

# From *Pato* to Parlor. Domesticity, Masculinity, Religious Space, and Alternative Archives in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Ghana

Stephan F. Miescher

## RESÜMEE

### Stephan F. Miescher: Vom *pato* zur Wohnstube. Häuslichkeit, Männlichkeit, religiöser Raum und alternative Archive im Ghana des 20. Jahrhunderts

Die Missionare, die vor 150 Jahren im heutigen Südwest-Ghana ankamen, fanden eine Form häuslicher Architektur vor, die weitgehend von Gender-Prinzipien geprägt war. Jeder, der es sich leisten konnte, baute in seinem Gehöft einen auf drei Seiten geschlossenen Plattform (*pato*), wo er Besucher empfangen konnte. Ebenfalls wichtig war der Raum, in dem die sakralen Hocker der matrilinearen Ahnen aufbewahrt wurden. Mit der Ausbreitung des Christentums im frühen 20. Jahrhundert entstand eine neue Klasse gebildeter Männer, die zwar im Einklang mit den Forderungen der Missionare zusammen mit der Ehefrau und den Kindern in einem Haus wohnten, aber innerhalb davon eine Stube hatten, die einen männlichen Raum darstellte. Sie übernahm sowohl die Funktion des sakralen Hockerraums (sie war mit christlicher Ikonographie geschmückt und diente unter anderem als Gebetsraum) als auch die des Besucherraums. Dieser Wandel in der Architektur widerspiegelte den Übergang zu einem neuen Männertypus.

Calling on retired teachers and catechists in Akan towns of southern Ghana during the 1990s, I was frequently led into their formal sitting rooms. These parlors, usually quite dark, were furnished with prestige objects like bookcases, wall clocks, radios, tables, and chairs. Displaying their collection of books and papers underlined these men's "bookish" knowledge and marked them as members of the *akrakyefoo*: clerks, teachers, store-managers, accountants, and pastors. Such domestic interiors were important sites in these men's lives. There they welcomed visitors, offered advice to family members, fulfilled their responsibilities as male elders, and practiced their religious belief as member of Christian churches. These spaces revealed their social status. Some had elaborate parlors

including a comfortable couch and television set, others had merely a cabinet with notebooks and paper, a couple of chairs and a small table that served many purposes. Here I explore these domestic interiors as personal religious spaces, as sites of memory, and – inspired by Antoinette Burton – their contents as alternative archives of Akan men’s gendered subjectivities.

In her book, *Dwelling in the Archive*, Burton presents a compelling analysis of how three Indian elite women wrote about home and domestic architecture, its symbolic meanings and material realities, in order to claim for themselves “a place in history at the intersection of the public and the private, the personal and the political, the national and the postcolonial.”<sup>1</sup> Burton argues that the three women – Janaki Majumdar, Cornelia Sorabji, and Attia Hosain – used domestic spaces as an archival source to narrate their own histories and historical contradictions while living within the context of colonial modernity. These texts about memories of home form an alternative archive in two ways: as a source of historical evidence about individual women’s lives, as well as a historiographical opportunity for the present which reveals “a variety of counterhistories of colonial modernities.”<sup>2</sup> *Dwelling* appears to be in part a response to the anxious “archive fever” that British imperial historians such as Burton have encountered when they ventured beyond the confines of the official archive, established by colonial rulers for the collection of data and the production of knowledge about colonial subjects.<sup>3</sup> Imperial historians, according to Burton, have been fierce defenders of an archive-based history in order to save the historical project from corrupting influences such as cultural studies, feminist theory, and postcolonialism.<sup>4</sup> Addressing the larger profession Burton asserts that archival work in far-away places has remained for many academic historians the benchmark by which to assess the quality of their colleagues’ work, be it in job talks, appointments, and promotions.<sup>5</sup> Burton’s comments about the “truth-fantasy of the total archive,”<sup>6</sup> as well as her concerns about working outside state repositories are not so pertinent for Africa’s modern historians, who are accustomed to looking for sources beyond the state archive. The difference has less to do with a genuine open-mindedness with regard to new historiographical trends among Africanists and more to do with the field’s origins, at least in its English-language rendition.

1 A. Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*, Oxford 2003, p. 4.

2 Ibid., p. 5.

3 For an elaboration of this anxiety, see Burton’s “Epilogue: Archival Fever and the Panopticon of History,” *ibid.*, 137-44; cf. J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz, Chicago 1996.

4 Burton, *Dwelling* (note 1), p. 141. Burton (*Dwelling*, 177n) refers to the *Oxford History of the British Empire* (ed. R. Louis, Oxford 1998–99), and lists the contributions by C. A. Bayly, D. A. Washbrook, and A. G. Hopkins in Volume 5, *Historiography*, ed. R. W. Winks; see also the comment by Winks who, as an “empirical historian,” fears for the new cultural history that “more and more books and articles will lack a firm foundation in primary sources,” *ibid.*, 666-67.

5 Burton, *Dwelling* (note 1), 139. For the “Archive Fever Proper,” the historian’s quest for original sources and occupational hazards experienced during archival work, see C. Steedman, *Something She Called a Fever*: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust, in: *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (2001): 1159-80.

6 Burton, *Dwelling* (note 1), p. 142.

In colonial Ghana domestic spaces were not merely gendered female. Rather, among colonial middle figures such as teachers, catechists, and clerks the sitting room blurred boundaries between private and public. As part of the home's inner sanctum with limited access, the sitting room served as a place for members of literate groups to meet their peers. When *akrakyefoo* gathered, the parlor became a male space that excluded women and children, especially if they were illiterate. In the parlor these literate men formulated, debated, and lived discourses of modernities, constructed and presented selves. The parlor also became a place of worship, either collectively during prayer meetings associated with churches, or individually when literate men devoted time to reading the Bible and personal prayer. Some men transformed these domestic spaces into archives, where they preserved material objects and personal papers in order to produce their understandings of the past and create histories for the present.

