

# The night-soil collector: bucket latrines in Ghana

SJAAK VAN DER GEEST<sup>1</sup>

One of my favourite proverbs in Twi, the largest African language in Ghana, is: *Wonkoa didi a, wonkoa bene* (If you eat alone, you will also shit alone). It is a blunt saying because of the directness of the term *ne* (to shit). People are usually more ‘polite’ and apply euphemisms to refer to defecation. The proverb points at the sociability of eating; someone eating alone is not considered to be a good person. S/he may be an egoist, or a miser, who will be punished for their bad behaviour and therefore will have to go to the toilet alone.<sup>2</sup> But what punishment is there in visiting the toilet alone? Most readers of this article probably prefer to be alone in that place.

The proverb refers to toilet conditions in the past of the Akan society of Ghana.<sup>3</sup> Some elderly informants explained to me that the toilet used to be a large pit covered by a scaffold of poles. The pit was always situated outside the ‘town’, in the ‘bush’. Visiting the toilet alone, in the night, was not a pleasure. If one became sick after eating a meal in the evening, one would probably have the company of another person who ate the same meal. Only the lonely eater, however, had to walk alone. The memory of the poles on which people had to squat to relieve themselves has been retained in some of the euphemisms for defecation, for example *kɔ̃ dua so* (‘to go on a tree’). One of Christaller’s proverbs (no. 407) also refers to the wooden poles of the traditional toilet: *Obi se ‘ɔbɛma woane’ a, Ente se woankasa wosɛn yanee so* (If someone says he will help you to shit, it isn’t the same as sitting yourself on the poles).<sup>4</sup> Christaller explains in his Twi dictionary that *oyanee* means ‘the scaffolding of poles outside the town used as a privy ... wc’.<sup>5</sup>

My knowledge of the pre-colonial, colonial and early post-colonial history of the Akan toilet is entirely based on discussions with people and the dissection of a few traditional sayings. There is an absence in the literature on ‘traditional’ Akan society about faecal matters. Rattray, the ‘Royal Warrant Holder’ of Akan tradition, who wrote five books on Akan culture, ignores his informants’ more mundane and natural necessities in life. Surprisingly, even in his collection of folk-tales, which, as he points out, are often vulgar and coarse, defecation does not occur.<sup>6</sup> In his ethnographic work there is only one reference to a toilet, when he lists the sixty-four rooms of a paramount chief’s palace. Room 48 is named as *Kantamereso* (‘the chief’s lavatory’). There is no indication what that ‘lavatory’ looks like or what is in it.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the reader may wonder where the other residents of the palace went to relieve themselves.

The overall picture that arises from my conversations with Ghanaians is that, in the olden days, people had public toilets in the bush which constituted a hole

with beams spread over it. They cleaned themselves with a corncob (*brodua*), and when the hole was filled up, they closed it and dug a new one.

Private toilets were probably only found in the houses of some important people in rural communities. However, an observation by Bowdich, a colonial visitor to the Asante capital Kumasi in 1817, suggests that private toilets *were* common in Kumasi:

What surprised me most ... was the discovery that every house had its clocae, besides the common ones for the lower orders without the town. They were generally situated under a small archway in the most retired angle of the building, but infrequently upstairs, within a separate room like a small closet where the large hollow pillar also assists to support the upper storey: the holes are of small circumference, but dug to a surprising depth, and boiling water is daily poured with, which eventually prevents the least offence.

Sanitary conditions in Kumasi at that time seemed to be exemplary and impressed many visitors to the city. In 1874 one visitor wrote: 'The smells of Coomassie are never those of sewage' and 'The town was kept scrupulously clean'. In rural communities outside Kumasi, 'among the lower orders', conditions were different, however, as Bowdich observed.<sup>8</sup> And those conditions are still different nearly two centuries later.

In Kwahu-Tafo, a rural town in Southern Ghana where I carried out anthropological fieldwork intermittently between 1971 and 2000, public toilets are still widely used. Only a minority of people have their own toilet attached to their house. In 1995 about sixty houses out of an estimated number of five hundred had a private bucket latrine. It may be the beginning of a process of individualisation and 'privatisation' of toilet use, but the continued wide acceptance of public toilet use remains remarkable.

