

When the child wants a name

The primary emergence of belonging among the Kasena: An anthropological analysis

Ann Cassiman

During three or four days following the delivery, a mother and her newborn child live in seclusion in the female rooms deep inside the Kasenahouse. The child does not fully belong to the world of the living yet, but navigates between this world and the otherworld where it came from, namely the world of the dead and the unborn infants. Gradually the infant and its mother make the transition to the world of the humans through different ritual practices which unroll in the domestic space of the house. The child itself determines the rhythm of the movement into the outside and human world, through illnesses. Some infant diseases are interpreted as 'triggers' for the creation or awakening of identity and belonging of the child. One cause of illness might be the child's desire to be endowed with a name. This usually takes place a few months after birth. A daughter of the patriclan inserts the child in the medicinal water of the patriclan, by which the child becomes a social being and a member of the patriclan.

I analyse the practices of delivery, post-partum seclusion and infant namegiving as spatial practices which insert a child into the social world and create its belonging to the matri- and patriclan.

[Ghana; Kasena; birthgiving; namegiving; cosmology; space]

Northern Ghana shows very high rates of child disease and infant morbidity (222/1000 children before the age of five, for the Upper East Region of Ghana, Senah et al. NHRC Report 1994). However, the aim of this paper does not lie with a discussion of the risk factors for diseases in this area, or the cultural constructions of disease etiology and health concerning children. Rather, next to my humane concern, my scientific interest in child health follows a non-medical track. Amongst the Kasena¹ of Northern Ghana some diseases are interpreted as 'triggers': they create or awaken the identity and belonging of the child. When a child falls ill, a diviner is consulted² to gauge out the reasons of the impairment and the corresponding treatment. One cause of the illness might be the child's desire to be endowed with a name and thus to enter the 'water of the lineage.'

In this article, I approach the ritual of infant namegiving as a spatial practice within the Kasena house. To explore the meanings of this ritual, which inserts the child into

the social world, I analyse the cosmological notions concerning the emergence of identity within the Kasena world.

In most parts of West-Africa, a child is only endowed with a name a few months after it has come to the world of the living. One of the reasons for this delay is grounded in cosmology. Kasena hold a dual worldview which distinguishes between a world for the living and a world for the dead. The two worlds do not occupy different time-spaces, but are inhabited by inverse or antithetical beings, the living and the dead. The world of the dead is an invisible world, where the inhabitants follow a 'reverse' drive: they walk 'backwards' or upside-down (on their heads) and they are active at night. Some inhabitants of the reverse world are the yet-to-be-born. The unborn infant belongs to the reverse world as a potentiality. Birth brings the unborn to the visible world of the living, across a boundary which is very delicate and fragile. It is due to the frailty of this border that those who have scarcely crossed it, are at risk to slide back. During the post-partum period the neonate or the infant, as well as its mother navigate in a liminal zone where the danger of bridging the edge and returning to the former state, constantly lurks.

To a large extent, ritual life in Kasenaland is spatially shaped. The house and the surrounding lands figure not only as the scenery of the ritual practices, but the dwelling environment is an important actor in daily and ritual life of a Kasena. My study intends to unravel how the ritual of namegiving borrows meaning from the spatial enrollment of the period between birth and the ritual itself, and how the emergence of social identity is moulded through the forms and movements in and around the habitat.

Although most of my research wants to understand the Kasena women's world, in this article I try to rewrite my findings and analysis from the perspective of the child. Behold my confession: despite the strong presence and large amount of children in the house, I partly succeeded in overlooking them as valid members of Kasena culture and domestic life (see Lallemand 1981: 12; Meurs et al. 1999). My findings on children were fragmented, frittered away under the heavier load of women. One of the major tracks of my research, the spatial enrollment of the dynamics of belonging, would have no doubt also lead me to the child. Children are of enormous value for the Kasena. The major aim of marriage is to bring forth children for the family. 'High fertility is life's highest achievement', they say (Adongo et al. 1997: 1796). In rural areas, a large offspring guarantees economic and social insurance and a vital help in daily work; also affective and altruistic reasons are at play (Awedoba 1985: 442).

I will give a chronological description of the different stages through which mother and child navigate from pregnancy to social birth. Beforehand I describe the house. It is seen as a spatial body in which, for example, child-caring practices are created and reproduced.

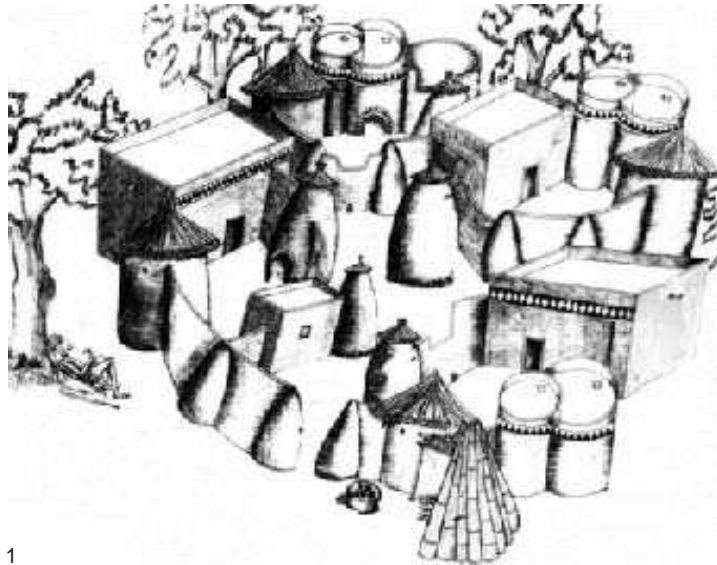
The lay-out of the house

A Kasenahouse (*soŋo*) is built according to a circular but irregular lay-out. It is situated at the meeting point of different small walking paths, which lead to the surrounding

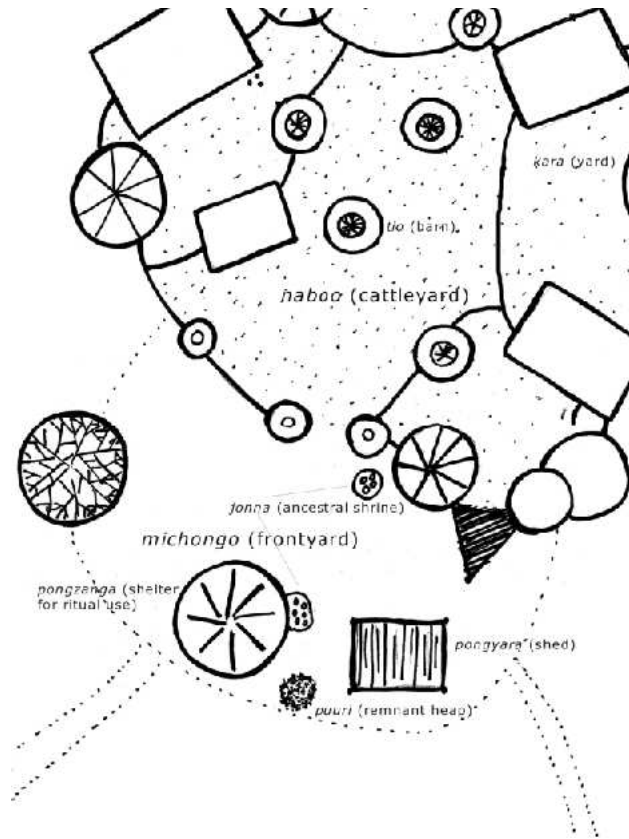
houses and fields. The house consists of several rooms interconnected by walls. The joint walls embrace a central open space, the cattle-yard, and leave only a small opening which serves as a gate to the front side of the house. In this frontyard, most houses have a shed, covered with stalks. From under the shed, the house-owner guards the house, watching the comings and goings of the house members from his bed of beams. On the outskirts of the frontyard is a remnant heap (*puuri*), on which all leftovers from the house are piled as a sign of (re)productive life in the house and as a source of recycled life: food-leftovers, ashes, broken pots, calabashes and all other residue. The shrines of the ancestors are moulded facing the entrance of the house. They assist the house-owner in protecting domestic life from all evil coming from the 'wild outside'.

