

Naming Practices in Kilenge*

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Introduction

In many parts of the world, and in many languages, the concept of 'name' is integrally linked to status and reputation. As English speakers, we all understand what is meant by the phrase "he has a bad name": the referent has a poor reputation or character.

Among the Kilenge of north west New Britain, Papua New Guinea, a similar situation prevails. On the most general level, the concept of *napasis*,¹ or 'name,' is synonymous with social identity. Name is the idiom through which people discuss status. Establishing one's name means demonstrating one's status. This is especially important for first-born sons or daughters. Ranking by birth order is a significant feature of Kilenge social structure, but it cannot be taken for granted. A child's

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¹All of the *underlined* terms are from the local language, Male'u. The term *napasis* and those that follow are generally given in their unpossessed forms. Nouns which appear in the paper are from two noun classes in Male'u. For simplification they are called:

- I, of the form *na-* plus -root,
- II, of the form root- plus possessive.

Class I nouns become possessed by the substitution of a possessive marker for the noun marker *na-*. Class II nouns do not appear in an unpossessed form, but must have a suffixed possessive in order to be spoken.

The singular possessive forms are:

- I, *lek-*, *ak-* (first person)
- lem-*, *am-* (second person)
- le-*, *e-* (third person)
- II, *-k* (first person)
- m* (second person)
- a* (third person)

For example, "my name" could be translated as *akpasis* or as *lekpasis*. (*na-* plus *-pasis* delete *na-* and substitute either *ak-* or *lek-*. 'My namesake' would be given as *sorok*. (*soro-* plus *-k*).

status must be affirmed by gifts of food made in the child's name. A host of rituals, feasts, and ceremonials honor first-born offspring and ensure that people are aware of the child's name. The act of taking food prepared in the name of a child signifies that the recipient recognizes and accepts the child's social status.

A man who has 'name' has fame and prestige. Acts such as the sponsorship of *narogo* (multi-year ceremonial cycles used for initiating children and honoring the dead — see Zelenietz and Grant 1980) serve to build a name for a man in the community. Failure to fulfill obligations and expectations can result in the creation of derisive nicknames to emphasize the limited merit a man has earned. Women may also acquire a 'name' by participating in major exchanges focusing on pigs and traditional valuables. However, female participation in this type of activity is optional, rather than mandatory. A woman's fulfillment of her daily domestic functions (gardening, child-rearing, honoring neighbor and kin obligations) is the most important criterion villagers use in judging her status.

The indication that a person is a leader is frequently phrased in terms of 'name.' Of a *natavolo*, the hereditary male *naulum* (men's house) head, it is said in Pidgin, "em i gat naim long ples," 'he has a name in the village.' The same is said for a *nagarara*, first-born daughter of a *natavolo*. People may earn status or name by acting in the manner expected of traditional leaders, that is, by exhibiting extreme generosity and hospitality.

A name in Kilenge also symbolizes and guarantees its holder the right to social recognition, group membership, and the use of certain resources. Names are not simply random phonetic configurations. Each name is meaningful because it is the property of a social unit. Carrying a particular name signifies membership in the social unit which owns that name and thus helps to establish a place for the name-carrier in the social structure.

Of course, on the most personal level, names are labels which allow for the identification of individual members of society. Each villager has several names, some chosen by parents or grandparents at a child's birth, and others which may accrue later in life. Although people may share a personal name with many others, seldom will they share all the same nicknames, Catholic names, and kinship terms. Accordingly, there are always ways for each individual to be made to feel unique because he or she has a name of his or her own.

In this paper we discuss the classification and application of Kilenge names and their meaning for social identity. Ample flexibility is built into the system to allow the structure to accommodate the particular needs, desires, and circumstances of members of society. When one asks of the

Kilenge, “what’s in a name?” one has to patiently listen to a long story before being satisfied with the answers.

The Social Context of Naming

Kilenge social organization has a superficial simplicity which masks underlying complexity. In brief, each village is composed of several *naulum* (men’s house groups), which are local groups with a patrilineal bias (created through preference for virilocal residence). However, descent is cognatic, and lines of descent frequently cross *naulum* lines. While people will, of necessity, live on the grounds of a particular *naulum* in a particular village, they will still claim affiliation with many of the *naulum* of cognatic ancestors (see Zelenietz, 1980: Chapter 2).

Naulum own real property, such as land, as well as intangible property such as emblems, legends, and names. While the members living on the *naulum* plot usually exercise control over the distribution and management of its property, all descendants of present and former *naulum* members (loosely called a ‘descent line’ hereafter) have the right to use the property.

