Names and Naming Principles in Cross-Cultural Perspective[1]

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I. INTRODUCTION

Received notions about the arbitrariness of personal names are based on the cultural attitude that personal names, as labels, are not supposed to have semantic content—i.e., the encoding of retrievable information in their lexico-grammatical structure.[2] This attitude roughly typifies the European conception of the semantico-cultural significance of personal names and contrasts with widely held views about the subject in several other parts of the world, especially Africa, Asia, Oceania, and aboriginal North America.[3]

For example, Goodenough reports that among the Lakalai, an Oceanic community, personal naming practices hinge on two basic principles: (i) fixed sequences of names reflecting one's place in a procreational chain, and (ii) naming children for their sib, or for the place, time of year, weekday, or other event or circumstance associated with their birth.[4] Indeed, since one's

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[2] See F. Niyi Akinnaso, "The Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names," *Anthropological Linguistics*, 22 (1980), 275–304.

[3] For examples of work on African personal names, see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Nuer Modes of Address," *Uganda Journal*, 12 (1948), 166–71; J. Middleton, "The Social Significance of Lugbara Names," *Uganda Journal*, 25 (1961), 34–52; Paulus M. Mohome, "Naming in Sesotho: Its Sociocultural and Linguistic Basis," *Names*, 20 (1972), 171–85; Akinnaso, "The Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names." For similar work on Asia, see R. P. Masani, *Folk Culture Reflected in Names* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966); and Indira Y. Junghare, "Socio-Psychological Aspects and Linguistic Analysis of Marathi Names," *Names*, 22 (1975), 31–43. For work on Oceania, see W. Goodenough, "Personal Names and Modes of Address in two Oceanic Communities," in *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. M. Spiro (New York: Free Press, 1965); and on aboriginal North America, see C. A. Weslager, "Name-Giving among the Delaware Indians," *Names*, 19 (1971), 268–83; and Thelma E. Weeks, "Child-Naming Customs among the Yakima Indians," *Names*, 19 (1971), 252–56.

[4] Goodenough, "Personal Names and Modes of Address."

identity as a person and as a member of society is an object of universal concern, personal naming practices relate to identity concerns in all cultures. But as Goodenough notes, "the directions and emphases for their concerns vary from individual to individual and modally from one social group to another."[5] Thus, when he compared Trukese and Lakalai personal naming systems, Goodenough found that while the Trukese personal naming system serves to emphasize individuality and give it explicit recognition, the Lakalai system emphasizes one's place in the procreational chain or in formally structured kin and social relationships. Goodenough goes further to suggest two major sets of factors which condition variations in identity concerns in society. One consists of the cultural organization of social relationships and the other consists of the prevailing circumstances in which these organizations find expression. While Goodenough rightly identifies personal names and modes of address as the most likely locus for identity concerns in all cultures, he misses an important aspect of the problem which C. and H. Geertz attempt to deal with in regard to the Balinese: personhood and person perception and how naming and address practices relate to them.[6]

However, Goodenough and Geertz leave unresolved a number of issues: How is a new baby received in different societies? How and by what process is it identified as an individual and as a member of society? What principles underly the identification system and how are they applied? To what extent can personal naming be regarded as a *symbolic* system where the relationship between signified and signifier is not altogether arbitrary?

These are by no means easy questions. In an attempt to answer some of them, I draw on existing and fresh ethnographic data on the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria and published data on the Delaware Indians of North America.[7] First, I make a comparative analysis of naming ceremonies in the two societies, focusing on how the new baby is received and perceived by society. Then I compare the methods of name giving in both societies. Finally, with copious Yoruba data, I account for cultural and epistemological principles that underly construction of personal names and demonstrate how the principles are applied cross-culturally. The focus will be on the purely traditional practices, especially as prevalent before the widespread hybridiza-

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[5]Goodenough, p. 265.