A closer look at the composition of the house shows how the rooms are arranged around several small open spaces, enclosures or yards. Each wife has her own yard, with a number of adjoining rooms where she resides with her children. The husband will normally build his own room, a thatched hut, in the first wife's yard. One yard, or one 'room' as the language says, stands as a matri-centred unit, and those who belong to it are 'children from one room' or 'from one belly'.

The most private and intimate female room, the twin-room, is – as its name suggests – a double room with one single entrance. The first room one enters is a kind of hall (*diga-pɔrɔ*) and the following one is the head-room (*diga-yugu*) (see figure 1 and 2). Scattered over the open space of the central cattle-yard granaries are built. They are cylindrical mud-structures which the Kasena use to store millet, groundnuts, Guinea Corn or rice. In the different yards the empty spaces between the main structures are filled with small flat or conical constructions which serve as pens for small animals like goats and sheep or fowls and chicks.



Figuur 1



Figuur 2

An extended family resides in one large house, according to the virilocal residence pattern. The house (*soŋo*) does not only accommodate the men, women and children, but also those who left (for travelling), and those who died. To be born in a particular house links one up to a house for the rest of one's life. Neither departure nor death removes someone from the house, rather the opposite, the deceased are most intimately connected with the well-being and the future of the house and they judge, punish and protect the living members. The membership of the *house* (*soŋo*) refers to patrilineal ties. When one speaks about the belonging to a *room* (*diga*), this alludes to matrilineal ties.

The most senior man is the founder of the house. He is the househead or house-guardian (*soŋo-tu*), who takes care of the 'house', who watches over the good behaviour of 'his' people, who represents them on different occasions, who is an adviser and a conciliator in quarrels. He is the intermediary between the living and the dead. Through sacrifices, conversations, incantations, and consultations with a diviner, he detects the wishes of the forefathers and tries to fulfill them.

A young woman is pregnant

Pregnancy is never publicly announced, especially not by the blessed one herself.³ During the months after marriage, the elderly women keep their eyes on the newly married wife, in search for any sign of pregnancy the young woman might display. Once the pregnancy is indubitable ('when the stomach bulges out', *puga na non*), the head of the house is informed. In consultation with the other members of the house, or in some cases with a diviner, he will decide which daughter⁴ of the house will be the ritual 'caretaker'⁵ of what is called 'the purification of the stomach'⁶ (*soeri puga*). This caretaker is preferably a woman of the house who is married and has therefore left the paternal house (*a kadiko*). This woman can be a sister or a paternal aunt of the father-to-be. Without the pregnant young woman's knowledge, she secretly comes to the house where they live. In the night, while everyone is asleep, she slips into the room where the husband and his pregnant spouse⁷ are lying down. In her hand she holds a black calabash with cool water, in which some sheanut-leaves and a piece of rope are plunged. While she throws the content of the calabash on the ignorant sleeping couple, she warns the girl: *A piire mo*, which means 'I have disclosed/uncovered you',⁸ and she sneaks out.

The following morning, the daughter calls the pregnant woman and ties a rope around the latter's neck and waist, and notifies her not to return to her parental house. Time has come for the new wife to bear a child for the husband's patrilineage and from now on she must be faithful to him. Bonnet (1988: 52) describes a similar practice amongst the neighbouring Mossi of Burkina Faso, where the paternal aunt explicitly says 'whatever the case, if your child is a boy or a girl, the child belongs to us'. These ropes symbolize her nearing motherhood and the boundedness to the marital house. During pregnancy and the first years of life of the infant, it will become clear how the caretaker (*kadiko*) of the practice performs the role of 'owner' of the infant.

The main theme of the ritual is the patrilineage (represented in the black calabash) claiming the unborn child. This claim is voiced by the caretaking daughter who appropriates the ownership of the pregnancy in name of her lineage. In Kasena imagery the calabash tree symbolizes the kinship structure (Liberski 1991); black is the colour of the patrikin. As such, this gesture by the daughter of the house demarcates for the child a first track in the unfolding of belonging: it is claimed and defined by the patriclan.

Afterwards, when the child is fully grown, 'it is for the daughter', which means that it 'belongs' to her (namely to the *kadiko*). In case of a girl, she can become the daughter's maidservant; in case of a boy, he will help the daughter with the work on the farm or with the building of her rooms.

After the assertion of the pregnancy, the father-to-be has to visit the house of his wife's relatives, his in-laws. There he spends the night, and early in the morning he accompanies his father-in-law to the diviner. The latter will assess the wishes of the 'stomach'.⁹ In some cases the stomach (namely the child) taboos to see the father or the brother of the pregnant woman; in other cases it 'forbids' to see the ancestral shrine; sometimes it does not taboo anyone.

These taboos find their rationale in Kasena cosmology. If the divination reveals that the child and the father, for example, 'sat under one tree' in the otherworld, it is dangerous for them to meet each other in this world. The fact that one 'came first', while they had to come to this world in the same house and generation, implies a violation of the temporal order of generations. The confrontation thus contains a danger for as well the child as the banned one (e.g. the father). There might also be an aspect of 'revelation' here: if two human beings sat under one tree in the otherworld, they know more of each other than mortals do. This adds a dimension to their mortal life which might send them back to the otherworld. It is also said that when one dreams that s/he wanders around in the otherworld, s/he will soon go there. The knowledge about that world can transform into a return trip. The ban is uplifted through 'ash-blowing', a small ritual that has an appeasing effect on the danger (see below).

During the progression of the pregnancy, the young woman continues to do the heavy domestic work as long as she can. 'She is not sick' is always said. In the meantime however, she needs to follow a relatively strict diet, which in the first place guards the woman and especially the child of growing too fat. Kasena believe that when the child becomes very fat and big, the delivery will be too arduous and demanding for the mother. Other behavioural prescriptions protect her from miscarriage or spirit-children (see below).

A child is born

It is favourable that one is born within the house. Those who come to the world in the bush or along the road are believed to never fully belong to the social world of the mortals. Nevertheless, the last decade gradually more and more women go to the hospital or nearby Health Post. The patterns of health-seeking behaviour (or the reasons for these choices concerning birthgiving) however remain outside the scope of this contribution. Instead, I concentrate on the home-delivery. Today, it covers nine on ten deliveries, although the practice undergoes some changes in disfavour of the home-delivery.¹⁰

Let us suppose one comes to this world in the father's house. When he or she is ready to come, the mother will 'feel the stomach turn upside down' and the labour pains start. The elderly women of the house are called, men withdraw under the shed in front of the house, children have to stay back. In many cases a 'traditional birth attendant' (or trained midwife),¹¹ is called to assist the delivery.

The place of the delivery is not that important, and for practical and hygienic reasons, some women deliver in the cattle-yard or courtyard. In rainy season delivery obviously rather takes place inside the room. Only when the house is polluted by death, or when another heavily pregnant woman is around, the woman in labour will be sent to a neighbouring house. The actual place of delivery does not follow such prescribed rules as the period afterwards, when the mother and child are secluded for 3 or 4 days in the twin-room of the newborn's grandmother.