In this article I intend to focus on the social and cultural implications of bucket latrines and report on my meetings and conversations with the man who is responsible for cleaning them. But first I would like to start with a few words about my research and about the Akan concept of dirt in relation to public and private toilet use.

### **Fieldwork in Kwahu-Tafo**

Kwahu-Tafo is a rural town of approximately 6000 inhabitants at about 150 kilometres from the capital Accra on the Kwahu plateau.<sup>9</sup> Most of the inhabitants are—at least partly—engaged in farming and trading. It is a place like many others, although it may be a bit more run-down than the 'average' Akan town. During my research, the road leading to the place was often in a deplorable state, especially in the rainy season. Many houses in the centre of the town had collapsed and the few streets that there were had enormous potholes. In 2001 the roads in and to Kwahu-Tafo were repaired. The town has a supply of water and electricity, but the majority of the population have no access to these facilities. The town is located at the crossing point of five roads and thus occupies an important trading position. There are several schools, a health clinic run by Catholic missionaries, about fifteen different Christian churches, and a small mosque.

Going to the toilet is a concern for many anthropologists during their fieldwork, even though they never mention it in their writings. During the almost three and a half years I lived in Kwahu-Tafo, I failed to practise full participant observation as far as toilets were concerned. I avoided the toilets which my landlords offered to me or which were used by the other people in the houses where I lived. My first morning in Kwahu-Tafo, now more than thirty years ago, is still fresh in my memory.

I had hired a room in the house of a teacher and explained to my host that I wanted to take part in everything. I asked him to introduce me to his way of life, which he did meticulously. The next morning he took me to the public latrine. It was rush hour. About ten people were waiting outside. When it was my turn I entered the place. A penetrating stench hit me in the face. The floor was littered with used paper. Squatting people stared at me. I felt terribly uncomfortable, walked past them and left the place. I told my host that I did not have the urge, which was very true. I asked an American missionary with a real water closet if I could use his facility and I never returned to the public toilet.

In a recent dissertation on the anthropology of defecation<sup>10</sup> Rachel Lea takes my reaction as an indication of my own cultural perspective on excrement and defecation. Using her comments, in a round-about way, for self-reflection, I realise how my preoccupation with privacy shaped my discomfort. Not being able to excrete alone in that inconvenient situation took away my urge completely. To me, privacy was more important than the elimination of dirt from inside the body.

In 1994, when I revisited the town to conduct research among elderly people, I settled in the house of someone who had his own latrine. I asked him if I could use it and he generously gave me a key saying that I should not give it to anybody. The use of this toilet was a privilege. Only some grown-ups and his own children had access to it.

There were good reasons to restrict the number of people using his toilet. The bucket, which was emptied once a week, would otherwise soon be full and the place would become a mess. I discovered the place *was* a mess, at least in my eyes. Several times I found the bucket overflowing. Flies loved the place, as did chickens who entered through holes in the door and the walls. The ever-present pieces of used paper, either tissue or newspapers in all languages, added to my repulsion.

At that time, I brought a Ghanaian sociology student with me to the field as a research assistant. He stayed in the room next to mine and I felt I had to show solidarity with him concerning toilet use. This gave a new impulse to my determination to overcome my toilet phobia and become a more complete participant. It did not last very long. I soon started to cheat on my assistant and secretly use the priests' toilet. I cleverly combined occasional visits to the Catholic mission with visits to their toilet. My bowels agreed; as soon as I approached the priests' place, I felt the urge coming.<sup>11</sup>

I never revealed my unfaithfulness to my research assistant. I felt too uneasy about it, and feared it would damage our relationship and our work. So again toilet use disappeared from my participant observation, but this also made the phenomenon the more intriguing. This feeling of 'failure' to adjust may have fed

my interest in toilets. The most decisive impetus, however, came from my research about care for elderly people, which began in 1994.