When parents or grandparents choose a name for a newborn child, they make a social statement about the child’s identity. By giving the child a name from a particular *naulum* they affirm the child’s commitment and relationship to that group. Sometimes people say that a boy should, upon adulthood, go to live with the *naulum* which owns his name. Several men explained their own *naulum* affiliation in such terms. Women may also use name-based relationships for geographical mobility, but usually live with their own natal *naulum*, or after marriage, with their husbands’ *naulum*. It also appears that adoption, which is quite common in Kilenge, correlates significantly with naming; that is, children tend to be adopted by kinsmen from the same descent line which controls the name the children were given at birth.

The right to confer a name on a new-born child alternates between the lines of the father and of the mother. The eldest kinsman or kinswoman from the line makes the decision as to which name is given. The usual custom is for the father’s line to name the first-, third-, fifth-born and so on, while the mother’s relatives retain the right to name the second, fourth, and sixth children. There are, of course, many deviations from this ideal pattern, but rarely do the relatives of only one parent bestow names on all the children. Occasionally, both sets of families will give names to the same child, but gradually a pattern of usage will develop whereby one name is favored over the other. When an infant or young child is adopted

by another family, the adoptive parents may choose to rename the child, giving it a name from one of their own immediate ancestors.

Healthy children are named within a week or two of being born, but names are withheld from sickly infants until people feel they have a good chance of surviving. The person bestowing the name (no special relationship exists between the namegiver and the recipient) may select a name from any descent line to which the child's parents are connected. Children are generally named after particular kinsmen who held or hold the same name. The most popular choices for namesakes are the child's grandparents, the natal siblings of the parents, or the siblings of the child's grandparents. It is not uncommon for a child to be given the same name as his own deceased sibling, if he had one; the new child may then be seen as a replacement for the lost one. Children are never given the same name as their parents.

Each Kilenge individual has several names. Some names are traditional. Others have been introduced by the Roman Catholic Church, of which the Kilenge are adherents. In everyday parlance in the village, traditional names are most commonly used, but church names may be heard in some settings. When people are dealing with strangers they ordinarily first give their Christian names. The use of the church name implies a formality and lack of intimacy rarely encountered in the village setting where everyone knows everyone else.

A few people living in Kilenge are, to some extent, statusless and hence nameless. They are usually migrants from distant communities, and for various reasons have never been fully integrated into Kilenge life. One old man from Kove had to rely on the Mission for his food and clothing, even though he lived in the village for many years. He had no 'name' in the village, and his Kove name seemed to be used as a epithet of derision. When he died, there were no mourners, and no feast.

If newcomers have kinsmen in Kilenge, then they can be integrated into the social network and given a name. But if they lack kin in the community, then they are often excluded from daily social interaction. The connection between naming and kinship relations became abundantly clear in our own case as visitors. Although we had been in Kilenge for a few months, many people could not manage to pronounce the name 'Jill.' The women who were our immediate neighbors decided that the only feasible solution to this problem was to give us village names. They chose the names of their own close kinsmen, thus drawing us into their circle of kin, and giving us a social identity in the community. As one man said to us, "Now that you have a name as someone's kin, you're related to everyone in Kilenge."

The Traditional Naming System

A. The Proper Name: *Napasis Kuria*

A person’s proper name, *napasis kuria*, usually has two parts: a simple name, *napasis*, and its ‘head,’ or *kuria* (see figure 1). The two form a unit, and only certain combinations occur. For example, a particular *napasis*, Talania, will only be found in combination with particular *kuria*, such as Sapakuru or Aritio. *Kuria* tend to be very restricted in their distribution, being tied to only one or two *napasis*. Rarely, a single name might serve as both a *napasis* and, for another individual, as a *kuria*, as for the following women’s names: Kovai Alopua (*napasis/kuria*) and Alopua Aisegel (*napasis/namuno*).