[6]C. Geertz, "Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); C. Geertz and H. Geertz, "Teknonymy in Bali: Parenthood, Age-Grading and Genealogical Amnesia," in *Marriage, Family and Residence*, ed. P. Bohannan and J. Middleton (New York: Natural History Press, 1968).

[7]Though pivoted on the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, this paper attempts a comparative analysis, suggesting possibilities of underlying similarity in personal naming behavior. It is part of a larger study of the cultural, sociohistorical, cognitive, and linguistic aspects of personal names, nicknames, and name diminutives.

tion of traditional and exogenous Western values. However, I shall use the ethnographic present throughout particularly because of the survival of the Yoruba tradition.

II. THE DELAWARE INDIANS

When a new baby is born into aboriginal Delaware Indian society, excitement and joy are muted until the parents are sure the baby has come to stay. Sometimes parents wait until their male offsprings are physically mature to use weapons.[8] A new baby is viewed as a gift of *Kee-shay-lum-moó-kawng* "the Creator." An appropriate nickname is used in lieu of a real name and not until the parents feel reasonably sure that the child is going to remain permanently with them are they willing to arrange a naming ceremony. Even then, not all parents directly give proper personal names to their children. Name giving in this society is a sacred religious ceremony performed exclusively by visionaries respected for possessing extraordinary powers.[9] If neither parent is a visionary, one has to be invited. By prearrangement, the visionary visits the home of the person to be named to perform the ceremony or does it at a special session of the Big House Ceremony, a 12-day ceremony held annually when visions are recited and attendant rituals performed. Advance notification is, however, necessary to give the visionary enough time to *create* a new and suitable name for the subject. The creation process might be aided by a recent dream, vision, or sudden inspiration.

The naming ceremony is both a religious ritual and a big feast. The person to be named is dressed in a complete outfit of new clothing including mocassins. The dress is usually presented to the child by the name-giver on behalf of the family. In attendance are members of the immediate family and perhaps other close relatives. The basic scenario for the ceremony is as follows: An old member of the family explains the purpose of gathering and introduces the name-giver as one who is well qualified to do the job. A holy fire known as *pe-lut tun-die* and addressed by the visionary name-giver as *Moo-Xoóm-sah* "Grandpa" is made and later sprinkled with Indian tobacco and cedar clippings. A fan made of eagle feathers is used to sweep away obstacles and rid the path of the person to be named of all malevolent forces and also to waft the smoke toward the sky, carrying the family's supplications for protection to the Creator. At the appropriate time in the ceremony, there is an exchange of wampum beads. The name-giver presents the beads to the person being named and a member of the latter's family reciprocates the

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[8]Weslager, p. 270.
[9]The visionary could be male or female.

present with a similar string of beads. This symbolically initiates the child into gift giving and the principles of exchange underlying most human transactions and social processes.

Until then, only the visionary knows the name of the child. It is never spoken aloud beforehand to anyone because the Creator must be the first to hear it spoken. When the crucial time arrives in the course of the ceremony, the name is finally pronounced by the name-giver. It is spoken reverently and repeatedly in audible prayer to ensure that the Creator and the *Mah-nut-toó-wuk* ''the Spirit Forces'' would thereafter recognize the individual by his given name. A personal name is regarded as a mark of identity linking the individual with his Creator through the Spirit Forces whom the visionary name-giver represents. Each name is a unique mark of identity not normally duplicated among the living or the dead. Great emphasis is put on the uniqueness of a personal name: ''A personal name was a highly individualized appelative, not merely an identification tag, because, according to Delaware belief, *a person and his name were one* [original emphasis].''[10]

Linguistically, every Delaware personal name conveys meaningful information based on lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic rules of the polysynthetic Algonkin language spoken by the Delaware Indians. Weslager summarizes it neatly as follows: ''The name must also be a synthesis of significant roots, not mere fractions of words, and it should preferably combine the ideas in a single word.''[11] The ''ideas'' encoded in Delaware personal names often reflect the vision or inspiration of the name-giver, some personality traits or talents of the person named, or some salient place, object, or experience in the community. To preserve their integrity, name-givers often take special care to compose names which ''will not contain elements unbefitting the personality or appearance in adulthood.''[12]