Childbirth compels the child to traverse from one world into another world. A good birth attendant is the one who can persuade the child to come to this world (Bonnet

1985: 41). During birth she calls the child to come and addresses him/her by the father's or grandfather's name: 'Come, come, child of Ayaga, child of Kobase, come, come'. The mother as well is said to have an influence on the child's eagerness to come and thus on the progression and accomplishment of the delivery.¹²

Most women of the house are present when one of them delivers. Not only in order to offer a helping hand, to hold and support the squatted woman during parturition, but also to lend collective assistance, reinforcement and backing to the one in labour. The delivery is a communal moment of giving birth collectively: in a sense, all women present undergo labour, all yell in the rhythm of the contractions of the young woman. The scenery of ten or more women rhythmically wailing to give birth, enacts the house in labour. It is not only the mother who is in labour; it is the house that gives birth.

For the child who tries to find its way to the world of human beings, the encouragement and intensive urging by the assisting women should convince him/her to come fast and smoothly. One day I witnessed a delivery inside the house where I stayed. The room was small and extremely hot, it was raining outside; the young woman (B.) sat squatted on a stone, supported by the other women and her mother-in-law. Everyone yelled and encouraged her, all in the same rhythm. Let me quote from my diary (16/06/97).

'I sit there, perplex, with huge disbelieving eyes, overwhelmed by the intensity of the spectacle of screaming women. The sweat streams down from all faces, the waters already lie at B.'s feet, everyone sits in it, there is no difference between my excretions and yours, between my dirt and your dirt, all are one. The little head appears again, but flips back as quickly as it came, hesitant to throw itself in this pandemonium of screaming and yelling women.'

Finally it is the child who decides when time has come. It is received by the birth attendant or sometimes by its own grandmother. In first instance, nobody looks after the baby. All attention is anxiously directed towards the afterbirth (*nyeene*). The latter too has to be attracted to come, it is also called by the names of the forefathers, in the same way the baby was. The placenta embodies the double of the newborn. Once the afterbirth has left its shelter, the mother and her newborn are taken out of the room to be bathed with hot water and leaves by one of the elderly women. Until that time, the child has been lying in the waste material of the parturient, only touched if necessary by the assisting women with their left hand. Before the bathing, the neonate is considered a source of 'dirt' which should be cautiously treated to avoid symbolic 'contamination'. Evidently, the health situation of the child has been briefly assessed, but no one bothers about its sex or physical outlook. The waste material as well as the afterbirth are then collected in a pot, covered with a broken piece of earthenware and buried in the remnant heap in front of the house: it is now contained in a uterus of earth.

The placenta (*nyeene*)¹³ can be considered the double of the child. Kasena say that 'the placenta is our chief, the child sat on it and came to the world'. It gives strength to the child, therefore it has to be taken good care of. As the double of the child, any danger threatening the placenta will indirectly affect the child. In order to protect it from witches or other evil, it is buried in the remnant heap (*puuri*). This is a significant

practice. Here all leftovers and rubbish from the house (waist material, food leftovers, broken calabashes and pots, ashes, ...) are thrown. It symbolizes the vitality and breath of the house, and stands as a symbol of wealth when heaped very high. There is a symbolical association between the remnant heap (*puuri*), the placenta and the chief: a chief has to swallow everything of the life in his village, people say, he is like a *puuri*, he captures all dirt of his village; a *puuri* also digests and recycles all produce of the house, such as food, pots or ashes; the placenta finally forms the breeding ground for the life cycle of the child. Through the placenta, the child lives, eats, breathes. It has to be treated with respect and be protected against any harm. All the afterbirths of those born in one house are buried in the same remnant heap: it contains the doubles of the house people. All produce of the house follows a cycle which develops in the space of the house: unprocessed materials or potentials come from outside, they are forged and manufactured inside the house and then turned into edibles or utensils, which are digested, reproduced and used inside the house until finally the leftovers, waste or duplicates are dumped on the remnant heap. The latter is the sign of the capacity of production, digestion and regeneration of the house. It is like the placenta of the house, dangling on the exterior of the house (see figure 2). While the house digests and produces life, all remainders or complements of the life in the house are contained by the remnant heap.

When the child and the mother have been bathed by the grandmother, they are installed on a mat in the head-room (*diga-yugu*) of the grandmother (the child's father's mother). For three or four consecutive days (for a boy or a girl respectively),¹⁴ they will stay together inside the room.¹⁵ The mother (who is now called a '*kasoro*')¹⁶ only comes out for her toilet and bathing, preferably in the night. She is considered a sick and vulnerable person who should be protected from the outside peril,¹⁷ until all the blood is washed out of her womb. Each time she leaves the child alone, she puts a broom by its head, to ward off evil spirits who want to inflict the child.¹⁸ During this period, she is not allowed to fetch water from the water jar, to cook or to do any pounding, grinding or sweeping, if not, 'the navel of the child will not close well'.

The mother comes outside ('pouring-of-the-leaves-day')

Early morning, on the third/fourth day of seclusion inside the room, the grandmother fetches ashes in her hand. She takes a broom and a broken earthen pot and guides the mother to the main gate of the house. The mother is blindfolded and has to hold the ashes in her left hand. When guided outside the gate, she blows the ashes while saying *a poone, a poone*, meaning 'I am outside, I am outside',¹⁹ three times or four times (for a boy or a girl resp.), until she has crossed the frontyard of the house. Her eyes are now uncovered. Therefore this practice is referred to as *blowing* (*firu*). The grandmother then goes to the path leading to the mother's paternal house; she puts down the broom in the form of a cross, covers it with the ashes and caps it with the broken pot on which she stamps hardy. She leaves it on the spot as a sign that the house has given birth, until it disappears, carried along by passing feet.²⁰

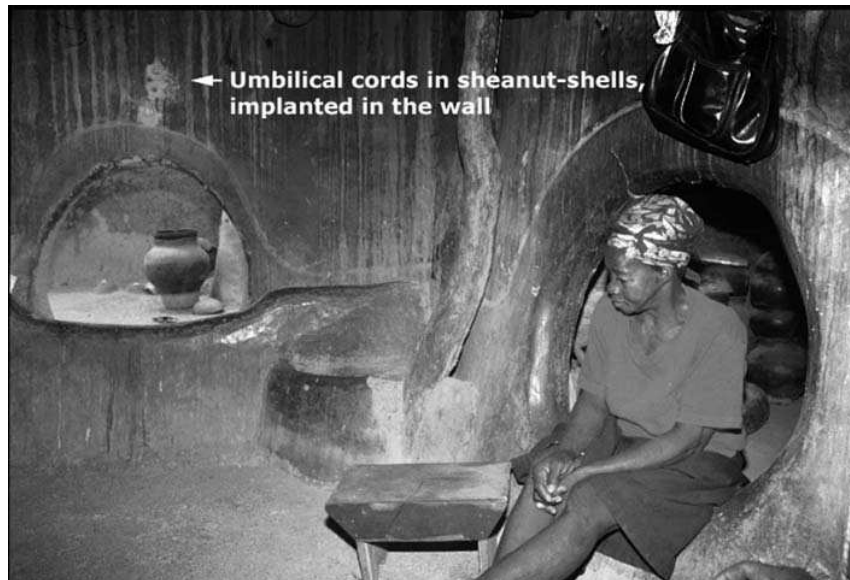


Figure 3

Some people gave a slightly different story. An outsider (man or woman) comes to the house, to guide the young mother to the gate. On the other side of the gate is her mother-in-law (the child's father's mother) and they both hold ashes in their left hand. When they approach, they blow the ashes gently towards each other, saying *de piire daane* (literally 'we uncover each other'). I suppose the practice carries the same meaning in both versions, where in the latter version, the mother-in-law represents the outside world which the mother can now be exposed to.

