumi ne no ka atrimu sem*), something I don't do with my brother. I scarcely converse with my brother and at times our conversation ends in a quarrel. My friend and I are able to share one bed, eat together and even bathe with one bucket of water, something I don't do with my brother. All this is done out of love. (*Ne nyinaa ye ɔɔ*).

Love in friendship is the purest (*Adamfoɔ mu ɔɔ no na eye ɔɔ ankasa*). Because friends always pray that the other won't die or fall into trouble so that their friendship will last a long time. But it is the wish of some people that their brothers die so that they can take their belongings. Indeed, there is no pure love among brothers. Love in friendship is very deep and there is happiness in it.

Only the love between a husband and a wife equals it because the way one lives with a wife is special. She always guides you not to fall into trouble. There is a saying that when love diminishes disgrace takes over (*Se ɔɔ sa a na ato adapaa*). When there is love a wife does everything the husband will ask her to do. But when there is no love she may even not respond if you call her. She will respond by asking what should I do? (*Yee menyɛ den?*) But when there is love there is respect. When a person loves you he also respects you. Without love there is no respect. A wife's love comes first because you share the same pillow and the same bed with her. So if there is love, it will be deeper than friendship.

There is also love between a parent and a child, but some people don't love their children. It all depends on the individual. Some people love their children so much that they prefer to suffer in their place. Others don't care about what happens to their children.



Brothers show more love towards each other than sisters. Brothers are able to work together and use the income to do something in common. Sisters are able to do that, but most of the time it does not work out well. Two sisters can be in love with one man and when this happens there will be a conflict between them. Such things do not happen between brothers. Brothers are able to maintain their love. A person can send a brother to bring his lover a present and this seldom happens between sisters.

Friendship usually starts casually. It starts first with greetings which will later on develop into a conversation. This goes on for some time. Then it develops into full friendship. Friendship may end when one leaves the other and travels to a distant place. But even when such a thing happens friends are able to maintain their friendship by sending messages to one another. Friendship can last till death. I have seen such a friendship. I had one. We used to buy the same cloth. I informed him about my love affairs with women and he did the same. None of us travelled without telling the other. I became extremely sad when he died.

There are two major causes, which break a friendship: women and money. These two things mostly bring friendship to an abrupt end. When such a deep friendship breaks there is little chance for reconciliation.

Friendship can spoil someone's marriage, especially among women. Women friends like discussing the 'chop money' that their husbands give and other things. The woman who thinks she is receiving less money and fewer cloths from her husband may develop ill feelings towards him and this always leads to divorce.

Friendship between men can also spoil a marriage. It all depends on the friend's character. If one leads a good life and the friend is also good, a woman will never object to such a friendship. If a woman hears you are discussing problems with a friend, for example, how to look after the children and how to set up a profitable venture, she won't complain because it shows how good the friend is. But when your discussion is about drinking and other useless things it will worry the woman and this can lead to divorce.

Let me tell you about my own friendship. I saw that my friend did not like gossiping and that he respected himself. (*Obu ne ho*). I also saw that he was hard working. These qualities attracted me. Ever since we started our friendship we have been going on well. We plan how we can

look after our wives. My wife is aware of all these qualities in him so she receives him warmly whenever he is here and she feels happy when he is around. When we were young we used to help each other in clearing our farms (*Yedi nnɔboa*). But now that I am old I can't go to farm, but we visit one another frequently for conversation. When we meet we share our meals together. Even when I am not around and there is a problem with the children my wife contacts him for help. A friend is someone with whom you share secrets. [Kwame Opoku]

It is good to love. You are staying with somebody and you love him and he also shows love for you. If you love me and I love you we become one. If you talk to somebody who hates you, it annoys him and he starts quarrelling with you. That is not good. But the one who loves even when you offend him, he does not take it seriously. When he offends you, you also don't mind, that is love. When he cooks he gives you some to eat. When you cook you also give him something to eat. That is love. Love is being kind. When you meet your brother and he gets some money he gives you some of it. Then you know that he loves you. When I have money I also give him some. We become one. That is love. But if you have money and you don't give me part of it, that is not love.

When I gave birth to my children. I sent them to school. Some of them did not go. It was only one of them who attended school, so he is the one who cares for me. When he gets two thousand cedis he sends it to me. That is love. He cares for me so I like him very much. Those I cared for do not care for me, yet I do not hate them. I pray for them. One of them has come back home sick. I have not rejected him; I care for him and I always pray that he recovers. He even attends the Catholic Church. If you have cared for a child, he also cares for you, the parent. That means he loves you and you also love him/her. But the one who scolds you does not love you and you also don't love him. When this happens the only thing you can do is to pray to God that he will change so that you become one.