One of the most basic personal naming principles among the Delaware then is association through their personal names of persons with events (envisioned or experienced), objects, sentiments and emotions that are socially and psychologically real for the name-giver and the community. This principle blends with yet another using qualities predictive of the named person's appearance or personality. Below are a few typical examples of Delaware names based on these principles:

    1a.Pem-páy-huh-lock   ''Running water''
      b.Weh-mah-tah-éX-kway   ''Woman who blooms everywhere like a flower''
      c.Awp-páh-tah-eh   ''White flower''

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[10]Weslager, p. 280.
[11]Weslager, p. 278.
[12]Weslager, p. 277.

According to Weslager, the events that motivated these names were both personal and communal in nature.[13] The name-giver saw a vision, "she heard the sound of water gurgling in a running stream. Since [the community] was then undergoing a long period when there had been no rain, she followed the sound into the woods, where trees and wild flowers were growing, but she found only the dried bed of a creek. As she turned her back and walked away, she again heard the babbling of the running water."[14] The names given by this missionary are therefore symbolic of her experience and that of the community.

The personal names below are mainly predictive of the personality (2a) and the appearance (2b) of the person named.

     2a. Oh-huh-lum-mee-tákh-see

         "The one who can be heard from afar"

     b. Ay-hell-lee-nówX-kway

         "A woman who looks like someone else"

This class of meaningful names must be distinguished from nicknames such as those in (3), given to Delaware children before the naming ceremony. The real names do not replace the nicknames as address terms, especially in public: except on ceremonial occasions when communication is between man and the Creator, the Delaware rarely use real names as address terms. Some of the nicknames used correspond to the following:

     3a. "My little one"

     b. "The one in front"

     c. "The carrier of turkies"

Nicknames may be permanent (e.g., 3a used by a parent to refer to a specific child) or they may be functional (e.g., 3c used to refer to someone who carried a heavy load of turkies). The primary reason for the rare use of real personal names is the fear that enemies may use them to harm their bearers.

Among the Delaware then, the naming ceremony is a religious ritual, an occasion to expunge evil spirits and propitiate the Spirit Forces and the Creator in preparation for the child's initiation and acceptance into society. Religiously, a person is viewed as a "sacred object," an essential link between man and the Creator, and a crucial part of the social order with which he is linked through his real personal name. Secularly, he is known and recognized by everyone else by his nickname. The nickname may be shared by several others, yet individuality is preserved through nonduplication of real personal names. Because of this emphasis on individuality, the practice of naming children after famous persons, dead relatives, or ancestors is

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[13]The name-giver's vision was an enactment of communal calamity.

[14]Weslager, p. 277.

uncommon. This seems to have been the situation on Truk before the introduction of European and Japanese names.[15]

Such traditions contrast sharply with the naming practice among the Yakima Indians of the Northwest where the personal name given to a child is almost always one that belonged to a deceased member of the family. This is because the Yakima traditionally believe that a child is born with the spirit of some deceased loved one. Naming the child after that person is therefore considered most appropriate.[16] Like the Delaware, the Yakima usually wait six months to twelve years before giving a child its personal name, giving a temporary nickname until then. The major reason for the delay in Yakima naming is the need to ascertain the identity of the deceased relative reincarnated in the child. Though they operate somewhat differently, the principles underlying Delaware naming reappear in the Yoruba system.

III. THE YORUBA OF SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

The rich cultural tradition of the Yoruba is heavily documented.[17] However, systematic studies of the sociocultural and linguistic principles that motivate the surface forms of Yoruba personal names are regrettably few.[18] To set the present account in comparison with that of the Delaware, we begin with the ceremonies associated with the birth of a child and then proceed to the naming principles.