In colonial Ghana, a school leaver with a Standard VII education was called *krakye* (pl. *akrakyefoo*), derived from English "clerk" and usually translated as "scholar." Following the expansion of the education system in the 1920s, the numbers of *akrakyefoo* rose dramatically.<sup>7</sup> These "scholars" – in colonial writing frequently derided as merely half-educated – belonged to intermediary classes.<sup>8</sup> They were neither part of the chiefly elites, the "traditional rulers" in charge of local administration under indirect rule, nor did they belong to the wealthy and highly educated lawyer-merchant class, the so-called Gold Coast intelligentsia who enjoyed some political representation, gathered in exclusive social clubs, and waited to inherit the colonial state.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this double exclusion, the *akrakyefoo* had political, social, and cultural aspirations. They hoped for social mobility through their literacy and salaried employment as clerks, teachers, and storekeepers, sought to partake in a modern, increasingly urban world, and thereby embraced a new form of masculinity.<sup>10</sup> They were as colonial middle figures in an ambivalent position, but not unique to colonial Ghana.<sup>11</sup> By the 1950s, their fortunes had improved. Some joined the newly formed mass parties and embraced the nationalist fever; their contribution to Ghana's independence struggle is legendary.<sup>12</sup> Recently scholars have turned to the

7 Total enrollment in primary and secondary schools in Ghana more than doubled from 1920 to 1940 (from 42,399 to 91,047), see P. Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana*, Chicago 1965, p. 113.

8 S. Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: "How to play the game of life"*, Bloomington 2002, p. 31. For the late nineteenth century, Foster noted the reputation of the "Cape Coast Scholars" as "poorly educated and regarded with disdain both by the Europeans and the more highly educated Africans" (*Education and Social Change*, 69).

9 For the Gold Coast intelligentsia, see D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850–1928*, Oxford 1963.

10 See S. F. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, Bloomington 2005, chap. 4, passim.

11 There is an extensive literature on these colonial middlers, initiated by Max Gluckman's work on chief and headman. See M. Gluckman, "Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand," *Bantu Studies* 14 (1940), p. 1–30, 147–74; and idem, J. C. Mitchell, and J. A. Barnes, *The Village Headman in British Central Africa*, in: *Africa* 19, no. 2, (1949), p. 89–101; cf. N. Long, *Social Change and the Individual: A Study of the Social and Religious Responses to Innovation in a Zambian Rural Community*, Manchester 1968, and now especially N. Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*, Durham 1999.

12 For the importance of the *akrakyefoo* in Ghana's nationalist movement, see J. Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana*, Madison 1993, and D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946–1960*,

cultural and social ambitions of these *akrakyefoo*. Stephanie Newell has examined their membership in literary societies, and I looked at the meaning of literacy in the life of A. K. Boakye Yiadom – a teacher-catechist who wrote for decades on his autobiography, in the style of diary, to document, comment, and challenge his predicament.<sup>13</sup> Yet the *akrakyefoo*'s relation to material culture, their styles of dress, acquisition of furniture, and organization of domestic spaces – frequently used for religious activities – were very much an expression of their social status and sense of belonging.<sup>14</sup> Thus the setting up of a proper sitting room became a key marker of having arrived as a *krakye*. The parlor's spatial organization and material of objects emphasized a *krakye*'s literacy, distinguished him from non-literate men, and emphasized his aspirations; they could also serve as a site of memory.

Africa's historians have only begun to explore the architecture and interiors of houses occupied by such middle figures. In their pioneering study about the nineteenth-century encounter between the London Missionary Society and Tswana people in South Africa, John and Jean Comaroff have shown how LMS missionaries considered their dwellings as a model home for a "civilized," Christian family life, and how subsequently Tswana converts adapted and reworked these architectural styles. In a "dialectic of domesticity" both the African frontier and the metropole impacted each other.<sup>15</sup> In a suggestive article about the impact of the Basel Mission and the Presbyterian Church for Ghana's economic development, Ghanaian historian Kwame Arhin noted how early mission houses became "centres of diffusion of architectural models."<sup>16</sup> Those who joined the new congregations and moved to the separate Christian settlements, so-called Salems, attempted not only to imitate the missionary home, usually a two-story house with a large veranda, but also the furnishing of their rooms. When the first senior presbyter of the Basel Mission congregation of Abetifi, cocoa farmer John Yaw Atta, erected his own story building in the 1890s, it was a copy in reduced scale of the mission house across the street. Upstairs, similar to the missionaries, he had his parlor and bedroom, a public and private space in his crucial position as a mediator between the mission congregation and the chiefs of Kwawu.<sup>17</sup>

London 1964; cf. the more detailed discussion of the *akrakyefoo*'s ambivalent position in Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), chap. 4.

- 13 S. Newell, *Entering the Territory of Elites: Literary Activity in Colonial Ghana*, in: *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and the Making of the Self*, ed. K. Barber, 211-35, Bloomington 2006, and *Literary Culture*, chap. 1; S. F. Miescher, 'My Own Life': A. K. Boakye Yiadom's Autobiography – The Writing and Subjectivity of a Ghanaian Teacher-Catechist, in: *Africa's Hidden Histories*, 27-51.
- 14 For the *akrakyefoo*'s dress, see Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), p. 77, 109-111. There is a new historical literature on dress in Africa, see J. Allman, ed. *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, Bloomington 2004, and H. Hendrickson, ed. *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, Durham 1996.
- 15 J. and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, vol. 2, Chicago 1997, p. 274-322, (quoted, 310).
- 16 K. Arhin, *The Role of the Presbyterian Church in the Economic Development of Ghana*, in: *Research Review* (New Series), 1, no. 2 (1985): 160.
- 17 For John Yaw Atta's importance as an interlocutor for the mission congregation, see his pastor's report upon his death, D. E. Akwa, Abetifi, August 12, 1916, Basel Mission Archive, Basel/Switzerland, D-3-7; cf. Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), p. 56-60.