A mother loves her own child most because it is her own blood that brought the child to life. It is God who put the seed into her womb for nine months. When the child is born she feeds it with her breast. It is her blood that brings him up so if the child grows, it is his responsibility to care for his mother. When he is young it is the mother who directs the child: "You should not go here or there because of these reasons. Listen to my advice. If you take my advice, all will be well for you."

It is through a man that a woman becomes pregnant by the grace of God. So if the man cares for the child, the child will also grow and love the father. Some of the men do not care for their children, others do. Some men join their wives and care for their children. Some men shirk responsibilities and the burden goes to the mother. The father will not take care of the child's education. If the father takes good care of his child, the child will love the father, but if he does not, he will have more love for the mother.

When you marry a woman you become one with her. You love her and she also loves you. You see to it that she does not become hungry. There are others who marry but later become enemies; others marry and love everything about you, even excuse me to say, your sex organ. He loves your cloth, your body and your sex. That is love and the two of you become free. There are others that even if you talk to them, they become angry and insult you. You may even be surprised at being insulted in that way. When you are hungry he will not give you money to cook with, yet if you cook, he will eat. That person does not marry you with love.

A woman who loves her husband does not let him go hungry. Even if the man does not have money, she will cook and give him some of the food to eat. I remember what happened one day. My husband was not there. When he came I had prepared food for him. He asked how I had managed to get money and I told him that I had my own money. When my husband ran short of money I used my own money to cook.

During our days together we showed each other real love. We stayed with our husbands alone, but the women today leave their husbands and go after other men. This is the practice of women today. When we were young we were not doing that. Our husbands could leave us for over a year, yet we never followed other men. But some of these children can't abstain for a week. We really loved our husbands.

In those days, although parents married for their children, there was real love, especially for the beautiful ones. Some refused to take ugly wives. In our days it could happen that somebody staying in Accra or Europe would request that his parents marry for him. At that time they used to examine certain things, for example, if there was any illness, if she had a good character and was hard working. The man would then be invited to come and marry her. Then the father performed the customary rites. But sometimes they refused to marry the woman that their parents had chosen.

Today's marriages do not last. Even when a man is with the wife the woman leaves the husband and goes to visit another man. In our days it was not like that. If the husband had anything against you, you had to stay until he sent you to your father. When you go they will ask "Did she steal your things?" When you marry, you marry. You are made to swear the oath, Kwasi Atia Mfia, which says that when the woman gets anything good, for example, wealth, she sends it to her parents. When she runs into debt it is the man who pays for it.

There is a difference between *Medɔ wo* (I love you) and *Mepe wo* (I like you). When someone tells you he likes you it is not very good because 'I like you' does not last. The like vanishes, but when one loves someone it lasts forever. For example, when it is dry season the leaves become dry. It is when it rains that the weeds begin to grow. As for love, it is always there.

In the olden days a man had several reasons for marrying more than one wife. He may get one woman who is good in washing and tidying up the house. Another woman may be very good in cooking and the other may be good in 'sleeping'. These were some of the reasons why some men married many wives. Sex was very important. Some like it very much. When a man marries three women, he has three tongues. Wherever he goes he goes to tell sweet stories to make the woman believe that he loves her the most. He will also go to the others and tell similar sweet stories to make them believe that he loves each one of them the most. He will not tell anything to the 'rivals' (*akorafɔ*).

Some men who have money may decide to marry as many wives as they want. The rich man may tell the wives who don't agree that they can leave. One of the women may detect that the man loves the other two more than he loves her. She may decide to ask for a divorce. Another woman may stay in spite of the maltreatment because she has children with him. She will continue to endure all the hardships and stay like that until death separates them.

A man can marry two wives, but a woman can't marry two husbands. That is how God made it: that a woman should get one husband. A woman can marry a second husband only after she has divorced the first one. A man on the other hand can marry as many women as he likes. It is God who made it so I have heard that in Europe men and women sometimes show love in public. They can kiss, hold hands and embrace each other in the street. We don't do that. Our

custom does not teach that. Their custom is different. We feel shy to do so. You may see a man holding the hand of his wife, but kissing the wife in public is not good. It is shameful. God did not create us like that in this country. You may have sex in the room and during the course of it, you may kiss her but not in public. That is shameful. If you are staying with your wife in the house, why do you have to kiss her in public? Their custom is not good. Ours is very good. It is because we have to respect each other. It is in bars and hotels that some people may do so while drinking, but you can't do it in public. That practice is never good.

There may be people who love their friends more than their wives, but friendship does not last. Marriage on the other hand lasts. It is your wife who usually cares for you. When you are sick, she is there. When you are dying, she is there.