The same morning, the women of the house cook millet paste, the main Kasena dish. In addition they prepare some guinea fowls for the mother. One of them goes to the bush to pick certain specific leaves, which are treated in a special way²¹ before they are boiled in water (this concoction is called *sɔɔru*). The preparation is used to bathe the mother, and to pour (*lom*) on her head. They successively pour hot and cold water over her, three or four times for a baby-boy or -girl respectively. In this, it is very important that the mother closes her mouth. If she swallows the water, she will not be able to give birth again. The mother is now strong enough to go out and to take up her domestic tasks, which she was not allowed to do while in seclusion. After the bathing, she symbolically carries out each of these prohibited activities shortly, to uplift the ban.

Early in the morning, the head of the house fulfills his part of the ritual: he visits a diviner to find out if his deceased fathers want any 'food', and which type of food they request (as a sacrifice). These ritual practices close the period of seclusion. They lead to some understanding of the concepts of birthgiving and delivery. During the first three or four days, the woman and her child somehow navigate between this world and

the otherworld. They stay inside the womb of the house. For the outside world, the house has not given birth yet. This period of seclusion is an extension of the pregnancy, where the mother and child are still extremely vulnerable, not only due to the physical circumstances, but also because of the danger of symbolic contamination by the outside world, as well as by the call of the otherworld (see also Bonnet 1988). They navigate in-between two worlds, which the child is about to leave behind, but into which the child can carry along its mother. The turning point or crossroad between the different worlds is gradually left behind. Only the weaning of the child, or the next impregnation of the mother (which may coincide), make the child a full member of this world. In case the child passes away before this time, its corpse will be buried as 'waist material' without any proper funerary ritual, since it did not belong to the mortals yet. Its burial place is located near the path to its mother's house (Abasi 1993). Miscarriages or stillbirths are buried in the remnant heap.

The child will stay mainly inside the house and rooms, 'until it grows and becomes strong and the navel heals well'. In the meantime it is bathed by the grandmother with the heated mixture of water and leaves. The mother too is bathed with the mixture, until the leaves are finished. Each time the mixture is poured away on the path to the mother's parental house.

Besides, the child is force-fed²² with a solution of water and herbs or roots. The day the navel dries out and falls off, the remainder is put into a sheanut-shell and implanted in the wall of the head-room (*diga-yugu*), right above the entrance (see figure 3). The number of sheanut-shells, neatly and shipshape modelled in the wall, one on top of the other, indicates the reproductive capacity of the room. The navels of different generations might be there. 'They are all one' a woman said. They are the children of the room.

A child of the mother's house

The answer to the question whether and to what extent the child belongs to the patri- or matriclan, is not an univocal one. I can only analyse here some of the practices indicating how each clan lays claim on the child, and how the child's belonging gradually changes into double membership of both the patriclan and the matriclan, although in a different quality and extent. During the first days after birthgiving, the child is considered to still belong to its mother's womb, while at the same time lying in the belly of the father's house (the head-room or *diga-yugu*). While its skin is still weak, pale and soft, the bathing of the child inserts its house-membership into the skin and hardens and blackens its skin, both signs of the patrikin. The leaves which are used to bathe the child are thrown on the path to the mother's house, as a sign of its washing-away and transforming the appertinment to that clan.

The day of the pouring of the leaves, the child's father goes to his in-laws, to inform the young mother's relatives about the birth. In case the neonate is a boy, he carries along a cock, in case of a girl, he holds a Guinea fowl. From far they see him coming, equipped with the gifts; they know the news he is bringing. After the handing over of the gifts and the greetings, the head of the house calls the man's mother-in-law (the

new mother's mother) and tells her to 'Go and see the daughter's delivery' (*N duri n ba ni*). The mother prepares the necessary items for her daughter in a new calabash, such as oil, ingredients, salt, pepper and dried fish, and by daybreak she hurries to see her new grandchild. If the child is her senior's daughter firstborn, they, the daughter and the mother, perform the blowing ritual (*firu*) at the gate of the house. The daughter is inside and her mother is outside, both blindfolded by a relative, and they blow ashes to each other, articulating *de piire daane, de piire daane* ('we uncover each other'). Afterwards, the mother can freely visit her daughter and the child as much as she wants. In some villages, the blowing practice is also performed between a father and his firstborn. They may do the blowing on both sides of the 'mouth' of the room.

In some cases a woman delivers in the father's house (mostly because it is the child's wish, or by coincidence). After the delivery, her husband is informed. He and his relatives rush to visit the wife and child to whom they present the following items: a small pot with oil to smear the navel and a larger pot to bathe the child on the day of the pouring of the leaves. Since the child was born in the mother's house, the husband's lineage has to 'collect the blood' before they can take their wife and child along. Normally some tobacco, a hoe and a fowl should be sufficient for this purpose. These items are also part of the marriage gift.

The removal of the ban which rests on one of the members of the matrilineage (the father or brother), usually happens when the child is a few months old. The young mother's relative, who was forbidden to meet the child during pregnancy, comes to visit her and the child. They too will do the ritual blowing of ashes (*firu*) with each other. On the inside of the gate stands the mother and her child, on the other side is the father or brother, held by a third person. They approach while repeating *de piire daane* ('we uncover each other'). This practice uplifts the ban. After the completion of the ritual, in some houses the custom exists that the relative in question tries to 'kidnap' the child. In a rash moment, he grabs the infant and runs with it to the house of the one who mediated and negotiated the marriage, the 'marriage-mediator'.²³ If the child's patrikin can catch him on the way, they go freely with their child. If he can reach the house, they have to 'buy' the child with a hoe and tobacco, items which explicitly remind of the marriage gifts. Here again, the patrilineage claims the child. The matrilineage gives in, in exchange for a lifelong reciprocity under the form of gifts and respect.²⁴

After some years of a fertile marriage, which gifted the man and his wife with a large family, the mother of the wife announces her visit to their marital house. What follows is a ritual practice in which the matriclan of the young woman is compensated for the loss of the 'ownership' of the children, through 'voluntary' gifts by the husband's relatives. In case she proved to be very fertile, the reciprocity of the husband's kin should be proportional.

Once the mother has arranged her 'official visit' to her daughter's marital house, both parties start the preparations for this very important occasion. The mother provides two small pots with oil, she weaves a long mat and a short mat, she grinds millet flour, chooses ingredients for soup and puts these items in new calabashes, and places all in a basket. A delegation of women (the 'mothers') accompanies her on her journey. The first stop is the house of the marriage-mediator. He receives one pot of oil, where-

upon he accompanies the delegation to the daughter's husband's house. The reception there should be very generous. For three or more consecutive days drumming and dancing is organised to celebrate the 'mothers'' coming. Each day a guinea fowl is killed for them and prepared by the communal efforts of the women in the house. When they finally return home, they are overloaded with gifts, such as baskets filled with millet and guinea fowls, other edibles or drinks, and at least one living goat. These valued items are all to be shared with the other lineage members, back in the village.