Visiting the toilet seemed problematic for many elderly people, at least in my eyes. Walking fifteen minutes to a toilet and having to share the same room with other visitors, including children, seemed to me particularly unpleasant for people of old age. This topic was discussed over and over with both friends and the elderly, and I slowly realised that some of my concerns about privacy, and my perceptions of dirt and disgust, were different from theirs. I decided to delve deeper into the language and perceptions of dirt.

### Terms and concepts of dirt

Dirt is a key concept in the Akan perception of the human being. It is something unwanted, something one should get rid of. Ideas about dirt and cleanliness pervade the entire culture. There are several terms which refer to dirt. *Efi* is dirt that comes from outside and attaches to the body, to clothes, to objects, or to a house. It has a temporary character. A man coming from his farm is dirty (*ne ho ayɛ fi* or *ne ho wɔ fi*) because of the work he has been doing, but he is not inherently dirty. A child playing in the mud is dirty, as is a yard which has not been swept.

*Atantaneɛ* (lit. nasty or hateful things) is dirt which is more detestable. Most people use the term for dirt coming from inside the body: vomit, phlegm, menstruation blood, urine, or faeces. When a latrine is dirty with human faeces, people say: *ehɔ yɛ tan* (lit. there is nasty).

As in most languages, terms of 'dirt' assume wider meanings. They are metaphorically applied to social, moral and aesthetic phenomena. Dirty = ugly = unattractive = nasty = bad = uncivilised = shameful = not respected. Examples from Christaller's Twi dictionary illustrate this: *efi aka no* (lit. dirt has stuck to him) means that someone has defiled himself morally, for example by committing evil or breaking a taboo. *Ne yere de fi abeka no* (lit. His wife has brought dirt to stick to him) means that his wife has disgraced him. *Efi* spoils things, it makes one vomit. So *efi* produces *efi*.

*Atantaneɛ* is derived from the root *tan* which means ugly. It pains the eye when one looks at it. *Tan* is also the term for 'to hate'. Hateful, nasty, shameful; they are one and the same thing. If someone has the habit of being dirty, people say *ommu ne ho* (lit. he does not respect himself). Telling someone that he is dirty is a serious offence. The strong emphasis on the different use of the right and the left hand shows the same concern about dirt. The left hand is reserved for 'dirty' activities, such as cleaning oneself after using the toilet, holding the penis while urinating, cleaning dirty things (e.g. a chamber pot), blowing one's nose, etc. Conversely, cleanliness (*ahoteɛ*) is the pre-eminent metaphor to express positive appreciation. Clean = beautiful = attractive = good = civilised = respectable. The most common term referring to being clean is *te*, which means 'to be open' or 'to be clear'. *Ehɔ te* (lit. There is open) must be understood to mean that the place is clear, free from unwanted things, free from dirt. *Ne ho te* (lit. His/her body is clear) is a compliment saying that the person is beautiful, attractive. In Ghanaian English, the expression 'she is neat' is

almost synonymous with 'she is pretty', with the connotation that she is also beautiful in a moral sense, 'pure'. The connection with respect is always present. Cleanliness engenders respect and expresses it. *Odi ne ho ni* means 'He respects himself' as well as 'He keeps himself clean'.

In summary, bodily cleanliness stands for physical and moral attractiveness, whereas dirt symbolises physical and moral decay. Dirt, or rather the abhorrence of it, plays a central role in the local 'anthropology'. To say that someone is dirty is almost a rejection of the whole person. Cleanliness of the body (the skin, the orifices, the teeth, the nails), and cleanliness with regard to housekeeping, clothing, or one's children, constitutes a basic condition for a person's attractiveness. Physical beauty and sexual attraction are commonly explained in terms of cleanliness.<sup>12</sup>

The concern about cleanliness accounts for the reluctance of people to build a toilet in their house. A toilet, by definition, is a dirty place so it should be kept outside the house, preferably outside the community. Thus it became the custom to construct the toilet at the edge of the town. In Kwahu-Tafo all four public toilets were initially situated on the outskirts, but when the town expanded over the years, some of them were gradually surrounded by houses. In larger towns and cities it has become impossible to keep the toilets outside the built-up area, for to do so would require some people to walk for an hour or more to visit the toilet. As a result, but contrary to the most basic feelings of what is appropriate, one finds dirty public toilets in the centre of the community and near markets and lorry stations in all larger Ghanaian towns.