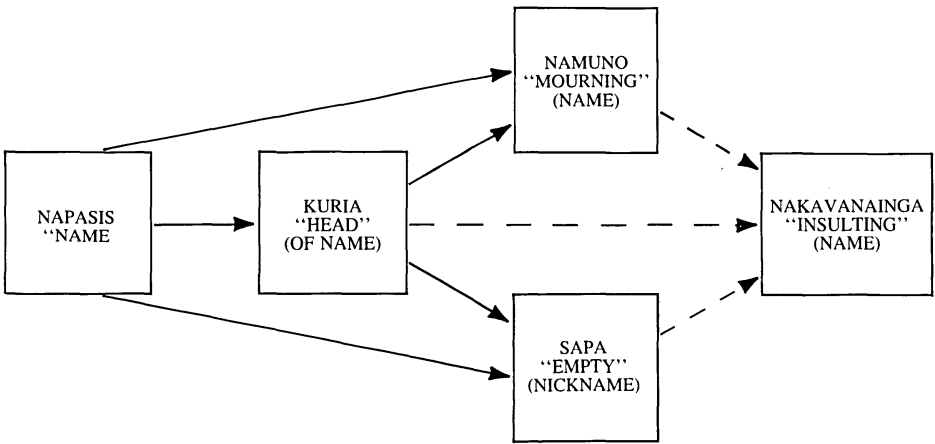


Figure 1: Traditional Naming System²

Napasis provide the Kilenge with primary identification markers: people tend to be called by their *napasis* unless there is the need to distinguish between people who have the same *napasis*. Then the secondary identification marker of the *kuria* comes into play. The combination form might be elicited.³ Some people, though, are known by their *kuria*. In a few

²The arrows indicate the name order most often volunteered by informants. *Namuno*, mourning names, may be used independently or may follow after *napasis* alone or *napasis kuria*. Nicknames and insulting names most often follow as addenda to *napasis*, although *sapa* can sometimes be used separately.

³A sample conversation:
 A. “Where is Talania?”
 B. “Talania who?”
 A. “Talania Aritio.”

cases, people are unsure of which part of a name is the *napasis* and which the *kuria*. For example, women with the name Galiki Aisipel may use either part of the name for their *napasis*, or common name. Most *napasis kuria* are sex-specific: that is, they are used either for men or for women, but not for both.⁴

The Kilenge naming system is undergoing some simplification. While some older informants know their own and other people's *napasis kuria*, and insist that all names had *kuria*, many younger people do not know their own *kuria* and often do not give any *kuria* to their children. Christian names (see below) are replacing *kuria* as secondary identification markers in village life. Impetus for this replacement comes from the church, the school, and urban custom imported into the rural areas.

Although many names are untranslatable, in that they do not refer to objects or concepts in the local language, some names are labels for varieties of garden produce. *Kuria* frequently refer to objects, places, concepts, flora and fauna. But there is no special relationship or totemic significance between the bearer of a *kuria* and the object to which the *kuria* refers.

B. The Mourning Name: *Napasis Namuno*

In addition to the proper name which is given at birth or adoption, an individual may take on other names at the deaths of elder siblings, children or spouses. Such mourning names, or *napasis namuno*, are added to a person's previous names. There are two kinds of mourning names: (I) those referring to some notable aspect of the death of the kinsman, and (II) those with no specific reference to the death, but belonging to the descent line of the name-taker (in cases where the circumstances of the death were unnotable). *Namuno* are usually one-part names that are used in place of *napasis* or common names; occasionally, however, they may be appended to the *napasis* in the same fashion as is the *kuria*. *Namuno* may be chosen by the mourner, or conferred on him by his close kin. Some *namuno* are virtually never used, while others totally replace the mourner's *napasis* in daily conversation.

In the names that refer to the circumstances of the death of a loved one (type I *namuno*), place names are sometimes used. The mourner's name can indicate that the kinsman died, became ill, or had a premonition of death in the place chosen for the name. For example, a woman whose sick daughter was flown to Lae where she subsequently died took the name

⁴We could find no adequate explanation for the six exceptions we identified: Sakail, Kaikmata, Donga, Aisipel, Keloi, Vunam. Neither can we be absolutely positive that there were not more names that were non-sex-specific, but which we did not discover.

'Lae.' Her husband, father of the dead girl, came to be called 'Balus,' the Pidgin word for airplane. As the name Balus indicates, *namuno* may refer to any notable aspect of a death. A widow whose dying husband ate only tea and biscuits wanted to be known as 'Bisket.'

These circumstantial *namuno* names are situationally-determined, are non-sex-specific, and are not (at least originally) owned by *naulum*.⁵ However, each *naulum* does have a repertoire of *napasis namuno* which its members can assume if their close kinsmen die under non-extraordinary circumstances (type II *namuno*). Such names usually refer to some object, spirit or animal over which the descent line claims proprietary rights. In some instances, these *namuno* seem to be sex-specific in their application.

When a new-born child is named after a kinsman, the child may be given the relative's whole set of names from the traditional naming system, including both the *napasis kuria* and the *napasis namuno* of the namesake. Despite the fact that the *namuno* has no reference to the death of the new name-bearer's own immediate kin, he acquires it by virtue of the fact that it belonged to the person after whom he was named. Even when thus acquired, this portion of the name is still called *namuno*, a name of mourning.