The child enters the water of the patrilineage

The first months of its life, the infant is a stranger to the house (see also Bonnet 1981). Boy or girl are called *Jampana* (small child) and considered an outsider. The child mainly belongs to the otherworld, to the non-domesticated world of the spirits and the deceased.²⁵ It is said to communicate with the spirits and some are believed to be fed and taken care of by them.²⁶

One day, the newborn decides that it is ready to leave behind this 'subhuman' world, and become a full member of the human's world. The most common sign for this is illness or another type of (mostly physical) disorder. The child has fever, faints easily, or vomits when it drinks water, in an attempt to communicate something which the househead tries to find out through a diviner. The latter indicates the demand of the child: 'it wants to enter the water of the lineage' (*o zo lira*), and this means that it wants to become a social member of the patrilineage.

Every child is chosen by an instance or tutelage force which will protect it during its life. The diviner assesses this guardianship, since that will determine how and where the outdoorings of the child will take place.²⁷ A similar guardianship is recognized by Cros (1990: 104). This guardian can be 'medicinal essence' (*lira*) which belongs to the house, or which is still to be composed for the house (in this case, on demand of the child), or a protecting locality (*tangwam*)²⁸ of the land and the house. Every 'house' or lineage is associated with different territorial land markers (*tangwana*) and medicinal substances (*lira*). *Tangwana* are usually considered to be 'shrines', but in fact they are localities, 'places where the earth breaths' (Liberski 1991), which guard one or more related houses, they secure the fertility of the house and land, and avert all calamities and evil. The medicinal substances (*lira*) too, although specifically assembled on demand of one person, protect the one who asked for its preparation, as well as the relatives who explicitly ask to fall under this protection as well. The child pronounces which of the protective forces of the house (*tangwana* or *lira*) is safeguarding him/her. Kasena believe that everyone, before coming to this world, reports to *wε* ('god' or the principal life force) and chooses a disposition or a path of life. They do not believe that one has a guardian-ancestor, such as other neighboring Voltaic groups do. One rather comes to this world with a disposition and is helped by a protective or tutelage force, which is associated with the house.²⁹

Each house has its own medicinal pot (*lira kambia*), kept by the original or eldest twin room of the house, some keep it in the cattle-yard, others keep the pot which

serves the whole house by the outside walls of the house. The *lira kambia* is an earthen pot, covered by another pot, crusted over with blood and feathers, an occasional skull or bone: tokens of the regular sacrifices. The content is composed by a diviner or a healer, in a specific commission of the head of the lineage. Next to the personal *lira*, which people can have, is this a common *lira*, which serves as a protective and life-giving force, a sort of 'lustral water', composed of roots of trees or plants to which water is continuously added by the head of the house.³⁰ The pot should never dry up, it is the 'water of the lineage', the amniotic fluid of the house. Each child born within the lineage will bathe (*suem*) in the *lira* or drink from the never-ending water (hence the term *bu-ηua-na*, 'child's-drinking-water', which refers to the content of the water). Whatever tutelage power the child chooses, it will be bathed with the water of the medicinal pot (*lira kambia*).

The outdooring of the child is again done by a female relative of the father, a *kadiko* (father's sister or father's paternal aunt), or 'a married-out-daughter of the house' as Kasena say. She comes to the house in the morning, while the preparations take place. Early morning, a guinea fowl and/or a fowl or a goat are killed and sacrificed to the medicinal pot (*lira kambia*), or to the ancestral shrine in front of the house. The exact object of sacrifice depends on the choice of the child, the essence to which it is dedicated differs from village to village or from house to house. The househead who performs the sacrifice, dedicates it to the ancestors of the house and invokes them to make the child strong and healthy, so that 'it's name will be called'. The sacrificial meat is used in preparing a meal with millet paste and soup (the main dish). When the meal is ready, the livers and thigh are sacrificed with some of the millet paste and all house-people participate in the commensal sharing of the meal. The bones of the sacrificed animal are tied around the child's waist, although many houses have left this practice.

When everything is ready, the daughter of the house (*kadiko*) takes the child in her arms and brings it to the frontyard or to the place the child demanded for. This can be the very place where the chosen protective locality is worshipped, or another representative of the 'tutelage force' of choice: a rock, tree or river which is worshipped for its suprahuman powers (*tangwana*), or else the altar of the ancestors of the house, built in the frontyard of the house. In some houses the child is simply brought to the frontyard, while an invocation of the 'protector' is sufficient.

All members of the extended family are present. The *kadiko* holds the child and bathes it in the medicinal water (*lira*), whereupon she or the househead announces its name. The name which is given to the child depends on the context in which the child is born, be it the circumstances in which the child first saw the light, or some major event which took place at that moment, or any particularity about the time or place where the child decided to come to this world.

The practice of namegiving clearly shows the transcending and regenerative capacity of the name(giving). The medicinal water, which is used to bathe the child, consists of rotting substances, recycling into new life. Sacrifice and bloodshed guarantee life for the infant and transgress the limits between the otherworld and the human world. The ritual caretaker in the figure of the married daughter affirms the connection between different worlds and between different generations: she moves between her

husband's house and her parental house where she plays a central role in all practices which generate new life for the lineage. She embodies the life giving force of the lineage and the rhythmical movement between different generations and between different worlds.

The name as such is not of much importance for a Kasena. In the beginning of my stay I was always surprised of how many people were addressed to with different names by different people. Especially those who converted to Christianity suddenly started using a Christian name, while known by everyone with their Kasem name. Moreover, beside their name given by the househead and their Christian name, many people were assigned a nickname during their life, due to resemblance with someone else, or because of their character or a certain event which occurred to them.

Depending on the choice of the child, two special pots are composed for the child, one with bathing water and one with drinking water. Until the child can walk, it will be using these concoctions. The day of its social birth has made him/her belong to the lineage for the rest of its days, even after its return to the otherworld. The infant has become a member of the house who will gradually grow in its full social role.

Some people diagnose the illness of the infant in the following way: 'The child does not want the hot water anymore, because it burns the mouth'. This suggests the formation of human speech in the child's mouth. In other Voltaic groups, the infant is said to communicate with the bush spirits. Its tongue is hot, evocative of the realm of the bush. Now it wants the mouth to cool, to learn the human tongue. Cold water is used to bathe the child. The alteration of heat and coolness is also an important indication of the child's new position in life. Close to the cooking fire, in line with the culinary activities of the woman, the reproductive potential of the man (the semen), becomes, combined with the cooking capacities of the women of the house 'the nourishment for the society' (Cros 1990: 95).

The transition from the otherworld to this world has been a gradual one, whereby the child and mother were first at risk because of their liminal state. The child itself hovers for some months and hesitates between these two worlds until it finally becomes a member of this world through its membership of the house. The death of the child within its early months is mostly interpreted in line of this view.

When an infant departs

The death of an infant is rather common in this area where extremely high rates of child morbidity are recorded, due to poor environmental conditions, high disease occurrence (malaria, acute gastro-enteritis, ...), bad water supply, a low socio-economic status and unsatisfactory maternal education in the villages (Senah et al. 1994).

When a young child dies, it can be interpreted in different ways and this depends first of all on the social place of the child. In case 'it has no brother or sister who follows', or a junior sibling (*yiikam*), it will not be considered a full human being. As long as the child does not allow the next-to-be-born to come, its death is interpreted as a return to the otherworld, due to different reasons. Those reasons are detected by the

househead through a diviner. On the one hand, the death of the child might be a signal of social disharmony within the house, or within the religious life of the inhabitants. On the other hand, the return can be caused by the dissatisfaction of the child with the situation in this world, or with the way it is treated by the mother or others; but in most cases, the child is not ready yet or it has forgotten something in the other world and thus needs to return.