### **The bucket latrine**

When I inspected the toilet facilities in Kwahu-Tafo in 1996 I found that the town had four public toilets each with twelve squatting holes. Two of them had been closed down for various reasons.

Most people of the town prefer to go to the toilet early in the morning before they take their bath and breakfast.<sup>13</sup> It means that around 6 o'clock in the morning the public toilets are crowded and people may have to queue for their turn. Visiting a public toilet is not 'free'. The caretaker of the toilet takes a coin of 20 cedis (about one dollar cent) from each visitor. He has a pile of cut newspapers in front of him and hands each customer one sheet before taking their money. He is also responsible for the cleanliness of the place.

In addition there are some semi-public toilets in various schools which are used by both pupils and staff members. People living in the vicinity of the school also make use of the facility. An unknown number of people do not use a toilet, but relieve themselves on their way to the farm or on the farm. In the latter case, their faeces contribute to the fertility of the land, but I am not sure this is a conscious policy (as it is in some Asian countries). Most people with whom I discussed the advantages of human manure reacted with disgust to this idea. A more recent and pernicious technique to defecate without visiting a toilet is the use of plastic bags, which are later on thrown away in the bush or on the garbage heap outside town. Children may defecate directly on the dunghill near the public toilet; it will save them the 20 cedis they otherwise have to pay.

Finally, a limited number of inhabitants have their own toilet. Some of these are water closets. They can be found in the houses of the missionaries, in the health clinic, in the staff quarters of the Technical School, in some houses of well-to-do inhabitants, and in the house of the chief. A few houses, mostly towards the outskirts of the town, have their own pit latrine traditional style. All other private toilets are so-called bucket latrines. In 1996 the sanitary inspector estimated their number at sixty.

Most 'buckets' are square wooden containers which are emptied about once a week. A bucket latrine can be inside the house but in such a way that the bucket can be removed from the outside, through a little door at the back of the house. A bucket latrine can also be built as a separate wooden shed a few metres from the house. Users of the bucket latrine are not allowed to urinate in it, or to throw paper in it (people urinate in the bathroom where the urine is later washed away by the bathing water). The toilet paper is deposited in a basket and someone will burn the paper when the basket is filled up. In view of the fact that the bucket is emptied only once a week (the collector told me that it may be once in six days), the number of users needs to be limited. Children, for example, can be told to use the public latrine.

In 1971 I was doing research with a Ghanaian friend and stayed in the house of someone who had a private bucket latrine, behind his house. The door to the latrine was locked and the key was hanging on the doorpost of the owner's room, out of the reach of children. Everybody knew the rules as to who had the right to use the toilet. The two of us were among the privileged, although I never made use of my right. When the bucket began to overflow before its time, the owner realised that some residents in the house were cheating and he took the key inside his room. My friend discovered, however, that he could also open the padlock with a pair of compasses. He was probably not the only person who knew how to circumvent the problem of the key. As a result, the bucket kept overflowing.

My first personal experience with the bucket toilet only came in 1994, when I started to use my landlord's private latrine. I have described that experience at an earlier point in this article. There were always children playing in the vicinity of the toilet and everyone could see me entering the place. The door had several holes and chickens followed me to, and even into, the place. Worst of all was the situation inside the toilet. Here too, the bucket was often overflowing and the stench was repulsive. Flies and other insects completed my 'ordeal'. After some time I stopped. From that moment onwards my toilet 'participation' was limited to urinating in the bathroom.