C. Nicknames: *Napasis Sapa*

Sometimes *napasis sapa*, literally 'nothing names' or nicknames, devolve on people. They may reflect remarkable events or special proclivities in the life of the individual so named. Visiting relatives from the Siassi Islands, Kove, or Arove may decide to give their own local names to Kilenge children, and in some cases these names have come into general use. Before the Second World War, Japanese pearlshell divers gave names to a few Kilenge men. During the war, Japanese and American servicemen bestowed names on several individuals. In some instances, these foreign names substitute in daily usage for the person's regular name.

Some people acquire nicknames because of their idiosyncracies. Thus, Musket'aienge (Old or Senior Shotgun) was the name given to a noted wild pig hunter. Another man with a reputation for scraping coconuts became known as Naniu (coconut). The namesake descendants of Naniu also carry his nickname, but, in general, nicknames are not inherited by namesakes of the original nameholder.

⁵A child named after an older person may take the *namuno* as well as the *napasis kuria* of the namesake. Over time it is possible that the *namuno* can become inextricably linked in usage with a *napasis kuria* and always passed along with it. But when the *namuno* of this sort (type I) is first taken, it is previously unowned.

Nicknames may be used daily, regularly substituting for common names, or they may be only rarely heard. Nicknames are seldom given in response to outsiders who ask a person his name.

D. Insulting Names: *Napasis Nakavanainga*

Another class of names is the *napasis nakavanainga*, or insulting and abusive epithets. Although bestowed during the course of a lifetime, insulting names are not classed as nicknames, or *napasis sapa*. Rather they indicate the marginality of a person's status in the community, and emphasize his unfavorable characteristics. Insulting names are used in conversation to refer to a person, but are never used to address a person. They are often appended to the *napasis* so that they appear to be a form of modification: for example, Aisa Roba (where 'Roba' would come from the Pidgin for 'thief').

Name Replacement

While the Kilenge continually deny that there is any prohibition on speaking a person's name, as characterizes the behavior of some of their neighbors on New Britain, they have many ways of avoiding the use of a person's proper name, especially when talking directly with that person. Certainly, mourning names and nicknames serve that purpose. The Kilenge also employ tekonomy, kin terms, role labels, and other terms of reference and address in order to avoid uttering a person's name. As people get older and more respected, one is less likely to hear their proper names spoken in address: other names or labels will be substituted. It is an interesting turnabout that as a person increases in 'name,' that is in status, one hears less of his or her name (*napasis*). In the period immediately following an individual's death, his or her name is virtually never uttered, even in reference.

Men of advanced years or considerable status have often held positions of responsibility in the church or government. Accordingly, they can be referred to or addressed by the role labels of the positions that they occupied. Terms such as Luluai and Tultul (headmen from the German and Australian administrations), Kaunsil and Komiti (elected village councillors and committeemen), Dikon and Katekit (the church representatives of Deacon and Catechist), all can replace the proper names of the men who have held the positions. These role labels may substitute for *napasis* both in reference and in address. They may also be appended to *napasis* to serve as an extra identification marker.

Other kinds of role labels may also be used to complement or replace *napasis*. The morphemes which means widow (*aitop*), widower (*aikos*),

bereaved parent (*aimaga*) and new mother (*aipena*) may be used in address to replace proper names. In reference they are frequently added to a *napasis* as means of differentiating people who share a proper name.

In public meetings where men are speaking to or about each other, there is frequent tendency to resort to teknonymy. One man will refer to another as 'Father of X,' where X is the man's first-born child. Spouses are sometimes referred to as 'Husband of Y,' or 'Wife of Z.' Children are never called by teknonyms such as 'Child of A' simply in order to avoid saying their names, but people may refer to them in such terms in order to distinguish individuals who share the same *napasis*.⁶ Teknonyms are rarely used in address except in circuitous fashion in public meetings. For example, a speaker might say "I think that Donga's father wants to tell us about the work," but would never say "Tell us about the work, Father of Donga."

In interchanges between kinsmen, kinship terms may replace names. Because Kilenge kinship terminology is extended generational-Hawaiian, almost everyone in the community can be reckoned a kinsman. Names can easily be avoided in preference for a kinship term. The Pidgin term 'tambu' (in-law) is widely used both in reference and address, and has largely replaced affinal kinship terms from the native language. Young children use kin terms in addressing their parents, but older children frequently call their parents by name.