The diviner acts as a medium capable of communicating with the two worlds. He interprets the death of the child, and elucidates the social and cosmological context of the interpersonal relations of the child to the deceased and to the relatives. He directs the househead to reestablish harmony within the house, namely through prayer and sacrifice.

Nowadays, disease etiology has strongly changed in favour of Western pathology, whereby many arduous illnesses are now recognised as malaria, cholera, measles, ... Nevertheless, subsequent death primarily fits into cosmological explanatory models. It is striking how infant death tends to be explained by a return to the otherworld, not only by those who cling to traditional etiologic models, but also by those who make use of biomedical-like health provisions, who frequent the clinics and appeal to pharmaceutical medicines.

Some children are said to 'die and come back' several times. If the death of a child is followed by the birth of a child of the same gender, and this for several consecutive births and deaths, it is believed that it is one and the same child that goes away and comes back. This also applies when the child comes back to another woman of the house: this means that a young woman of the same house delivers a boy a few months after another woman's baby boy has passed away. Such a child is called a *chirijoor*, a 'deceased-who-returned'. The people are not pleased with the caprices of such a child, death is always a painful event and points a finger at the close relatives of the newborn. When the child returns to the world of the mortals through birth, and the family disrobes it, they try to pretend not to attach great value to the child. If they attach no value to the child, and do as if they don't even want it, they hope the inhabitants of the otherworld will leave it in peace. On 'the day of the pouring of the leaves', they ritually enact this 'symbolic worthlessness' of the child. The ritual reveals the nature of the child and is meant to make it stay in this world (to 'shame' it, as some people explained). It is again the same female member of the patriclan, the *kadiko*, who comes to the house to perform the ritual. The child is treated as a worthless piece of dirt, it is thrown on the refuse heap or in a cattle pen, and dragged out by the *kadiko*, while she says 'I have caught you, don't return'. The child will be called, following this practice, *Apuuri* ('Refuse heap') or *Katugu* ('Cattle pen').³¹

If the child is a boy, they rather take it to the market, where they carry it around and try to 'sell' it (resembling the practice of the slavery) to prevent it from returning to the otherworld. If someone from another ethnic group symbolically 'buys' it, it can be named after the tribe (e.g. *Gonja* if a Gonja person symbolically bought the child) or it can just be called '*Kaba*' (slave).

Another way to prevent a child from fooling its relatives, is by giving it a mark or sign which will reveal its nature and allow disclosure before it is too late. When for ex-

ample a child dies and returns and dies again, before it is buried, the gravediggers give the child a mark (*dao*). They smear some ashes on its head, cut a cross or another sign on its cheeks, put sand in the eyes or twist a toe or a finger (this practice is called 'they put down a mark', *ba tin̄dao*). These signs will betray the child upon its return to the same house (e.g. when it has a white spot on the head, or it is blind, or has a scar on the cheeks). The scars on the cheeks can be done from the first suspicion that the child is a *chirijoora*, or the healer makes a small calabash with some roots and herbs (*dao-kunkwolo*) to be put on the child's neck, which will prevent the child of returning to the otherworld. (Here, I do not go deeper into the practices which are carried out with the mother of the child in order to restore her reproductive capacities, upon this painful loss.)

In some cases it is believed that a bad spirit has entered the mother's womb. When a neonate shows some anomalies or behaves strangely, a diviner may show that it is a bad spirit (*chichirru*). Such a child is believed to harm the members of the family and therefore it has to be secretly³² eliminated by a 'spirit-taker' (*chichirru-kweenu*). He kills the child in a specific way and buries it in the bush, where it metaphorically belongs. Wild things have to stay in the bush and to allow them in the house is believed to be a threat to the inhabitants.

All newborns are in contact with the otherworld which differs from the inhabited domestic world. Kasena do not adhere to a clearly described cosmography, so to give any a posteriori description here does not make much sense. During the first months, as long as the child's navel is not fully grown or it cannot sit properly yet, the child navigates in a liminal zone on the fragile border between the two worlds and it has the ability to communicate with the inhabitants of the otherworld. In case a young woman is pregnant of a disguised bad spirit, the infant should be removed from the domestic space and brought back to the wild, in order to prevent it from doing any harm.

The child's trajectory towards belonging

The newborn child is in a liminal phase. It bridges a trajectory through the cosmological space and the domestic space to finally become part of the patrilineage and a member of the house who progressively acquires social status. Born in the womb of the house, as a child of the mother's stomach and a stranger to the house, it gradually delineates itself towards a diversifying 'other', as a member of the house and patrician. In the physical space the child describes a path from the intimate inside of the house to a larger and larger outside, to finally identify itself with the house as a social group and an outer skin. This all happens in a parallel more 'temporal' dimension wherein the child undergoes the transition from unborn infant to a child of the lineage and at the same time a young wife of the house becomes a young mother.

Within cosmological space, the trajectory of the new being crosses the transitory space between the otherworld and the humans' world, while the risk of a return constantly lies in wait. When finally the child enters the water of the lineage, and allows the next child to come to this world, it belongs to the world of the mortals. The

otherworld and the visible world are not located in a different space-time. The difference is rather determined by the rhythm of the succession of generations. If birth violates the rhythm of the generations, death will put things back into place. Bonnet (1988) explains how the 'otherworld' is a representation of death and of the genetical potential within Mossi cosmology. Although the latter have a much clearer and more explicit cosmography, where the cycle of life and the return of ancestors is the central device, Kasena cosmology shows some slight similarities. The otherworld expresses the temporal order of generations to which every individual has to submit. The perversion of this rhythm leads to the ordinance of a ban, or to death. In Kasena language it is 'dirt' (*digru*) and dirt creates taboos to overcome it.

On the social level, the struggle between the patrilineage and the mother's lineage is always settled in favour of the patrilineage to which a child, boy or girl, belongs for the rest of its days and beyond. For the mother's house, it yields an unbalanced asymmetrical relation in which the husband and his relatives owe reciprocity and awe to their in-laws as long as the following two generations.

From the moment of pregnancy to the weaning of the child, the patrilineage lays claim on the newborn, in the first place through the figure of the paternal aunt, the *kadiko*. She represents the patrilineage in the different rituals which are carried out during the gradual passage of the child from the otherworld to its social birth in the patrilineage. The young mother is made clear that the child does not belong to her. When the child has grown, the *kadiko* can even appeal to her 'ownership' of the child.

For the mother, the *kadiko* probably embodies the vicious part, through all these practices which make her hand over the tenancy of her child. But there are also the ancestors, who play the very cruel role of seducing the child to return. This apparent cruelty lurks during the whole life of a Kasena, and teaches the major wisdom in life: one does not decide over life and death.

Some illness episodes in childhood are perceived as 'growing pains', in the sense of critical moments in the progressive growth of an infant in its belonging to the social and cosmological world of the human beings. The rootedness of the child in the house goes together with its delimitation towards an outside world which gradually grows larger. The other becomes an other, against which the child demarcates itself more and more clearly, be it 'all-others-than-the-mother', the patrilineage, the outside world, the bush or the otherworld. The locality of delimitation is in the first place the child's skin, which demarcates the inner from the outer; the concentration point of the skin is the navel. Although the skin itself is not such an important issue in Kasena cultural concepts, the navel is. The closure of the navel is considered very important and some activities which are prohibited in the post-partum period are said to prevent the healing of the navel. If the mother would carry out domestic tasks, or if she would appear in the public spheres, the child will not be able to form its boundaries and the navel will not close well. Oil is smeared on the navel to cure. While in the seclusion period, mother and child lodge in the womb-like rooms of the house, activities and taboos ensure the healing of the navel so that after these three/four days, mother and child come out as two separate, bodily differentiated beings. If not, one of them will not be able to make the transition to the 'outside' world well.