As the twentieth century unfolded in Kwawu and other Akan areas, big men – cocoa farmers, traders, chiefs, and politicians – constructed impressive buildings to show their accomplishments and preserve their legacy.<sup>18</sup> For the teachers, clerks and traders whose lives are featured in my book *Making Men in Ghana*, building a house in their hometown was one of the most important achievements in life. The Presbyterian minister, Rev. E.K.O. Asante (1911–1997), started constructing a house when working as a young teacher in his hometown of Abetifi during the 1940s. E. F. Opusuo (b. 1923) delayed marriage till he had succeeded in erecting a house in his hometown of Pepease.<sup>19</sup> These were modern houses built with cement blocks and covered with iron sheets. The design of Asante’s house followed the model of the colonial bungalow with a central sitting room, veranda, and adjacent bedrooms.<sup>20</sup> Opusuo’s building consisted of three attached “two-room houses,” each with “chamber and hall” – the one in the center with a spacious sitting room for himself – and all facing the large yard with a kitchen.<sup>21</sup> These men did not follow the Akan practice of separate conjugal residence but instead shared their houses with wife and children, presenting their version of a Christian family home. The gendered organization of their domestic spaces reflected their new position as *akrakyefoo*. The homes of the matrilineal Akan people had a different spatial organization. Most married couples lived separately, especially in their hometowns, where husband and wife each resided with their matrikin. Only when migrating to another location or staying in a farming village did the couple have a joint residence. Wives provided domestic services; those who lived separately sent food to their husbands and visited at night.<sup>22</sup> Following Akan belief, a woman was not supposed to cook for her husband nor enter his room while menstruating. A matrikin’s home could be fairly large, comprising lineage members of several generations. Architecturally, as the anthropologist M. J. Field noted for rural Akan communities of the 1940s, such a home consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms opening into it. A married man occupied his own, lockable room. These rooms were seldom entered during the day, since everybody lived in the yard.<sup>23</sup> At

18 Polly Hill noted for Akuapem cocoa farmers that such houses built in hometowns were “self-made memorials, expressions of civic pride” (P. Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study of Rural Capitalism* [Cambridge 1963], p. 190). For similar investments by cocoa farmers in Nigeria, see S. S. Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation among an Extended Yoruba Community*, Berkeley 1985, 78, 128.

19 Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), p. 178-80; cf. S. van der Geest, *Yebisa wo Fie: Growing Old and Building a House in the Akan Culture of Ghana*, in: *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 13 (1998): 333-59.

20 Mid-twentieth-century bungalows in southern Ghana have a striking resemblance to the house-type among Yorubas in southwestern Nigeria, analyzed by J. M. Vlach, *The Brazilian House in Nigeria: The Emergence of a 20th-Century Vernacular House Type*, in: *Journal of American Folklore* 97, no. 383 (1984): 1-23. I am grateful to Swati Chattopadhyay for this reference.

21 The “two-room” house was common layout in African urban housing in the postwar period, see G. A. Atkins, *African Housing*, in: *African Affairs* 49, no. 196 (1950), 228-37.

22 For duolocality of husbands and wife, see G. Clark, *Onions are my Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*, Chicago 1994, p., 104-5.

23 M. J. Field, *A Search for Security: An Ethno-Psychiatric Study of Rural Ghana*, London 1960, p. 24-5. Field noted the varied organization of Akan households, listing the occupants of forty-two households in the town of Abe-nase (M. J. Field, *Akim-Kotoku: An Oman of the Gold Coast*, London 1948, p. 95-103).

one side of the yard there was the *pato*, a three-walled enclosed platform, which served as reception room.

Both the *pato* and the public courtyard could become sacred spaces, a place for worship of gods and ancestors. Sitting on the *pato* and offered a drink or a meal, an elder poured the first drop on the floor and offered “the first morsel of food to the ancestors.”<sup>24</sup> More elaborate rituals, including libations and slaughtering of animals, were performed in the courtyard and on the *pato* during *da bone* (good days, i.e. ritually important days on the Akan calendar: *Wukudae*, *Akwasidae*), the annual *Odwira* festival, and rites of passage such as outdooring of children, marriages, and funerals, when the *abusua* (matrilineage) gathered.<sup>25</sup> Houses of senior Akan men and women – lineage heads, office holders at the *ahenfie* (chief’s palace), *akikro* (village chiefs), *ahenfo* (town chiefs), and *ahemaa* (queen mothers) – feature a clearly defined sacred space, the stool room, where ancestral stools were kept. These stools, thought of as “shrines of the dead,” were venerated by pouring libation and ritual sacrifice prior to important decisions affecting the *abusua* and the town, as well as during festivals and *da bone*.<sup>26</sup> The stool rooms were a gendered space, since mainly men had access to them. Women had to stay away from them, especially when menstruating. “In the olden days” (the nineteenth century), as the anthropologist R. S. Rattray noted, if a women entered the stool house during her monthly periods, “she would have been killed instantly.”<sup>27</sup> Permanent sacred spaces in houses also included shrines for Akan gods (*abosom*) and, since the 1920s increasingly, shrines for new gods and medicines imported from elsewhere, among them Senya Kupo, Nana Tongo, and Tegare.<sup>28</sup>

Houses of wealthier men, especially an *ahenfie*, followed the same organizational principle as the matrikin’s home, only bigger in scale with several courtyards. If large enough, the house included separate spaces for the chief’s wives. In his ethnographic study of early-twentieth century Asante, Rattray provided a detailed account of a paramount chief’s palace with enclosed rooms and *patos*, three-walled platforms that faced the public courtyards, and a stool room. Each *pato* was used for specific purposes such as receiving guests, eating, or occupied by other palace elders. The gendered spatial organization is striking. The front courtyards and adjacent rooms and *patos* were reserved for the chief and his male elders, while his wives occupied smaller rooms “running all around the back

24 K. A. Busia, *The Ashanti*, in: *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Values of African Peoples*, ed. D. Forde, Oxford 1954, p. 201.