The Yoruba child is welcomed and introduced to society through two ceremonies. The first is an informal one convened by the parents of the baby as soon as it is born to express their joy and to welcome the baby into the

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[15]Goodenough claims that "with rare and accidental exceptions, every individual in Truk has a distinctive personal name that he shares with no one else, living or dead, and he expects to be addressed by that name and in no other way by everyone on almost all occasions," p. 267. The few exceptions he found in 1947 were one German and three Japanese names.

[16]Weeks, pp. 253–54.

[17]See, for example, Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1920); E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962); William Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969); William Basom, *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Wande Abimbola, *An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976); J. Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979); and J. S. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For bibliographical reference, see David E. Baldwin and Charlene M. Baldwin, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria: An Indexed Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976).

[18]The most systamatic studies to date are those of S. A. Ekundayo, "Restrictions on Personal Name Sentences in the Yoruba Noun Phrase," *Anthropological Linguistics*, 19 (1977), 55–77; and Akinnaso, "The Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names." The former is an analysis of the syntax and semantics of Yoruba personal name sentences while the latter provides a theory of how sociocultural and grammatical knowledge are integrated in the construction of Yoruba personal names.

world. Kinfolk and other well-wishing community members who happen to be around attend, and any uninvited passerby is also heartily welcomed. The parents are congratulated in the midst of singing, dancing, joking and spirited conversations. Between the day of the baby's birth and the day of the naming ceremony, appropriate family divinities are consulted for necessary propitiation and sacrifice. It is an occasion to seek protection of the family God for the newborn and to enquire into the baby's future. Attendance at such rituals is usually limited to close relatives. After all necessary preliminaries, messages are sent to kinfolk and friends far and near to attend the naming ceremony on a fixed date. In the meantime, the child is known as *íkókó* "little baby". This label is used until the baby is about three months old, even though it may already have been given a personal name.

Among the Yoruba, child naming is a ritual in itself, a communal festive occasion celebrated jointly by relatives, friends, neighbors, acquaintances and well-wishers. Traditionally, the naming ceremony usually takes place in the morning of the seventh day after the child's birth if it is female, the ninth day if it is male. This is based on the folk belief that females have seven ribs while males have nine. While some families still adhere to this traditional scheme, others now name their children on the eighth day regardless of sex differences; this is a direct influence of the Christian and Islamic religions. In such cases, the naming rituals are modified in a syncretic fashion: elements of foreign and indigenous religious practices are blended as needed. There are yet others who name their children on the sixth day after birth for traditional religious reasons. The divinities requiring sixth day naming are traditional ones, adopted by some Yoruba families from the beginning, and should be distinguished from recent influences.

Though details of the traditional naming ceremony vary from clan to clan, the basic scenario is as follows. On the day of the ceremony, the baby is bathed and dressed (usually in white, signifying purity and innocence), and carried on the lap by its mother, grandmother, or the eldest woman in the extended family or clan. The baby is made to taste basic food items including yam, palm oil, honey, dried fish or meat, salt and water. The baby's feet are made to touch the floor and it is later made to go through some mock rainfall outside the house—all to expose it to both the joys (honey, etc.) and hazards (rain) of life. After these preliminaries, the baby's (grand)father takes it, whispers its name into its ears, drops some money (originally cowries) in a calabash of water, and then announces the baby's name to the gathering. The baby's mother and grandmother announce their own choice of name and other relatives and well-wishers follow in suggesting still other names for the child. Usually, however, it is the name given by the child's parents, especially the father, that is adopted over time as the child's permanent name. Feasting, singing, and dancing follow.