For the elderly, the bucket latrine was an ideal solution. Most of them managed to make use of such a private toilet, either in their own house or with one of their neighbours.<sup>14</sup> One of them, a blind man, could find his way to the toilet thanks to a long rope which led from his room to the toilet. Bucket latrines are now on their way out, however. Local and higher-level governments are propagating water closets for the well-to-do and better quality public toilets for the others.<sup>15</sup> One way to improve the quality and cleanliness of the public toilets is privatisation.<sup>16</sup> Entrepreneurs exploit toilet facilities and users of public toilets now have to pay a small amount of money. It seems to be a lucrative business.

That bucket latrines are being phased out is understandable if one considers the type of work that is required for the regular removal of the waste. It is becoming more and more difficult to find people who are willing to empty the buckets. Who are those night-soil collectors and how do they look upon their work?

### The night-soil collector

My first ‘meetings’ with a night-soil collector took place in the night without the man noticing me. Once a week I woke up in the middle of the night because of an intense stench drifting into my room. When it happened the first time I stood up and looked out of my window. I saw a short figure emptying the latrine bucket of my neighbour, just four metres from my window. His movements were steady and almost soundless. I observed how he poured the contents of the bucket into his own container and cleaned the bucket with a cutlass and a broom. He put the bucket back in its place, closed the little door, lifted the container on his head and walked away in the night.

It was only some years later that I met the man in daylight. Yaw Darko, one of my friends, who also was a research assistant, lived close to the man’s house and one day introduced him to me. I felt uneasy at first, assuming that the man would feel uncomfortable about his work and my interest in it, but I was mistaken. Mr Atia, as his name was, took pride in his work and had no inhibitions telling us about it.

The night-soil collector is called *Kruni* in Twi. The term is derived from ‘Kru’, the name of an ethnic group in Liberia. Kru people, I was told, used to be the soil collectors in Southern Ghana. At present, most of them come from Northern Ghana or Burkina Faso, but the name *Kruni* has remained with them. That migrants and outsiders are the men performing this unpleasant work should not surprise us. *Atantaneɛ nti na yetɔ ɔdɔnkɔ* (‘We buy a slave because of the filthy work’), Asante informants told Rattray in the 1920s.<sup>17</sup> The situation has not changed very much. What *did* surprise me was the self-esteem of Mr Atia. He saw his work as clean work and was aware of the fact that people needed him. He knew his value and ‘he had his price’. In the minutes of the local council of the town of Larteh as long ago as 1940 we read about the respect allotted to the night-soil collectors: ‘as the boys for carrying latrine excrement are sometimes scarce, they should be handled gently’.<sup>18</sup>

Mr Atia is a Frafra from the area around Bolgatanga in the Upper-East Region. He told us that he had been doing this work for twenty-eight years. Some years ago he was the only *Kruni* in the town, but due to his age (he must be about 65) he has now reduced the work to about thirty-five houses. Two other *Krufo*, also from the Bolgatanga area, serve the rest of the town.

Mr Atia was first a labourer, weeding the roadsides around Kwahu-Tafo. It is the type of work which many people from the North are doing in the South of the country. Some come to work on a season’s basis and return home for sowing and harvesting, while others settle permanently but retain close ties with home.<sup>19</sup> Mr Atia is one of the latter. When he ‘retired’ from his first job, a Town Council Officer responsible for sanitation appointed him to work at the *bɔɔla* (refuse

dumping place), but he declined the offer because he did not like the work. When we asked him why he did not like it, he replied rhetorically: ‘Who would like such a job?’ (*Σε obiara ne nea απε?*) He then decided to do the same kind of work but as a ‘private entrepreneur’. During our conversation in 2000, he was charging each household 5000 cedis a month, which was then almost one American dollar. Assuming that he was serving thirty-five households, he made about 175,000 cedis per month, the equivalent of about 30 American dollars. The minimum salary of an unskilled labourer in that same period was about 50,000 cedis (less than 10 American dollars). He collected the money at the end of the month. If people failed to pay he simply stopped emptying their bucket. This technique usually worked, instantly obtaining appropriate payment. While we were conversing in front of his house a young woman approached him and whispered something into his ear which we were not supposed to hear. She informed him that her bucket was full and asked him if he could come that night to empty it. After she left we continued the conversation and he said he earned some extra income by castrating cats, dogs and goats.