25 For rites of passage, see R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, Oxford 1927, passim; for libations, see E. Akeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times*, Portsmouth 1996, p. 5; and cf. P. Bartle, *Forty Days: The Akan Calendar*, in: *Africa* 48, no. 1 (1978): 80-84, and Busia, “Ashanti” (note 24).

26 P. Sarpong, *The Sacred Stools of the Akan*, Accra 1971, p. 51, passim.

27 Rattray, *Religion and Art* (note 25), p. 74-75.

28 For these “new cults” see Field, Akim Kotoku, chap. 12 (particularly the description of Senya Kupo), and now J. Allman and J. Parker, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*, Bloomington 2005, chap. 4 (particularly for Nana Tongo); for Tegare, cf. Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), p. 7, 174-77.

of the palace.”<sup>29</sup> When visiting their husbands, the chief’s wives sat in specific *pato*s in the rear. In more moderate homes women occupied the courtyard or a separate three-walled kitchen for cooking and other domestic work, while the *pato* remained reserved for household elders and visitors.

This gendered separation of space was complicated by the fact that both men and women could become elders. In pre-colonial Asante, as Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashigton Obeng note, “old age blurred the lines of gender politics.”<sup>30</sup> Post-menopausal women no longer posed a spiritual danger and occupied, in special circumstances, male stools and chiefly offices. In the home of a senior woman, such as the queen mother, she and her elders occupied the *pato* for their deliberations.<sup>31</sup>

*Akrakyefoo* departed from this house model and developed innovations. Many left their hometowns: they migrated to commercial centers to find employment as clerks, accountants and storekeepers, or took up posts as teachers, frequently transferred across colonial Ghana. Indicating their education and Christian lifestyles, they sought to emulate the homes of the literate coastal elites and the spatial organization of the colonial bungalow occupied by missionaries and colonial officials. By the late nineteenth century the merchants and professionals, the “‘native gentlemen’ of the ‘better classes,’” not only lived separately from the poorer classes in Accra and Cape Coast, but also embraced “the social milieu of the metropole” including ideas of Victorian domesticity.<sup>32</sup> Since mission churches ran the vast majority of schools, most pupils converted to Christianity. These churches advocated a different belief system, as well as a new version of personhood that affected gendered practices of marriage, childrearing, dress, and domesticity. If school graduates built their own houses, these homes featured an enclosed parlor, often located towards the street behind an ornate façade, even if they maintained the courtyard structure. The higher *akrakyefoo* climbed on the social ladder, the more elaborate their sitting room – a male space, off-limits to wife and children.

These new Christian homes, where ideally a man lived with his wife and children and not surrounded by members of his matrilineage, were organized around the parlor.<sup>33</sup>

29 R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, London 1929, p. 56-61 (cited, 60). The paramount chief’s place resembled the structure of elite houses described by Bowdich one hundred years earlier. See T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, London 1819, p. 304-9.

30 E. Akyeampong and P. Obeng, *Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History*, in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 492. For two prominent examples, see the biographical portrait of Yaa Akyawaa Yikwan by I. Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante*, Athens 1993, chap. 10, and Yaa Asantewaa, the famous Queenmother of Edweso (cf. A. Adu Boahen, *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1* [Accra 2003]).

31 Colonial rule led to a “masculinization” of the political realm in Akan societies; Native Authorities failed to recognize female elders. See, J. Allman and V. Tashjian, “I Will Not Eat Stone”: A Women’s History of Colonial Asante, Portsmouth 2000, p. 24. For the intersection of age and gender in Akan societies, see S. F. Miescher, *Becoming an Opanyin: Elders, Gender, and Masculinities in Ghana since the Nineteenth-Century*, in: *Africa after Gender?*, ed. C. M. Cole, T. Manuh, and S. F. Miescher, Bloomington 2007. Cf. the description of an Akan household by C. Opong, *Middle Class African Marriage: A Family Study of Senior Civil Servants*, London 1981, p. 32-33.

32 See R. S. Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana’s Coastal Communities under Colonial Rule*, Lanham 1999, p. 53-5.

33 Yet many Akan men living in Christian marriages did not neglect their responsibilities towards their matrikin, which led to tensions with their wives. See the examples of elite civil servants by Opong, *Middle Class Marriage*

In the conjugal home, as the *Regulations* of the Presbyterian Church stipulated, “Daily household worship, morning and evening, should never be omitted.” It was the duty of the “house-father or the house-mother to see that it [was] observed regularly, and that all members of the family and servants [took] part in it.”<sup>34</sup> In his parlor, a *krakye* displayed his literacy and professional accomplishments. He also used the parlor for practicing his new Christian faith, individually or in a group. The wall décor, mass-produced images of classical Christian iconography such as the Last Supper or the ubiquitous Christian calendar, emphasized the religious function of the space. Thus among *akrakyefoo* the private interiority of their sitting rooms became the public place to receive visitors, unlike the spatial organization of an Akan ancestral home where elders entertained their guests and had libations poured on the *pato*.

Some of the *akrakyefoo* also kept collections of notebooks, diaries, letters and other texts in their domestic spaces. This “do-it-yourself archiving” – the storing of printed and handwritten texts for many years in tin-trunks, suitcases, boxes, or in class-fronted cabinets – is at the center of Karin Barber’s volume, *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*.<sup>35</sup> Barber introduces the concept of “tin-trunk literacy” that refers to the “profusion of innovative individual writing” by non-elites in colonial Africa, the “propensity to collect and ‘archive’ such texts,” and the significance of reading as a way of personal betterment.<sup>36</sup> Relevant here is the idea of recognizing and exploring such personal collections as ways of reconstructing the aspirations of non-elite groups.