This period is still part of the gestation period, where the house is in labour and tries to give birth. Cooking and food preparation would disturb the detachment or dislodging of child and mother. Moreover, cooking causes too much heat and in addition to gestational heat it would cause harm to the new life.

Kannae (1978) takes note of a treatment of the mother's navel with ashes whenever she comes out of the house during the post-partum seclusion period. All these indications prove how the untying of mother and child guarantees the further life of both.

I will now shortly touch upon the theme of heat. In West African symbolism, conception and gestation always relate to heat. In rituals and practices affecting the fertility of the woman, the symbol of the cooking fire is very central. The first sign of pregnancy is the heat of the woman's body, which is the only signal for the husband of her state. The cool water which the daughter of the house (*kadiko*) throws on them contrasts with the hot body of the woman. Likewise, she is bathed with hot water after the seclusion, she has to eat 'hot' spicy food to enhance the breast milk production, the child and mother stay in the head-room, lying by the fireplace, kept warm with a small fire; these are all indications of the close association of fertility and heat. Child and mother are in a symbiotic gestation, the birth of the child takes place when it is inserted in the lineage. In the meantime it is a sexless stranger who navigates between 'this' and 'the other'.

The mother comes out earlier. She is bathed with hot water and leaves after the seclusion period of three or four days and she enacts the activities she was forbidden to engage in: food preparation, fetching of water, pounding, sweeping. Bathing is a critical process to induce a passage or a purification, nakedness shows that one undergoes a transition. The water with the leaves from the bush bound the woman back to her bodily shell. After the delivery all women bath, they all undergo a transition, the house has delivered and all women collectively took part. The individual motherhood is not as such explicated, the pulse of the differentiation process lies on the appropriation of the new life by the house vis-à-vis the 'other', be it the otherworld or the bush. The bathing which concludes the seclusion period delimits the period of danger where the left-overs of the blood in the mother's womb made her vulnerable for disease and contamination due to the parturition and transition, as well for the symbolical contamination she risks by the contact with the otherworld through the child.

Until 'the child's navel has completely healed' and it can sit well or be held properly, or, when its bodily wrap has taken a coherent form, the child stays like a foetus in the womb-like rooms, publicly non-existent as a valid member of the house. The child itself pulls the trigger by some physical symptoms or illness to enter into a new phase: 'It wants to drink water'. Every lineage has its own water, the amniotic fluid of the house, the earthenware pot with the *lira*. The one who enters the water becomes a social being, a member of the patrilineage, a produce of the house. A common expression says that 'they have bathed in the same water', which means that they belong to the same house (in contexts of witchcraft, kinship, ...).

Up to then the child was bathed in hot water, to make its skin hard and strong. The bathing is done 'to make its skin turn black'. The change of color and of temperature (from white to black, from hot to cold) affirms the transitory state of the child. Born as

a soft-skinned and white creature, on the threshold between this world and the otherworld, the bathing should make its skin hard and black, to seal off its body and identity, and to be set to confront the outer world. The hard black skin is a sign of membership to the mortal's world.

The pronounced wish to drink water might be an indication of the wish to leave the otherworld and stay in the mortal's world, which is perceived as a wet and moist world in contrast with the otherworld where the inhabitants suffer from thirst.³³ The spatial transgressions, from inside to outside, are accompanied by the blowing of ashes. This is said to have an appeasing impact on all dangerous forces which the outside world embodies.³⁴

The threat of the banned person, of the bad spirits, of the outside world are all conciliated and subsided by the blowing of ashes. The outdoor day, a child is also taken to 'where the wind blows': this is the public space, the inhabited world, where different movements crisscross, where paths intersect. The child is brought out to the frontyard, given a name, and given a direction in its life's navigation. The wind makes its skin hard, it becomes an outer shell, with an inner concept, the self with a name. Skin refers to the house, the patrilineage, it is now part of the patrilineage, although the path to the mother's house and the water make it part of the mother's lineage too. The child belongs to its patrikin and matrikin.

Notes

Ann Cassiman studied Psychology and Social and Cultural Anthropology at the KU Leuven. She is actually a research fellow at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the KU Leuven, where she works on a PhD-thesis on women's spaces among the Kasena of Northern Ghana. (*The rhythm of the Kasenahouse: an anthropological approach to women's spaces*). Her research deals with the meaning and practices of space, and especially with how women shape the domestic space. E-mail: Ann.Cassiman@ant.kuleuven.ac.be

- 1 Anthropological research was conducted from March 1996 to April 1998 among the Kasena of northeastern Ghana, more specifically in the western part of the Kasena-Nankana district of the Upper-East Region of Ghana. My findings concern the practices observed and collected in Chiana, capital of the Western Kasena district. My gratitude goes out to all the women, men and children of Chiana and Yidania who made this study possible, exciting and fruitful.
- 2 The consultation of the diviner is obviously restricted to those who live according to the traditional belief systems and cosmology. I will not go deeper into the health-seeking behaviour of Kasena in general, but restrict myself in this paper to the most widespread and traditional response to the infant's first illness or the infant's death.
- 3 The idea of a public announcement of the pregnancy by the woman herself, such as we do here, appeared very odd to those I explained this to. Such an announcement would be a hasty claim on the new being which does not belong to this world yet. Moreover, if the revelation would be done by the pregnant one herself, it would be perceived as a wrongful confiscation of the child by its mother. A child belongs to the patrilineage, as will become clear ahead.

- 4 A daughter of the house, or a *bukwo*, is a woman born to that house, who consequently belongs to the patrilineage. Once she is married, she becomes a 'married-out-daughter', a *kadiko*.
- 5 Caretaker or *tu*, in the sense of the one who carries out the ritual, or the master of the ritual.
- 6 *Puga* literally means stomach, but refers to the pregnancy or the child-to-be-born.
- 7 A woman in her first pregnancy is called a *kacheeri*.
- 8 *Piire* literally means 'to uncover, to disclose, to dull, to bring to light, to lay bare' or figuratively 'to catch someone in the act, to discover something about someone and to make it public'.
- 9 This practice, where the man goes with his father-in-law for a divination concerning the pregnancy is called *puga voro kom*, literally 'stomach divination'.
- 10 Senah et al. (1994) indicate 93% home-deliveries in 1994.
- 11 In most villages one or more women are trained to assist in deliveries and watch the good progress of it. These traditional birth attendants recognise obstetric emergencies and know how to treat them.
- 12 Once I assisted a delivery of a premature child (approximately 1 month too early). The ignorance of the mother about the date the child was to be expected, resulted in the diagnosis of prematurity on the moment of the delivery only. To my surprise the birth attendant blamed the mother for this fact, perceived as a failure by the mother. It was the mother who made the child come too early.
- 13 I wonder if the concept of '*nyeena-bia*', which refers to the 'children of one maximal lineage', finds its roots in the word '*nyeene*' (placenta) (while *bia* means 'children'). Lineage members have their placentas buried in the remnant heap of one 'house' (although this 'house' might be physically divided or split up into different houses). Usually people translate '*nyeena-bia*' by 'lineage-members' or 'those whose grandparents descend from one ancestor' (Howell 1997: 75) and who therefore belong to one maximal lineage.
- 14 In the whole of West Africa the association of male with 3 and female with 4 is common (Fainzang 1985).
- 15 If the mother is a primavera, she will not breast-feed the child during the days of seclusion. The child will be fed on boiled cow milk and water with millet and groundnuts. At the end of the seclusion, the mother's milk is tested on its quality. In case the milk is good, the child will be breast-fed, if not, the mother first undergoes a specific treatment to induce heat in her body.
- 16 *Kasonjo* literally means 'woman-house', and refers to the mother who is secluded inside the house during the early post-partum period.
- 17 The threat which the outside world contains is caught in the metaphor of the red-eyed person. This is someone who has taken a specifically prepared medicine to be invulnerable and to make others sick or weak.
- 18 Some lineages believe that they have to leave their newborns alone from time to time, since their lineage belongs to what is called '*chichirru*' ('spirits'). They say that their infants can communicate with the bush-spirits and that they are fed by them. After having bathed the child, for example, the grandmother intentionally leaves the child alone in the twin-room, so that the spirits can enter the room to feed their child. Afterwards, before anyone can enter the room again, the grandmother goes inside, warning the spirits 'I come, I come, I then come!' in order to avoid any confrontation with them. The spirits travel through the chimney of the head-room.