Frankly, there is more enjoyment in friendship than in marriage. What your wife will do you may not like, but you will like whatever your lover (*mpena*) does. I have had lovers some years ago and really, there is enjoyment in it. Your lover gives you better treatment. However she does so with fear. She fears that your wife may start a fight with her when the affair becomes known. However, if there is no quarrel, then you will feel happy. There is always interesting conversation. In marriage you may not converse so nicely. The man may not have much time for his wife. Instead of appearing nicely before going to bed he goes to drink. But when going to visit his girlfriend he will not drink before sleeping. He goes with clear eyes and converses a lot. It is a sweet conversation. However, if it does not last, you will have to go back to your wife eventually.

When you love somebody you may love him to the end. You may also love somebody and getting to the middle of it, the love is lost. Others love until death separates them. My first husband, for instance, I loved him and it was only death that separated us. He loved me as I loved him. He used to give me a cloth every six months, during Christmas and in the middle of the year, but I did not love him merely because he provided for my needs. No, not only that. I believe that it was the work of God. Just after he had declared his love to me I also began to love him. God blessed it. When he died I felt miserable.

There is a difference between the love men have for women and the love women have for men. Men usually do not give their love to one woman. They visit other women. They may compare the character of the

new girl friend with that of the old one and decide to stay with the new one. There are some women who are called *bediivaa*. They come only to consume. They come to demand while other women are prepared to stay even if the man is poor.

Just as a man can't stay with one woman, so some women can't stay with one man. A pregnant woman who gets to know that the man who made her pregnant is incapable of taking care of her may even give the baby in the womb to another man. She will drive the man away denying that he was the one who put her in the family way. Some men also detect that the women are not stable and they refuse to accept the pregnancy of their girl friend. That is the character of the present generation. Some men drive their girlfriends away when they become pregnant. The girls attempt to abort the child and meet their death. Men are wicked and dishonest. Many young men today put women in the family way and refuse to take care of them.

A reason why couples divorce is that the man fails to take good care of the woman, for example, he does not give her cloths. Some women prefer going naked without a husband rather having a husband and going naked anyway. Another reason could be that a woman may refuse to help her husband to do his job. Perhaps she did not go to farm with the man or refused to wash his clothes. Some women were lazy; some men too were lazy. They would not go to farm. Some divorced simply because they had lost their love for the other. And finally, childbirth is another reason for divorce. When the two do not get issues, it sometimes causes divorce. The fault could come from either of the two. They may separate and try to have children by someone else. [Mary Dedaa]

Everything depends on love. If you are rich, but the woman does not love you she won't care about your money. When you marry and have nice children, when you manage to have your daily bread, you don't owe anyone and you lead a respectable life, you are bound to be happy with your wife. When you have no worries and no lack of food you will enjoy life. But the most important thing in marriage is love. [Kwame Opoku]

When there is love your wife will look attractive to you no matter how old she is or how long you have lived together. But when there is no love you may even feel annoyed when she speaks to you.

Men have the habit of regarding everything new as beautiful (*Ade foforo biaera ye fe*). When you stay for a long time with your wife you become so used to one another that sometimes it seems as if you are brother and sister. So it is normal that you may have a desire for a new woman instead of your wife no matter how beautiful she is. One thing is that the woman who is new to one man can be the discarded wife of another man. No matter how old a woman is, when a man marries her, the man will say I have married a new wife. *Maware foforo*. It is possible that a man may have a desire for a woman far older than his wife just because she is new to him. [Kwame Opoku]

The elders say: "It has come to its sweetest point" (*Mpanyinfo ka se, eyi na abi ato de*). When there were children they used to disturb you a lot. When you stop having children there is the time for joy. Whenever you meet you can enjoy freely. (*Bere biara mohyia a, se moagye mo ani*). [Kwame Opoku]

It is wrong for an old person to go about chasing men or women. The respectable thing is to marry and stay together happily. No young person will seek advice from an old person who goes after men or women. They will call you *akwakoraa bome* 'bad old man'. When you grow old, you should try and maintain good morals. Old age is precious and all your actions should be worthy of an old person.

If you give a woman something and sleep with her, what about your food? Who will cook for you? Who will wash your own things and who will give you water to bathe? Your relatives will even be annoyed with you and children will refuse to go if you send them. The best thing for an old man is to have a wife to help him do other things. What we know is that an old man should have a wife. Then, in the evening, you enter your room, converse together and think about the children. [Kwame Opoku]

It is many years ago that I slept behind a man (*medaa barima akyi*). When you grow old you begin to change and when you are changing you also change your character. Sex is a type of work that you should stop when you grow old. However, there are some old people who still like it. I do not have the taste for it now. It is not something we need like we need food. A nurse once came to teach us that there is no need for a

woman to run after a man. What is important is that you should eat a little in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening. That will help you to be healthy. Good health is not maintained by having sex with a man.