These collections, which also provide insights into the use and organization of personal religious spaces, are different from most of those stored in mission and state archives, both in terms of intended audience and attempts of self-fashioning.<sup>37</sup> Boakye Yiadom, the Abetifi teacher-catechist, has created such a personal archive: his notebooks, among them an autobiography, kept in a cabinet and his letters, receipts, and pamphlets stored in a Key Soap box. He relies on this soap box to write about his life, to document his achievements as a member of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>38</sup> While his autobiography contains no description of actual homes, the text offers an understanding of home in a more figurative sense by identifying his sense of belonging: to his extended family, his immediate family of wives and children, and his network of peers. The text tracks the purchases

(note 31), 128-33, and the discussion on marriages in Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), chap. 5.

34 The Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast, *Regulations, Practice & Procedure* (revised 1929), 20, Basel Mission Archive, D-9.1c, 13d.

35 Barber, *Africa’s Hidden Histories* (note 13).

36 Idem, Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa, in: *Africa’s Hidden Histories* (note 13), p. 3.

37 Yet for non-elites’ abilities to inscribe themselves into missionary and state archives see J.D.Y. Peel’s magisterial interpretation of the journals of African agents of the Church Mission Society in nineteenth-century Yorubaland (J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Bloomington 2000), and the letters by Louisa Mveme sent to the South African Native Affairs Department (C. Burns, *The Letters of Louisa Mveme*, in: *Africa’s Hidden Histories* [note 13], 78-112). Cf. D. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*, Portsmouth 2004.

38 See the discussion of Boakye Yiadom’s ongoing struggle for ordination with the Presbyterian Church in S. F. Miescher, ‘Called to Work for the Kingdom of God’: The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity, in: *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. A. Cornwall, Bloomington 2005, p. 192.



of material goods and shows his responsibilities and religious activities as a teacher-catechist, often carried out in his domestic spaces. The autobiography reflects the multitude of Boakye Yiadom's selves and alliances, as well as his aspirations in terms of class and status. Since he did not have the means to build a house with a parlor, he selected the autobiography, written for his children, as his personal monument.<sup>39</sup>

During sitting room conversations, my elderly interview partners frequently highlighted the furniture and other objects they had accumulated that fitted their position as *akrakyefoo*. Reverend Asante of Abetifi provided a detailed account of how he purchased each piece of his parlor furniture. Arriving as a young Presbyterian teacher at his first station in Adukrom, Akuapem, in 1935, Asante ordered a set of furniture from a local carpenter; one chair, still in his possession, cost five shillings. As he became more established, the furniture expanded. The most prominent piece, a wooden cabinet with carved glass doors for his books, followed when appointed head teacher of the Abetifi Presbyterian primary school in 1937. Asante purchased a wall clock that strikes every half hour, made in Switzerland and imported by the Union Trading Company, during his tenure as a senior pastor of Bekwai in 1955.<sup>40</sup> The assembled parlor furniture became Asante's mnemonic devices to recall important moments of his career when he acquired material objects fitting to his status as a literate man. Yet the furniture not only shaped his parlor but also provided the backdrop for its use as a personal religious space. During our conversations, the annual Presbyterian calendar and a poster marked this role of his sitting room; the poster read: "Christ is the Head of this house/The unseen Guest at every meal/The silent listener to every conversation." Asante also wrote a brief autobiographical portrait about his life. There he had little to say about his domestic life, except briefly mentioning his wife and children; instead he listed his building accomplishments as a senior pastor. Several of these buildings were "manses"—modern pastoral houses with appropriate domestic spaces.<sup>41</sup> Asante did not use the memories of domestic spaces for his written self-presentation. Yet in our oral conversations, they were allocated an important place. Although he did not take any steps to preserve his sitting room and its material objects beyond his life time, his house became a monument connected to his name and achievements.

In another case, the children intervened to secure their father's legacy as represented in his parlor. When the Abetifi big man E. K. Addo (1904–1998) died, his children turned their father's sitting room into a museum. Addo, who started out as an itinerary trader under the tutelage of his older brothers, became a storekeeper in Nsawam, a commercial center outside Accra, in 1928. He quickly moved through the ranks of colonial society. Mainly self-educated, he hired teachers from the prestigious Achimota School to learn

39 Cf. Miescher, *My Own Life* (note 13). For an account of Boakye Yiadom's life, see Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), and, *The Life Histories of Boakye Yiadom (Akasease Kofi of Abetifi, Kwawu): Exploring the Subjectivity and 'Voices' of a Teacher-Catechist in Colonial Ghana*, in: *African Words, African Voices. Critical Practices in Oral History*, ed. L. White, S. Miescher, D. W. Cohen, Bloomington 2001, 162–93.

40 Interviews with Rev. E.K.O. Asante, Abetifi, August 16 and 17, 1993.

41 Rev. E.K.O. Asante, "Rev. E.K.O. Asante: A Profile" (c. 1980, rev. 1994).

how to conduct his own business correspondence with his European suppliers such as the United Africa Company. Interested in hometown affairs, he frequently visited Abetifi and constructed a large home called Sober House No. 2, adjacent to his older brother's building, Sober House No. 1, in the 1940s. The name "Sober" was not so much a statement of temperance but rather reflected his business ethics, as well as Addo's pursuit of respectability in his personal life. During the following decade, at the end of indirect rule, he became chairman of the newly established Kwawu North Local Council, which replaced the chiefs responsible for local administration. Although Addo withdrew from his Nsawam store in 1964, he remained active as a businessman owning real estate and continued to serve as a community leader for Kwawu people in Accra and Abetifi. By the time of his death in 1998, he was a well respected and beloved big man whose life was celebrated at a special funeral.<sup>42</sup> The parlor's material objects not only document this trajectory from an itinerant trader to a store clerk and finally to a big man, but also serve as reminders of the parlor's usage as a personal religious space.