- 19 *Poone* means 'outside, in the open space, where light is', always in opposition to a place which is inside and dark. The space around the house in the night, is not *poone*. *Poone* needs to have the quality of 'light and open', 'there where the wind blows'.
- 20 A broom represents a human beings and wards off evil spirits (see Cros 1990: 103). When the mother leaves the child alone, or, in a funeral, when the corpse-guardians leave the corpse alone, they will put a broom to repulse the bad spirits.
- 21 Customarily, the leaves have to be piled in prescribed ways and piled again and again in different heaps. I do not have much information on these practices, although in some areas (e.g. the region of Kaya) they are still strictly followed (oral communication with Liberski).
- 22 Force-feeding is a practice which is common in this area, especially when water is given to the newborns. At a later stage feeding can be done forcefully when the child refuses to eat adult food. The mother holds the child firmly on the laps, cups her hand around the child's mouth with the water or porridge. With the other hand she closes the child's nose, so that when it wants to inhale air, this is followed by a big gulp of the liquid or food (Senah et al. 1994).
- 23 The marriage-mediator is the one who contracted the marriage: he acts as a go-between for all negotiations between the two lineages engaging in wedlock. During the course of the marriage he remains a very important person, all the more in matters concerning the offspring. The mediator's mother belongs to the maximal lineage of the young wife, while he himself belongs to the maximal lineage of the young husband.
- 24 In some villages the ban always rests on the father of the child himself: he is not allowed to see his newborn until the child is a few days or even a few months old. Due to the secrecy which veils these practices, I do not have much information on them. I suppose the practice originates from an inter-generational conflict (for comparison see Lallemand, 1993). It would be interesting to see how the appropriation of the child by the patriclan vis-à-vis the matriclan is put into practice here.
- 25 Howell (1997: 83) refers to a saying in Kasem 'A baby is *wε*', which she explains by the inabilities of a child of that age to communicate with the human beings, while it is said to be able to communicate with *wε*, the supreme god or the life-giver. I would rather frame this saying ('a baby is *wε*') within the preceding analysis, which explains how a child is in a liminal period, whereby it has some supra-human abilities to communicate with the spirits and maybe *wε*.
- 26 Here I refer to the existence of clans which are called '*chichirru*' and who believe the spirits feed their newborn children (see note 19).
- 27 In some parts of Chiana, the pouring of the leaves and the namegiving are performed on one and the same day.
- 28 Howell (1997: 84) speaks of how one's head-god (*yuu-wε*) can serve as a protective force for the child. I did not take note of this practice in the context of the bathing ritual and it seems rather improbable to me, considered the protector role the *yuu-wε* plays for every human being, in any case.
- 29 In Eastern Kasena land, the force which protects someone is called the person's *duŋa* (see Abasi 1993, Liberski 1991). In my field in western Kasenaland, this word is rarely used. *Duŋa* rather refers to a personal empowering medicine, such as a bangle, a horn, ... To my surprise, Ayaga uses the term in the sense of 'the divinity to which the child is dedicated during the naming ceremony' in a study on the Western Kasena too (see Howell 1997: 84). I did not find any evidence for this meaning ascribed to the word '*duŋa*'.

- 30 I do not know the exact composition of the *lira*, I was only told that it exists of a concoction of water with plants, herbs, leafs and roots.
- 31 Variations on those names exist: when a name starts with *Ka-*, this is always the female version of the *A-*, for example *Apuuri* for a boy, *Kapuuri* for a girl.
- 32 The secrecy might be due to the public condemnation of this practice, especially by those who converted to Christianity and by those who have a high national office.
- 33 The idea of the dry otherworld as one of the reasons why ancestors return to the mortals is very explicit in Mossi cosmology (see Bonnet 1981: 145).
- 34 In Kasem a saying exists that 'Even a chief does not cross ashes', which stresses the peace-making power of ashes.

References

- Abasi, A.K.
1993 *Death is pregnant with life: Funeral practices among the Kasena of Northeast Ghana*. Unpublished PhD, K.U.Leuven: Dept. Social and Cultural Anthropology.
- Adongo, P.B. et al.
1997 Cultural factors constraining the introduction of family planning among the Kassena-Nankana of Northern Ghana. *Social Science and Medicine* 45(12): 1789–1804.
- Awedoba, A.K.
1985 *Aspects of wealth and exchange with reference to the Kasena-Nankana of Ghana*. Unpublished PhD, Wolfson College: Accra.
- Bonnet, D.
1981 Le retour de l'ancêtre. *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 51(1-2): 133-49.
- Bonnet, D.
1988 *Corps biologique, corps social: Procréations et maladies de l'enfant en pays Mossi*. Paris: Orstom.
- Cartry, M.
1978 Les yeux captifs. In: G. Dieterlen & CNRS (eds), *Systèmes de signes (textes réunis en hommage à G. Dieterlen)*. Paris: Hermann, pp. 79-110.
- Certeau, M. de
1984 *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cros, M.
1990 *Anthropologie du sang en Afrique: Essai d'hématologie symbolique chez les Lobi du Burkina Faso et du Côte-d'Ivoire*. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan.
- Fainzang, S.
1985 Les sexes et leurs nombres. Sens et fonction du 3 et du 4 dans une société burkinabé. *L'Homme* 96: 97-109.
- Howell, A.
1993 *The religious itinerary of a Ghanaian people*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Kannae, F.K.
1978 *Kasena bia yira pam*. Accra: Bureau of Ghana languages.
- Lallemand, S.
1981 Un petit sujet. *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 51(1-2): 5-21.

- Lallemand, S.
1993 *La circulation des enfants en société traditionnelle: Prêt, don, échange*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Liberski, D.
1991 *Les dieux du territoire: Unité et morcellement de l'espace en pays kasena (Burkina Faso)*. Unpublished Phd thesis, Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes: Paris.
- Meurs, P. et al.
1999 Kinderen, gezondheid en welzijn: Naar een medische antropologie van kinderen. *Medische Antropologie* 11(1): 199-229.
- Pellow, D.E.
1996 *Setting boundaries: The anthropology of spatial and social organisation*. London: Bergin & Garvey.
- Senah, K.A. et al.
1994 *The socio-cultural context of infant/child morbidity and mortality in Kassena-Nankan district*. Navrongo: NHRC Reports.