When an old man is staying with an old woman in marriage, that is different. When one day you are there with your husband and he likes to come to you, you will agree, but that is different. Once in a while if the old man wants to do it, you may allow him. If the man loses his sexual power, you may allow him to play with you. The woman remembers his strength when he was young so she will know how to stay with him and play with him. If the man secretly takes another woman, I will not say anything. If a man has the feeling and goes out, I will not say anything. If you don't mind him, he will pamper you and provide you with your needs. [Yaa Amponsah]

When I was young I used to engage in sex, but now that I am old I have stopped doing it. I don't have a husband now, but I stopped sleeping with my husband quite a long time before he died because he was weak. If he had had the strength and desire to do it regularly, I would have responded. I would also have allowed him to go for another woman. I would have explained to him that whenever I had the strength for it I would let him know. Making love is a tiring work for a woman because the man is strong. When I was young I was able to do it twice a night but now I am old and don't have a man. *Matwa mu*. (I have passed the stage).

Some men who are impotent permit their wives to go out and have pleasure with other men. All they need is that the wife comes back, to bathe them and sleep with them and to play with them (*di agoru*).

The desire for sex stays longer in women than in men (*εmaa dee yen ho nnwo ntem*). It is because of waist problems that I don't have a desire for it. Do you notice how I walk? It is due to waist problems. Otherwise I would still do it. It has reached its sweetest point (*Eyi na abi ato ɔde*). That is what people say. If you have a husband, you can do it, but not always. Some people like it and they do it till they are very old. Even when they are old and without a husband, they look for a man. Some old women try to look young to attract men and succeed in doing so till they die. They won't have children any more so they pretend to be young through their dress and take men just for the joy of it.



A person may like someone and have a desire to have sex with that person because of physical appearance. That is not love. A person can also love someone, but because of physical appearance may not like to have sex with him or her. Anyway, some manage to maintain their love in spite of the physical appearance of the other partner.

If children prevent their old fathers from marrying again after the death of their mother, it is because of jealousy. They feel jealous of another woman joining them in their father's house. Let me tell you something. Sometime ago I came and stayed in this town for three years while my husband was not here and a certain man proposed love to me. When I told him that I had a husband he advised me to go back to him or divorce him so that I could have another man. If I do not do so, I will fall sick. I was then very strong and able to work. I could look after myself and did not need the assistance of a man, financially or otherwise. So I didn't take his advice. I stayed for five years without a man and then I fell sick. I was all the time feeling dizzy and weak. It was only after I had gone to my husband that I recovered. By then I had not yet stopped menstruating. So if you are fit to sleep with a man and you abstain from it, you can fall sick. (*Se wonsaree na se wogyae sbarima nna a, ebebo wo yare*). But if your time has passed and you refuse to do it, it won't worry you very much.

An old person cannot keep the qualities which made him attractive when he was young. The skin will by all means develop wrinkles. (*Wo honam beye ntwutwo-ntwutwo*). As you grow older your beauty diminishes. Only some people look beautiful ('don't spoil') to the end. (*Ebi wa ho a wonsee kosi se wubewu*). They keep themselves neat (*Wodi wam ho ni*). If I have money to buy a cloth and if I bathe and wear a cloth, I will by all means look beautiful. The way a person talks or dances can determine beauty. During funerals I sing playful songs, which make people admire me and they come around me and we joke and laugh. When you are dancing, someone can say: "Oh this woman is old, but look how beautifully she is dancing." [Mary Dedaa]

If a woman has her own house and she loves her husband, she will go and stay with him in his house. If she does not, it means that the love is gone (*Adi no ka*). If you don't want your father to marry after the death of his wife, it means you don't respect him. Any child who behaves like that does not respect his father. No child should impose his will on his

father. I will never allow my children to impose their will on me. (*Merentumi mma me ba biara nhye me so*). When they do so it means they don't love their father.

When old people who are friends meet they may talk about sex. They talk about what we call 'nonsense about sex' (*yetumi di nsem hunu ho nkɔm*). No old person can talk about sex to his own children. And no child can ask him a question about sex. But an old woman can advise a young girl who is newly married what she should do to the husband, for example, about cooking. She will not teach her how they should sleep together. Some women teach the young girls about medicine that they insert in their private part to make sex more enjoyable for their husbands.