Talking about his work he explained that first he worked during the day, but people complained about the ‘nuisance’, so he started to operate in the night. Usually he begins around 11.30 p.m. and continues until 4 or 5 a.m. In that time span he is able to ‘do’ six or seven buckets. For each bucket he has to walk a long distance, from the house to a dumping place outside the town, on average about one kilometre away. He does not work when the soil is wet and slippery. As he carries the load on his head, slipping would have extremely unpleasant consequences. In fact, one night when we had agreed to accompany him during his round, he cancelled the appointment because the soil was too slippery.

Mr Atia’s equipment consisted of a large (about 15-litre) bucket, a soiled white shirt, a sack in which he carried a cutlass, a broom, and a hat with a layer of foam rubber (to place the bucket on). We asked him if there were particular risks in the work he does. There are, as an excerpt from one of our conversations shows:

Yaw Darko/Sjaak van der Geest: You told us you don’t work when it rains. Why?

Atia: It is because the ground becomes too slippery. You know the weight of the load. If you are not careful, you are in danger.

YD/SvdG: Do you take alcohol?

Atia: Formerly I did, I was drinking too much. The doctor told me to stop. You see it is a difficult job. If you drink, you may one day find yourself covered by ‘toilet’ [excrements]. So, it is better not to drink, unless after you have finished the work.

Another time we asked him if the stench bothered him.

Atia: Not at all. Not, if I take medicine.

YD/SvdG: Is the medicine for prevention against the stench?

Atia: No, it also protects me against witches. When I see them, I don’t get afraid. They hide, when I see them.

Apart from the heaviness of the load and the danger of falling, the roaming about of witches in the night constitutes a danger to him. He remembers that he once saw a white image about 90 metres away from him. When the figure spotted him it diverted its course and disappeared in the bush.

To protect himself against the stench *and* against witches he uses a medicine which he calls *mɔɔɔ*. I ask him to show it to me and he enters the house and returns with a black substance wrapped in paper. It looks like charcoal. I taste some of it and the taste too reminds me of charcoal, although I have never actually tried charcoal. He tells us that he gets the *mɔɔɔ* from his hometown.

That same night, Yaw Darko accompanies him on his tour. I quote from Yaw's notes:

Almost the whole atmosphere was dead. Everybody was asleep and I met nobody on the way. I got to Atia's place at 11.25 p.m. exactly. I knocked on his window and he came outside in his 'uniform', a white shirt with stains, a sack over his shoulder and a cutlass inside the sack. We went to the first house where his bucket was waiting. He hung the sack over a nearby flower hedge. He opened the door and pulled the full bucket towards him. He then pushed his own empty bucket against the full bucket. I began to feel [smell, svdg] the stench of the *ebin* (shit). Mr. Atia dipped his left hand (without gloves) into the shit of the bucket and scooped some of it into the empty bucket. He did this four times, because the other bucket was too full to lift without spilling. Then he took the full bucket, and poured the contents into his own bucket. He wiped his hand on the grass to clean it and took his small hat with the foam layer from his sack and put it on. He lifted the full bucket from the ground, rested it a moment on his lap and then placed it on his head, with ease. He then started walking to the dumping ground. During this exercise I had taken some pictures—with his permission.

### Daylight

The bucket latrines will disappear and so will the night-soil collector. Mr Atia's children will not continue his occupation and no one else in the town of Kwahu-Tafo is prepared to do this type of work any more, certainly not the autochthones. Several people assured me that they would not take his position, 'Even if they paid me a million'. This brief article has first of all been a description of a phenomenon which will soon be extinct, a piece of urgent anthropology, one could say.

I have also written this article as a tribute to those who were forced to work in the night because their labour was too offensive for the people of the day. My description seeks to show their job to the daylight before it is eclipsed.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I want to thank my friends who patiently explained complicated faecal matters to me: Patrick Atuobi, Anthony Obeng Boamah, Benjamin Boadi and Yaw Darko. Special thanks go to Mr Atia, the night-soil collector, to whom I dedicate this article.