The unusual project of establishing a museum in Addo's sitting room was initiated by his eldest daughter Edna Sampong, who had migrated to the United States. Visiting Addo he frequently talked about his children, proud of their accomplishments: particularly of Sampong, a teacher living with her daughter in Seattle, and his two late sons Andrews Addo and Browne Addo Kwakye. The former was trained and worked as a veterinarian in the United Kingdom, the latter was vice principal of the Abetifi Training College. Addo had additional children, among them his son Ofori Atta Addo, a businessman in Accra, who was instrumental in realizing the museum. Upon completing Sober House No. 2, Addo made a public announcement that this stately home would be inherited by his children and not, as common among Akan people, by his *abusua* (matrilineage). Thereby Addo followed the principle of the Presbyterian Church, the successor of the Basel Mission, which encouraged its male members to privilege their Christian wife and children over the *abusua* in inheritance matters. Since the coexistence of different inheritance norms caused much litigation, Addo wanted to prevent any dispute about the ownership of his Abetifi home.<sup>43</sup> During our last conversations in 1997, when Addo was thinking much about his own death and personal legacy, he urged me to visit his daughter Edna in the United States.<sup>44</sup>

The following January, I interviewed Edna Sampong in Seattle. Sampong was a member of Ghana's dispersed community whose names are frequently evoked in sitting room conversations. In 1961 she followed her husband, who was pursuing graduate studies in economics, to the United States. What was planned as a temporary sojourn became permanent due to a series of crises: in 1966, before completing his degree, her husband lost his stipend after the coup against Nkrumah; six years later he died. Against her father's

42 See Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), p. 190-1, *passim*.

43 Cf. S. F. Miescher, *Of Houses and Litigants: Disputes on Inheritance in Abetifi – A Town of Colonial Ghana*, in: *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 39 (1997): p. 81-119, and *idem*, *Making Men* (note 10), 169.

44 Interview with E. K. Addo, Accra, July 28, 1997.

wishes, Sampong stayed in Seattle because of health problems and better educational opportunities for her daughter. Still Sampong remained connected with Ghana. Although she was never in a position to send remittances or build a house in her hometown – in Kwawu the common expectation of migrants abroad – she nurtured her relationships through letters, phone calls, and two visits. Moreover she evoked Ghana in her everyday life through her cooking. When we met, she was struggling with cancer and did not expect to travel to West Africa again.<sup>45</sup>

In July 1998, two months after her father's death, Sampong wrote to me: "I am not sure if you saw the additional part of 'Sober House No. 2' in memory of our late Brother 'Andrew' who passed in London; that Dad built at Abetifi. If we can find a portion to preserve stuff on Dad & make it a little Museum for him & take some 'Donations' to help promote what he believed in. (It will be O.K.)."<sup>46</sup> The previous year Addo had shown me the addition that carried the inscription, "Veterinary Surgeon Dr. Andrews Adjei Addo Memorial Hall."<sup>47</sup> In a phone conversation Sampong repeated her wish "to make a little museum in [her father's] name." The museum should display "his thick eye glasses" and "just a few [other] little things."<sup>48</sup> Sampong did not live to realize her dream; she passed away in December 1998.

Half a year later I received a letter from Sampong's brother Ofori Atta Addo, based in Accra. Ofori Atta, E. K. Addo's only remaining son, had become caretaker of Sober House No. 2 on behalf of his siblings. In his perception, I was behind the genesis of the museum. Introducing himself, Ofori Atta noted that his late sister had mentioned my acquaintance with "the Oldman" and that I "desire[d]" for them "to set up a museum or something in memory of the Oldman." He assured me: "We the family cherish the idea and have collected some pictures and documents which we think will be of much help to us. However, we will like you to enlighten us of how to go about it to satisfy your wish and vision for the project."<sup>49</sup> Ofori Atta also expressed an interest in my writings about his family. After further correspondence, in which I credited Sampong for having launched the idea, we met at his Accra home in the summer 2000.<sup>50</sup> By then Ofori Atta had arranged his father's papers and identified specific documents – letters

45 It was quite an emotional encounter, when suddenly a Swiss scholar, familiar with her hometown of Abetifi and delivering a message from her father, appeared in Edna Sampong's life in Seattle. She agreed to additional interviews, conducted by Leslie Ashbaugh. For a portrait of Sampong's life, see S. F. Miescher and L. Ashbaugh, *Been-to Visions: Transnational Linkages among a Ghanaian Dispersed Community*, in: *Ghana Studies 2* (1999): p. 57-76. For a recent discussion of this new African Diaspora, see E. Akyeampong, *Africans in the Diaspora: The Diaspora and Africa*, in: *African Affairs 99*, no. 395 (2000), p. 183-215, and T. Manuh, ed. *A Home in the World: International Migration and Development in Contemporary Ghana and West Africa*, Accra 2005.

46 Letter by Edna Sampong to author, Seattle, July 24, 1998.

47 There is some confusion about Andrews Adjei Addo's name. E. K. Addo named his oldest son after one of his UAC managers, called Andrews. While Addo always spelled Andrews with an "s", Edna Sampong and Ofori Atta referred to their brother as Andrew. By 2001, the "s" had been removed from the sign of the memorial hall.