If you marry and you are not able to sleep with the woman, she will never be happy. There is nothing he can do. The woman won't stay with him unless he allows her to go and sleep with other men. There is nothing else he can do. A marriage in which the man can't sleep with the woman can never be a happy one. [Kwaku Nyame]

An old person who is weak in his bones can't sleep satisfactorily with a woman. (*Worentumi ne ɔbea nhyia*) (You and the woman cannot meet). An old person can never be as strong as a young person, but in case you have the strength befitting an old person you can sleep with a woman. Without strength a woman will only stay with a man if he can look after her properly. The things they do in bed (*senea wobedi ayensin*), playing and other things, can give him pleasure. (*Ebema n'ani agye*).

It all depends on the person. There are some young men who don't have interest in sex and they don't care about women. But a person like me, in spite of my age, can't stay without a wife. I like to have a woman with me always. So someone like me always enjoys the company of a woman. When the woman becomes aware of your desire she is prepared to do whatever you want. All this can be achieved depending on the care that you give to her. No woman will do such things with an impotent man if he does not look well after her. If you look after her properly, she will do whatever you ask her to do and no one will know you are impotent. [Kwame Opoku]

### *Building a house*

If you have thousands and thousands of cedis, a thief can come for it and take it all in a single night. But a thief can't steal a house. So no matter how much 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 so and so. You will never hear someone mentioning the amount of money a dead person left behind. We only hear about the buildings he left.

I know a certain man from Obo 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. 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 respect 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.

I built the house I am living in. 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 to build the house. So anyone coming to the house would say, "I am going to Kwaku Nyame's house." The cocoa farm was destroyed by fire just as I finished building the house. One of my nephews who is overseas sent in money that was used to construct the concrete structure around the house to protect it against erosion. If I had not built the house, my nephews, nieces and grandchildren would not have cared for me as much as they do now.

It is painting that makes a building look nice. After you have finished the painting, the house is complete. (*Se wo 'penti' edan pe 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 will never notice that it is a swish building. Only a certain portion was built with cement blocks.

Apart from the painting, glass can make a building look nice. In fact, the combination of glass windows and nice paint makes a building look very beautiful. If you see a house with glass doors and windows you realise that the owner has really put up a building.

People with houses have better funerals than those without a house. If you don't have a house, any kind of funeral can be organised for you. *Se wunnii edan a yeye ayie no biara biara a, se woko wo baabi.* Just think about the man from Abene who died here recently. I heard of his death in the evening and the next day he was buried. It would never have happened to a person with a house.

Building a house is the most important thing. (*Ne nyinaa ne se wasi edan*). Do you think your nephew will announce 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. No matter what you possess, without a building it is nothing. When a very worthy person dies, no matter how much 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. If you have children and they don't have a place to sleep, what is the value of it? Everything points to building a house. (*Ne nyinaa kowie edan*). [Kwaku Nyame]

It is difficult to put up a building, so therefore anyone who manages to build one 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 the *abusua fie*. Children and a house are the most important things in a person's life.

A person's money is in his own possession (*Obi sika wo ne nko ara 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 someone. 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".

Even during your death you will be laid in state in a house. So money is good, but a house is the most valuable thing. No matter what your position is outside your home you will not receive full respect if you fail to put up a house in your hometown. [Kwame Opoku]

## *Death*

I am not afraid of death. (*Owuo? Minsuro no*). God created me so when the time comes and He calls me I will go peacefully. Whatever a person does, he will go. Death is something God has arranged. He says the longest time a person can live is seventy years and whatever would be added to it is a gift from Him. Death is the time for a person to go. It is something that has been laid down. (*Eye ade a eda ho*). It is God who called him so he has to go to Him. If you follow His ways, you will go to Him. He created us to serve him so that when he calls us we can go to Him peacefully.

I don't know where a person who does not go to God will go. I can't tell. But I know a man who lived at Bepong many years ago. He did a lot of bad things so he suffered before he died. Before his death he was telling everyone who visited him to do good. Such a man is going to account for his deeds over there. He is going to the town of the devil (*ɔbonsam kuro mu*). His mind was not on Jesus.

Some people reveal some things for everyone to see when they die (*Obi wo ho a owu a, oyi neema bi ma obiara hu*). When I was at Kukurantumi something happened. A certain man was at the point of death and he invited his wife and children to his bed and told them that he was going because God was meeting him. He advised them to do good so that they would come to where he was going. After that he joined them in a prayer and then he died.

After the death of some people their children and grandchildren become free from all kinds of troubles that they had suffered for a long time. Such a peaceful condition too can be the will of God.

Some children are born who look like a departed relative. When such a thing happens people take it to be the same relative who has returned. I have seen it. It is something created by God. In the same house with you can have a child who resembles you. It is the work of God. (*Eye Onyame abode*). If a person stays for a long time in the same house with you, she can have a child that resembles you. It is the work of God. I have been seeing it, but I can't tell why.