Other non-kin terms may be used in reference or address. *Waii-* (friend), and *-vola* or *-ulava* (trading partner) are sometimes heard. With the sharing of proper names being so common in Kilenge, the term for namesake or name-sharer, *soro-*, is a frequent label of reference and address. The sharing of any *napasis*, *napasis kuria*, *napasis namuno*, *napasis sapa*, *napasis Catholic*, or even of any role label can establish a *soro-* relationship. Calling someone *Sorok* (my namesake) avoids saying the other person's given name, but entails nothing more. It is just another example of the Kilenge proclivity for not using a proper name if some other alternative is available.⁷

⁶We wish to emphasize that the use of teknonyms to replace names takes on a different character than the simple use of teknonymy for purposes of identification. Teknonyms used in public interactions by grown men are attempts to avoid the use of names, not simply to ensure that the audience knows who is being discussed. When a village elder says in a meeting, "Massina's father has a suggestion," he is making a social statement as well: that is, that Massina's father has enough status to merit avoiding the use of his name.

⁷Two examples of the usage of the term *sorok*, 'my namesake,' are:

- a. two women with the name Kamugi would call 'Sorok';
- b. two widowers, or *aikos*, could call each other 'sorok.'

The actual relative for whom an individual was named is also called *soro-*, but the special significance which may accrue to that relationship comes from the kin connectedness of the name-sharers rather than from the fact of their sharing a name. There is nothing in the name-sharing itself which creates a special bond between people. Only rarely do people who share the same *napasis* fail to use the term *sorok* in addressing each other. Those who share role labels sometimes use the *soro-* term, but at other times may choose to use the addressee's *napasis*.

Catholic Names

At birth or baptism into the Roman Catholic Church, a name is chosen for each child either by the parents or by the mission or hospital staff. These names are taken from the Bible or from the home countries of the missionaries. Such names as Daniel, Alois, Ignacius, Maria, Clara, and Josephina are common. At confirmation a second Christian name may be conferred. In most cases neither baptismal nor confirmation names are widely used in the village, although they may sometimes serve as replacements to avoid using a proper name. Some parents quickly forget their children's Christian names. A few of the elderly villagers have even forgotten their own Catholic names.

Christian names are not part of the traditional naming system, and they are handled differently. They do not belong to specific *naulum*. Children are not given Christian names because a kinsman held the name; each Catholic name-giving event is treated as unique. Elder kinsmen are not consulted about which name is given; the parents make the decision on their own or with the help of the mission personnel.

Government Names

The government administration and the school have imposed their own order on the structure of naming in attempt to keep their records straight. The naming system so imposed has little usage in the village.

Census records most often name a person according to the following formula: *napasis* of individual, plus *napasis* of natal or adoptive father. Occasionally, *kuria*, *namuno*, or Catholic names may substitute for one of the *napasis*. School records list children by their Christian name, plus their *napasis*, and sometimes also by their father's *napasis* or Christian name.⁸

⁸Here are two examples of the variety of names that individuals own:

a. A man aged 24 had the following names:

When people leave the village to go to town, they must decide which name-combination to use. Frequently, they use their school name. Giving their Christian names first enables non-Kilenge people to deal with their names more easily than if they used just their village names. Most often their village name serves as the second part (or surname) of the name they use in the outside world.

Names and Relationships

Our brief discussion of the Kilenge naming system demonstrates the vast range of labels which can be tagged to individuals in Kilenge society. The flexibility in the names which people can use with each other reflects the intricate and multifaceted nature of their personal relationships. The system allows people to make social statements simply by virtue of the names they call others. For example, man A might call man B several names: if he says 'Sapu' (a proper name), he indicates a certain level of familiarity with the man, but not much respect; should he use '*tuage*' (elder brother), he indicates both familiarity and respect; were he to say '*luluai*' (headman), he would indicate that, first and foremost, he respects the man's wisdom and experience. Thus, for the Kilenge, a name is more than mere random phonemic configurations. Not just a handy label, a name is a social statement, encapsulating the world of social action and orienting the participants of that world in their interactions with one another.

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- Catholic name, Christopher,
 - *napasis kuria*, Navona Navaniaro,
 - *namuno*, or *sapa*, Naniu (inherited from his namesake).

His father's name was Namongo. The government had the man down as 'Navona Namongo.' His school name was 'Christopher Navona' or 'Navona Christopher.' In the village he was 'Navona' or 'Naniu,' or sometimes 'Katekit,' since he was also a church catechist.

b. A woman aged approximately 54 had the Catholic name, Susana, the *napasis kuria*, Koko Navem, the *namuno*, Valiapua (from the death of her daughter) and Avulago (from the death of her elder brother). Her father's name was Marakos. The government called the woman 'Koko Marakos.' In school she had been 'Susana Koko.' In the village she was generally called 'Valiapua' or 'Koko.'

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