48 Notes of phone conversation with Edna Sampong, August 31, 1998.

49 Ofori Atta (Addo) to author, Accra, April, 22, 1999.

50 In a telephone conversation on February 20, 2000, Edna Sampong's daughter Beatrice also mentioned that her uncle Ofori Atta was "trying to put together a memorial for her grand-daddy." Asked about a contribution, I pledged pictures and copies of my writings.

of appreciation, receipts of donations showing Addo's generosity, and the codicil with instructions for his burial – to be included in the exhibit.<sup>51</sup> In Abetifi, Ofori Atta showed me the changes to his father's sitting room. He had mounted about three dozen framed photographs with typed captions, dating and situating the images within Addo's life and explaining Addo's relation to the depicted people. A glass cabinet for the documents still needed to be built.<sup>52</sup> While I had no direct input in preserving and selecting documents for the exhibit, Ofori Atta allowed me to consult his father's archive. Further he asked me to photograph public buildings around Abetifi, such as the post office and town hall, which Addo had constructed during his tenure as local council chairman.<sup>53</sup> In the subsequent months, Ofori Atta reported the progress on his "father's memorial project" and inquired about the promised pictures.<sup>54</sup>

By my next visit to Ghana in 2001, Ofori Atta had completed the museum. Visibly proud, he unlocked the door to his father's former parlor, opened the gray shutters to let in daylight, and invited me to have a close look at the exhibit. The elegant room is lined with comfortable armchairs and a couch, their back pillows draped with a white embroidered cloth. The photographs on the red walls depict Addo as a young trader, husband and father, local council chairman, and respected elder. They further include images of Addo's favorite elders: teacher I. O. Sampong (accompanied by a caption reading "who became his role model and mentor") and his senior brothers J. K. Kwakye and J. E. Sampong, who had initiated him into trading. It also included images of well-known colonial figures: Reverend Friedrich Ramseyer, Abetifi's pioneer missionary from Switzerland, King George V with the Prince of Wales, both sporting the "Admiral uniform," and another hand-colored photograph of King George, which used to have a prominent place in Addo's parlor. Next to the main door, Ofori Atta placed a table with his father's personal objects: the thick eye glasses, his hairbrush, calendar, driver's license, Bible, and notebooks, including diaries of the 1930s. In his diaries Addo recorded his business activities, travels, and church visits. The diaries, serving more as a logbook of his activities than as a place for introspection, show how he entertained his peers, other *akrakyefoo*, in his domestic spaces, where he also sought refuge for prayer and Bible study.<sup>55</sup> Above

51 Interviews with Ofori Atta (Addo), Accra, August 15 and 23, 2000.

52 Interview with Ofori Atta (Addo), Abetifi, August 20, 2000.

53 Ibid. For E. K. Addo's political career, see Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), 170-72.

54 Letters by Ofori Atta (Addo) to author, Accra, December 12, 2000, and January 24, 2001.

55 After church one Sunday, E. K. Addo "walked home and rest[ed] upon books especially [the] Bible," Addo diaries, November 2, 1933 (for Addo's diaries see Miescher, *Making Men* [note 10], 88-91). Writing a diary was not uncommon among literate members of the Presbyterian Church. Education officer B. E. Ofori of Akropong used his scheduling books for notes on classroom visits and personal entries; he also commented on his domestic spaces, for example noting difficulties in finding suitable accommodation upon being transferred. See entries in B. E. Ofori's 1971 diary: March 8-9, 12; August 10-11, 20-22; and September 7-8; I am grateful to Kwame Asa Ofori, who provided me access to his father's papers. Cf. the Nigerian case of Akinpelu Obisesan, an Ibadan trader, who left not only an archive of seventy-two boxes but also forty diary volumes kept over a period of forty-six years. Unlike those by Ghanaian *akrakyefoo*, Obisesan's diaries are full of introspection. See R. Watson, *What is our intelligence, our school going and our reading of books without getting money? Akinpelu Obisesan and his diary*, in: *Africa's Hidden Histories* (note 13), 52-77.

the table Ofori Atta mounted the large glass case, measuring about eight by four feet, to present on its green matting the laminated copies of receipts and appreciation letters. The center of the room is dominated by two coffee tables, both covered with embroidered table-cloths: the lower square one features glasses that invite fellow elders for a drink, and egg cups, a bottle opener, a miniature Akan stool in the shape of “Gye Nyame” (All except God), and a vase with bright silk flowers; the round table displays bourgeois tropical accessories: porcelain dishes with flowery designs to serve fufu, the Akan staple dish, and a large ceramic water filter.

The sitting room museum highlights Addo’s multiple roles as modernizer and elder, clearly indicated by two large photographs, standing on the floor and framing the table with his personal objects. One photograph portrays him as the modern trader wearing a business suit in a seated pose with legs crossed; the other shows him standing wrapped in Kente, the toga-style cloth of the Akan elder. The exhibit also displays Addo’s dark suit with white shirt and silver tie (wrapped in plastic), fedora hat, dress shoes, belt, and briefcase, items that marked him as literate trader; as well as his sandals and stools, one with a carved elephant, the markers of the Akan chief.

The museum reminds visitors of Addo’s rise from itinerary trader to Abetifi big man and documents his accomplishments: his years of public service and recognition received from dignitaries. As its conservator, Ofori Atta hopes that the museum will inspire others to emulate his father’s generosity and serve as an example for younger generations.<sup>56</sup> It is not clear how many people have actually seen the exhibit. Some Abetifi residents consider it rather eccentric for a son to create such a shrine in his father’s parlor. Currently Ofori Atta is still planning further changes. The museum should help celebrate the tenth anniversary of Addo’s death in 2008 and then become more widely accessible.<sup>57</sup> Due to this transformation Addo’s parlor, once merely a temporary religious space, has become a permanent sacred shrine created in memory of the late father and local big man.