People fear death because when they go they won't come back. Some too are afraid because they could not complete what they had

planned to do. Others fear because it is painful to leave their children and grandchildren. No matter what a person does, he will die, but it is better to go in the right way. (*Hwe skwan pa a wobefa so aka*). Some people suffer a lot in bed. Maybe it is a kind of punishment from God (*Ebia na Onyankopon retwe n'aso wo asase yi so ansa*) because of their wrongdoing. What I know is that people who lead good lives die without much suffering (*Nea mahu ne se obiara a nye neema a ennye no, se Onyankopon fre no a, zfre no ferew na aka ne baabi*). [Yaa Amponsaa]

I am never troubled by the thought of death. At this age you don't fear death, you rather look forward to it. What we are always afraid of is to have to lie in bed for a long time while people have to help us with a lot of things. When Master Mensah [one of his friends] was alive his motto was *Na anka hwere* (I wish it would happen in a flash), which at his age meant that he was looking forward to a quick death. He was lucky and almost had it so. So you see, an old person is never afraid or worried about death.

When you grow old death does not disturb you because you realise that by all means you will die one day. So I am not afraid of death at all. But what you mostly think of is the manner in which you may die, whether it will be a proper way or a bad way. Concerning death, let us consider this example. In the forest we sometimes find an old tree that is dead without any visible sign that something has happened to it. If you have a close look at it you discover that it was not burnt. It just died because the end of its life had come. It is the same with a man. No matter what happens, you are bound to die one day. So as you grow old you look forward to death without any fear.

A good death is when a person grows old and dies peacefully. A bad death is when a person dies at a tender age because of his wrongdoing. We say: *wabu abugyen* (he has been broken/died suddenly). It was not time for the person to die, but due to something he died. A person is bound to die, but some die early as a result of the kind of life they have led. If you die because of the wrongs you committed against others, it is not a proper death and it did not occur because your time was due. [Kwame Frempong]

There are times when a young person may die while an old person remains alive. So I don't think about death. When the time comes you

have to go. When you see that you are old and may die anytime you must make the necessary arrangements to avoid problems after your death. For example, you can choose your successor. After proper arrangements (*Wo toto wo neema wie a*), you are not afraid if death will come in the morning, afternoon or evening. What I am afraid of is to have to lie in bed for a long time with sickness, but if you become old and die peacefully, it is a nice thing (*eye anigye dea koraa*).

The thought of death does not frighten me. Whether you are afraid or not you will die. You should not worry about your death (*ense se wo fi wo ho se wobewu koraa*). As long as you grow old you must die so there is no need to be afraid. Some people do a lot of bad things and that makes them suffer for a very long time before they die. They are punished before they die. They wish to die to be relieved, but they don't get it because of their wrongdoing. Some people have a part of their body rotten, but they don't die because they are being punished.

Death is something ordered by God so it is difficult to understand how it is. (*Eye Onyame nhyehyee enti wunbu n'ani so*). But according to you Christians, you say God did not create man to die, but that it was the fault of Adam that brought death to the world. It is something arranged by God so it is difficult to understand.

A person is buried after death and he does not know what happens next. We have been saying that after the death of a good person he goes to a good place *baabi pa*. If you do bad things you can't go to a good place (*worentumi nko baabi pa*). Therefore you will be roaming about. I have never died so I don't know what it looks like, but that is what we hear (laughing). It is a saying, but no one has been there to know the truth. We have to take it so. [Kwame Opoku]

Pouring libation to the ancestors is a custom that we perform. It is like preparing food for the departed spirits (*nsaman duane*). They don't come to eat it, but we still do it. We usually eat it ourselves in the evening. There is a power in libation that is derived from some kind of spirits (*ewo ho na aye sunsum bi*). [It looked as if the *Okyeame* was not sure of what he was saying.] If you look at things clearly, the person is no longer around here when he dies. Either he may go to God, or he may be roaming somewhere. No one can tell where the spirits reside. Some people are able to send a message after their death (*se obi wu a otumi kyere biribi*). For example, they can show where they have hidden some valuable



things. Someone could be possessed by the *asaman* of the dead person and through him the message is delivered (*asaman no tumi besi obi so ma aka*). People who die prematurely usually deliver messages through that means and are able to tell the cause of their death. We just remember the ancestors through libation, but my personal belief is that they can't help.

After his death a person profits from the good things he did on earth. People to whom he showed kindness during his life will attend his funeral and help the relatives by contributing towards the funeral. If the person was a wrong doer, he will be punished. He won't get the chance of going to God. That is what we call *ntfofo*. He will be roaming and appearing to people and frightening them. There is a reward for whatever you do, good or bad.