<sup>2</sup> The proverb is used in a much wider sense, however. It expresses criticism of someone who is told that he should bear the consequences of his 'stupid' behaviour. The roughness of *ne* (to shit) suits the abusive intent of the saying.

<sup>3</sup> The Akan include the Asante, Fante, Akyem, Akuapem, Kwahu (or Kwawu), Bono and several other smaller groups. This article is situated in Kwahu society. Other studies dealing with Kwahu include: P.F.W. Bartle: 'Urban Migration and Rural Identity: An Ethnography of a Kwawu Community', Ph.D. thesis, Legon, University of Ghana, 1977; W. Bleek, *Marriage, Inheritance and Witchcraft: A Case Study of a Rural Ghanaian Family*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1975; W. Bleek, 'Sexual Relationships and Birth Control

- in Ghana: A Case Study of a Rural Town', Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1976; S.F. Miescher, 'Becoming Man in Kwawu: Gender, Law, Personhood, and the Construction of Masculinities in Colonial Ghana 1875-1757', Ph.D. thesis, Anthropology, Northwestern University, Evanston, 1997.
- <sup>4</sup> J.G. Christaller and K.R. Lange, *Three Thousand Six Hundred Ghanaian Proverbs from the Asante and Fante Language*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, p. 34.
- <sup>5</sup> J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, Basel: Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933.
- <sup>6</sup> R.S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930, p. ix.
- <sup>7</sup> R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, p. 60.
- <sup>8</sup> Cited in D. Maier, 'Nineteenth-Century Asante Medical Practices', *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1979, pp. 63-81.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Town' in Ghanaian English stands for the Twi term *kurom* and is used for any major settlement. For non-Ghanaians, Kwahu-Tafo with its 6000 inhabitants would perhaps be a 'village'. Within Ghana, 'village' (in Twi: *akuraa*) refers to a settlement of just a few houses or huts. Depending on its context, 'village' may have a derogatory meaning. I shall, therefore, use the term 'town'.
- <sup>10</sup> R. Lea, 'The Performance of Control and the Control of Performance: Towards a Social Anthropology of Defecation', Dissertation, Brunel University, London, 2001, p. 53.
- <sup>11</sup> I have described that first 'defeat' (and the subsequent ones) several times, most extensively in S. van der Geest, 'Akan Shit: Getting Rid of Dirt in Ghana', *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 8-12.
- <sup>12</sup> See again, S. van der Geest, 'Akan Shit', pp. 8-12.
- <sup>13</sup> S. van der Geest, 'Healthy Bowel Movements in Kwahu-Tafo: A Brief Note' (submitted for publication).
- <sup>14</sup> S. van der Geest, 'The Toilet: Dignity, Privacy and Care of Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana', in S. Makoni and K. Stroeken (eds) *Sociolinguistic and Anthropological Approaches to Ageing in Africa*, London: Ashgate, 2002, pp. 227-244.
- <sup>15</sup> N. Obirih-Opareh, 'Public or Private? A Policy Dilemma of Liquid Waste Management in Accra', in S. van der Geest and N. Obirih-Opareh (eds) *Toilets and Sanitation in Ghana*, Accra: Stepri, 2001, pp. 13-23.
- <sup>16</sup> N. Obirih-Opareh (see note 16) and J. Post, 'Managing Liquid Waste: The Case of Public Toilets in Kumasi', in S. van der Geest and N. Obirih-Opareh (eds) *Toilets and Sanitation in Ghana*, pp. 25-34.
- <sup>17</sup> R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, p. 44.
- <sup>18</sup> D. Brokensha, *Social Change at Larteh, Ghana*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, p. 67.
- <sup>19</sup> J.S. Nabila, *The Migration of the Frafra of Northern Ghana. A Case Study of Cyclical Labour Migration in West Africa*, East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1974; C. Lentz and V. Erlmann, 'A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival Among the Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1989, pp. 69-111; K. van der Geest, "'We're Managing": How Farmers in Northern Ghana Adapt to Climate Changes', Master's thesis, Human Geography, University of Amsterdam, 2002.