While many Kwawu houses carry the names of deceased elders, the houses’ interiors usually belong to the living, not serving as carefully assembled repositories of the material artifacts of the dead. Yet across Ghana, there are prominent museums that include the domestic spaces of the nation’s heroes. One well-frequented tourist site in Accra is the former home of Ghana’s most famous African American returnee, W.E.B. DuBois. His late colonial bungalow has been turned into a museum, research center, and place of pilgrimage, particularly for African American visitors.<sup>58</sup> In Abetifi there is another museum located in an interior space. Tourists staying at the Presbyterian retreat center are encouraged to visit the “Ramseyer shrine” in Kubease, a nineteenth-century house in Abetifi’s old section. There, in 1869, Reverend Ramseyer rested with his wife Rosa and trader Johannes Kühne for three days as Asante captives on their way to Kumase. Now

56 Interview with Ofori Atta (Addo), Abetifi, September 1, 2001.

57 Interview with Ofori Atta (Addo), Accra, August 2, 2006.

58 For independent Ghana’s importance for African American, see K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expectations and the Civil Rights Era*, Chapel Hill 2006, and J. T. Campbell, *Middle Passage: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005*, New York 2006, p. 315–64.

the space features historic photographs of the Ramseys, whose meaning for local history are explained by the resident tour guide.<sup>59</sup>

During my visit to E. K. Addo's museum, his son reflected about his father's life. We sat down in the comfortable chairs for an extended interview, during which Ofori Atta elaborated on his father's personal history and its importance for the nation of Ghana. He evoked the dedicated father cherishing education, the devout Presbyterian committed to his church, the local big man generously sharing his wealth with the people of Abetifi, the self-educated trader who promoted the founding of a training college and secondary school in Abetifi, the Kwawu businessman who provided the car for Nkrumah's triumphant release from prison in 1951, and the public figure who served in local politics but later became discouraged by the course his country was taking.<sup>60</sup> These stories reminded me of my final conversation with Addo, when he eloquently expressed a litany of the woes of postcolonial Ghana whose government had "wasted its reserves" and whose people, especially those in Kwawu, squandered money on funerals instead of investing it in the future of their children.<sup>61</sup>

Addo's sitting room museum offers an interpretation of Ghana's history to its imagined audience that contains an ambivalent message. It reminds Ghanaians of their colonial past, while celebrating how a big man embraced the project of modernity by promoting a new infrastructure for Abetifi, by constructing the post office, a clinic, and other community buildings. Yet the museum also documents Addo's critique of local practices such as the conspicuous consumption during funerals by displaying his codicil in which he demanded a simple burial without any waste of resources – a wish that was only partially fulfilled.<sup>62</sup> The museum can be understood as a manifestation of an alternative modernity that embraces ideas of development and nationhood for Ghana, while remaining deeply skeptical about the excesses and failures of the postcolonial state. This attitude is rooted in a profound appreciation of the culture of a simpler but still significant past.<sup>63</sup> The museum can be experienced as a sacred space inviting visitors for historical reflection; it provides material connections with a prominent ancestor – in some ways a modern formulation of the ancestral stool room.

*Dwelling in the Archive* offers a timely challenge to historians of (post)colonial Africa to recognize spaces like houses and interiors as sites for historical exploration. Africa's gender historians will reap benefits by revisiting them. In colonial Ghana, transnational encounters of mission education did not merely lead to a new sense of domesticity among women as wives or mothers. A group of non-elite literate men, the *akrakyefoo*,

59 For Ramseyer's first stay in Abetifi, see F. Ramseyer and J. Kühne, *Four Years in Ashantee*, New York 1875, p. 36-37. I was led to the Ramseyer shrine during my first visit to Abetifi in July 1991.

60 Interview with Ofori Atta (Addo), September 1, 2001. For Addo's role in the celebrations of Nkrumah's release from prison, see Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), 170.

61 E. K. Addo, July 28, 1997.

62 For E. K. Addo's funeral wishes and arrangements, see Miescher, *Making Men* (note 10), 189-191.

63 Cf. D. P. Gaonkar, *On Alternative Modernities*, in: *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 1-18, and B. M. Knauff, ed., *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, Bloomington 2002; for the excesses of another West African nation, see A. Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria*, Berkeley 2005.

also sought to reorganize their domestic spaces. They presented within their parlors artifacts of literacy that conveyed their sense of status and ideas of masculinity. Specific pieces of furniture became crucial in expressing their cultural, social, and political aspirations. When a group of *akrakyefoo* gathered for worship and Bible study, when they gathered to discuss their ambitions and personal betterment, the parlor served as a male space, replacing the three-walled platform of Akan elders. *Akrakyefoo*'s move from *pato* to parlor reflected their gendered transition to a new type of men. These changes found expressions in their daily habitus, domestic organization, material acquisitions, as well as selection of personal religious spaces. These men's parlors included a religious dimension that was experienced individually, as well as collectively within a select group.

Burton invites us in considering people, whom we usually treat as historical subjects, to regard them as creators of historical collections as well. Middle figures such as Boakye Yiadom were in fact archivists who not only gathered material but also interpreted it; they themselves became historians. Others gathered their fathers' personal papers and material objects in order to dwell on their contents and historicize them. Ofori Atta formalized his memories of his father E. K. Addo by an ancestral shrine in the form of a museum that emphasizes Addo's accomplishment as the modern big man. The sitting room museum permits visitors to formulate their own interpretations. Thus an archive of sitting room furniture, trinkets, and soap boxes, stories about their acquisition and meanings, promises to be a rich source for historians and a site of interpretations that examine the intersections between gender, space, and material culture. The process of producing these alternative archives – in the form of memoirs, popular literature, or sitting rooms – is critical to how history is being imagined, constructed, and understood by their authors. These archives reflect the historical subjectivity of their creators and users.

On the surface my project of exploring the histories of men and masculinities in twentieth-century Ghana has been quite different from three elite Indian women whose texts about their encounters with history as accounts of domestic spaces are featured in *Dwelling*. Although Burton and I both examine the late colonial period, my work has focused on the stories and memories of a cohort of men who were not part of Ghana's small transnational elite. The men featured here were not just collectors and archivists but also interpreters of the past and commentators on the present. Their written texts and oral elaborations, their parlors and artifacts, contribute to a reevaluation of Ghanaian history. This essay joins Burton in calling for an expansion of the boundaries of legitimate archives to explore colonial subjectivities. Furniture and sitting rooms, as well as autobiographical writings and oral accounts, document how history is not merely the study of the past but how its meanings are enacted in the present. Burton's question of "who counts as a historical subject and what counts as an archive," deserves further reflection.<sup>64</sup>