Some people are afraid because of their wrong doings. The slightest illness worries them because they are afraid they may die because of some wrongs they have committed. But if you have done nothing wrong, there is no fear of death. If you have done nothing wrong, there will be no fear in you.

A good death is when a person dies a natural death after putting his life right (*Wo toto wo neema nyinaa wie na ebere no so na wuwu a, eye owu pa*). Yes when your time comes and you die it is God who has called you so there is nothing wrong with that. That is why it is good to do good and die peacefully.

A certain young woman recently died here. Because of her bad ways, I understand it is impossible for a person to sleep in the room she had lived in. She has been appearing and frightening the people in the house. I consider such a death not to be a good death. I think she died because of her wrongdoing. Because of that, she cannot go to God or a good place. (*Ne bone nti ontumi nko Onyankopon ho anaa baabi pa*). She is roaming about. A bad death (*owu bone*) is when a person poisons himself, hangs himself or shoots himself with a gun.

Nobody should give someone who is suffering something to drink so that he dies. It would be wrong to do that. (*Woye saa a, woaye bone*). Maybe the one has done something wrong and God is punishing him. In such a case, if you do that, his sins will come upon you. I have never seen it happening. If you do that, the person's sins will come upon you. If people say they act out of sympathy when they help their mother die peacefully because she is in great pain and will never get well again, they lie. It is not true that you are sympathetic. It is because you are tired of

caring for her. You don't know why she is not dying, so if you help her to die, you are wrong. You will be responsible for her death. You should allow a person to live till the time he will pass away himself. A person who looked after his children very well will never experience such a thing because they will do their best to make you comfortable till you die. But if you did not look after them, how can they care for you when you are sick? [Kwame Opoku]

There is a proverb which says: *Se wuwu ansa na wo hia ne wo sika dan adi* (Your money or poverty becomes public after your death). This means that a person may look quite wealthy during his lifetime, but after his death people and the banks will start asking the *abusua* to pay some of the debts he owes.

When he was alive nobody knew he was poor. It is other people who open a person's box after his death, something he alone did during his lifetime. Whatever is inside is made public and it is possible that a person whom many people thought was very poor proves to be rich. There is another proverb with the same meaning: *Apɔnkyerene wu a, na wohu ne tenten* (It is only after its death that we see how long the frog is).

Another proverb, which reminds us of death, goes like this: *Obi nnidi mma ne were mfi owu* (When eating you should not forget death). This means: However happy a person may be he should not forget about death. It can happen that at your happiest moment in life, when you have slaughtered a cow and are enjoying your meal, death can make you leave it. So a person should always remember death and do well.

Death is strong! Another proverb says: *ɔdomankoma bɔɔ owuo maa owuo faa no* (God created death but death took him). It shows how strong death is. It is a warning to us that even God who created death had to die. Therefore, no matter what position we find ourselves in, rich or poor, we shall die one day. The drums (*atumpan*) always announce it. [Kwame Opoku]

## *Funerals*

After a person's death it is the duty of the *abusua* and children to perform the funeral, but sometimes it happens that the children alone take it upon themselves to provide the money for the funeral. In fact, it all depends on how you were able to care for your children. If a person led a good life and was able to help some relatives and children during his life, there is no problem with his funeral. Such a person will have a glorious death. (*Onipa a ste saa no nya owuo no mu animuonyam*).

Good care during one's life is more important than good care after one's death. After one's death it does not benefit the dead person. If a person dies and people refuse to bury him or give him a proper funeral, it does not have any effect on the dead person. But when the person is alive he feels the effect of neglect. So it is better to care for an old or sick person than to spend a lot of money on his funeral. There is a proverb that says a dead person does not care if his buttocks are exposed. (*Nea wawu nnim kata wo to*). This means: When a person dies he does not know anymore what is happening, so he does not care about what you do to him. It is rather the people who are alive who can be disgraced by their actions, not the dead person. This means that if no proper funeral is held for a person, it is the relatives and children who are disgraced, not the dead person. When such a thing happens, you hear people commenting and blaming the relatives and children for not giving the dead person a fitting funeral. But one point is that if a person takes good care of his children he will by all means get a fitting burial. Even the friends of his children will help with the funeral. If the deceased has offered assistance to some relatives, they too will contribute to make the funeral a success.

There are some of my relatives, nephews and nieces I have not seen for years. They don't pay any visits to me now, but the moment I die you will hear them crying: "Oh! My uncle is dead." They will start to make all sorts of arrangements to come home for my funeral. It shows that they love my dead body (*efunu*) more than my living body. Sometimes a group of people may arrange to buy the same cloth to wear during someone's funeral. All this proves that people love *efunu* more than the living person. That is why we give the proverb *Abusua do efunu* (The

*abusua* loves a dead body). When a person is alive people don't mind him. The person may go hungry, but as soon as he dies people start making elaborate arrangements for his funeral. [Kwame Opoku]

People spend much on funerals instead of using the money to look after the person when he is alive. It is not a good practice, but it has become a tradition. When someone dies and the relatives do not spend money people will talk about it. Moreover, funerals are organised by the bereaved families; it is a collective effort and everybody contributes his or her share. Even if people incur debts after the funeral, it is shared among the family members so they don't mind spending so much on funerals. Of course, the same family could have contributed collectively to look after a sick relative while he was alive, but it does not happen. It is a wrong practice, but it has become a bridge that everybody must walk on (*Eye mfomso, nanso, akɔye twene da ho a ese se obiara fa so*). [Kwame Frempong]

My father used to say that you should treat the sickness of a sick relative to justify your sorrow when he dies. *Se wo ni yare a, sa no yare, na se owu na wo ani bere a, na eye*. If you neglected someone during his life, why do you hold an expensive funeral after his death? Some do so for their 'name'. They want people to praise them and it also is a means for them to get money. At such funerals the people who perform them invite a lot of their friends and they donate handsome amounts of money to them.

To the wealthy it is a disgrace if a person does not perform a big funeral for his departed relative or father, but to a common person it does not matter. It is the position of the deceased during his life that should determine the size of his funeral. If he was hard working and left some properties, there is nothing wrong if a big funeral is held for him, but if he left nothing behind but debts, there is no need to hold an expensive funeral. [Kwame Opoku]



*Appendix*

*Anthropological publications*

All publications listed below have been written by Sjaak van der Geest on the basis of anthropological fieldwork in Kwahu-Tafo. The research was carried out with the help of many people: Kwame Fosu, Samuel Sarkodie, Patrick Atuobi, Anthony Obeng Boamah, Benjamin Boadi, Yaw Darko Ansah, Kofi Ron Lange, *Abusuapanyin* Daniel Osei Yeboah, Martin Asamoah, Michael Buabeng, Isaac Oppong, Abena Jo, Abena Ansah, Marek Dabrowski, Grzegorz Kubowicz, Monica Amoako and many others, in particular the elders who shared their knowledge, memories and concerns with the researchers.

- 1995 Old people and funerals in a rural Ghanaian community: Ambiguities in family care. *Southern African Journal of Gerontology* 4 (2): 33-40.
- 1996 The elder and his elbow: Twelve interpretations of an Akan proverb. *Research in African Literatures* 27 (3): 110-18.
- 1997 Between respect and reciprocity: Managing old age in rural Ghana. *Southern African Journal of Gerontology* 6 (2): 20-25.
- 1997 Money and respect: The changing value of old age in rural Ghana. *Africa* 67 (4): 534-59.
- 1998 *Yebisa wo fie*: Growing old and building a house in the Akan culture of Ghana. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 13 (4): 333-59.
- 1998 *panyin*: The ideal of elder in the Akan culture of Ghana. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32 (4):449-93.
- 2000 Funerals for the living: Conversations with elderly people in Ghana. *African Studies Review*. 43 (3): 103-29.
- 2001 'No strength': Sex and old age in a rural town in Ghana. *Social Science & Medicine* 53 (10): 1383-96.
- 2002 Respect and reciprocity: Care of elderly people in rural Ghana: *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 17 (1): 3-31.
- 2002 The toilet: Dignity, privacy and care of elderly people in Kwahu, Ghana. In: S. Makoni, & K. Stroeken (eds) *Multiple perspectives on aging in African gerontology*. London: Ashgate, pp. 227-44.
- 2002 "I want to go!" How elderly people in Ghana look forward to death. *Ageing & Society* 22 (1): 7-28.

- 2002 From wisdom to witchcraft: Ambiguity of old age in rural Ghana. *Africa* 72 (3): 437-463.
- 2004 Dying peacefully: Considering good death and bad death in Kwahu-Tafo, Ghana. *Social Science & Medicine* 58 (5): 899-911.
- 2004 Grandparents and grandchildren in Kwahu, Ghana: The performance of respect. *Africa* 74 (1): 47-61.
- 2004 "They don't come to listen": The experience of loneliness among older people in Kwahu, Ghana. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 19 (2): 77-96.
- n.d. "It is a tiresome work." Love and sex in the life of an elderly Kwahu woman. In C. Oppong & Y.P.A Oppong (eds) *Sex, work and survival: Gendered struggles and coping strategies in Ghana*. In press.
- n.d. *Between death and funeral Mortuaries and the exploitation of liminality in Kwahu, Ghana*. In press.
- n.d. *Respect, reciprocity, respect. Growing old in Kwahu, Ghana*. (Book in preparation).