Traditionally, if he is alive, the grandfather suggests the baby's name or selects the most appropriate from a pool of alternatives suggested by the parents of the child. The import of grandfather's role in Yoruba naming emphasizes Yoruba patrilineality and ensures the continuity of tradition. His role in society is very similar to the Delaware's visionary. Because he is the living head of the lineage cult, he mediates between members of his lineage and *Olódùmarè* (similar to the Delaware's Creator) through the lineage divinity. In this capacity and as a result of his rich experience, he has access to a wide variety of personal, lineage and community events, values, sentiments and emotions that need be reflected in a new baby's name. Consequently, it is believed that the grandfather controls the largest repertoire of appropriate personal names as well as the greatest ability to create new ones. So long as he is still alive, the Yoruba grandfather is required by custom to function as the sole consultant when new babies in his lineage are to be named. So important is this custom that, till today, most Yoruba traditionalists living overseas (especially in Britain, Canada, and the US) still write home to their fathers requesting names for their newborn babies. It should be noted, however, that in making his choice of a particular name, the grandfather will consider input from the baby's father as well as the community in which the latter lives. This is necessary so that the baby's name may reflect appropriate home contexts (to be discussed in the next section).

The Yoruba naming ceremony is a symbolic initiation of the baby into society and into life. All its kinfolk are expected to attend and participate in the ceremony, joining in the cooking, eating, singing and dancing as well as contributing goods and services to the utmost of their ability. They owe the baby and its parents these obligations which are expected to be so reciprocated eventually. The child is thus introduced, through the ceremony, not only to the processes of exchange, but also to the importance of cooperation and communalism requiring considerable identification with the joys and sorrows of one's kinfolk.[19] Cooperation and communalism are dominant Yoruba

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[19]Following J. Paden, "Communal Competition, Conflict and Violence in Kano," in *Modernization and the Politics of Communalism*, ed. R. Nelson and H. Wolpe (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971), p. 113, communalism is here defined as "ascriptive types of identities, adherence to cultural norms and values, and loyalties or obligations toward members of an identity group which tend to be relatively diffuse rather than specific or contractual." The salience of this social behavior is clearly expressed in many Yoruba proverbs one of which states that *ow̩ó̩kan kò gbé e̩rù dé orí* "one hand can not successfully carry one's load to one's head." This behavioral pattern is, of course, not peculiar to the Yoruba. The concept of communalism, as used here, is reminiscent of the concept of *confianza*, a Latin American native category that denotes mutual readiness to engage in reciprocal exchange. For the use of the concept of *confianza* as a tool in the analysis of reciprocal exchange, see Larissa Adler Lomnitz, "Reciprocity of Favors in the Urban Middle Class of Chile," in *Studies in Economic Anthropology*, Anthropological Studies, No. 7 (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1971) and her *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

values evident in various aspects of social structure: traditional political systems, family and kinship structure, pan-kinship organizations like *esúsú* "work cooperatives" and *ẹgbẹ́ ìbílẹ̀* "customary associations"—as well as in verbal art, especially myths, folktales and proverbs. Indeed, according to a popular Yoruba creation myth, all Yoruba are one family, having descended ultimately from Odùduwà; and till today, all Yoruba *Ọba* "kings" validate their right to rule by claiming lineal descent from Odùduwà through one of his several sons.[20]

The Yoruba highly value sharing, honoring one's obligations, taking full responsibility for the affairs of one's dependents (children and sib), and rendering assistance and loyalty to one's senior kinsmen as well as participating in several communal activities, clubs and associations. Lineage, community, or club membership is considered in good standing when these obligations and responsibilities are honored. *Ọlá* "personal honor" and *iyì* "dignity" depend in part on the effective discharge of these kin and communal responsibilities, all of which require a great deal of hard work, *akin* "valor", *ìfẹ́* "love" of others and a relentless effort to contribute to the *ayọ̀* "happiness" and welfare of others.

The Yoruba personal name system serves to reinforce those cooperative relationships and those highly esteemed virtues which together define the social order. Through the naming ceremony and subsequently its personal name, the baby is identified with its people and the social order. In particular, its personal name often shows very clearly that the baby is viewed as a reflection of the social order, for they are those events, values, and belief systems which have sociocultural and psychological reality for its family, clan or community that provide the cultural information and rules for the construction of the baby's name.

It should be noted that the emphasis on cooperation and communalism does not imply that the Yoruba do not recognize individual achievement. They do recognize it, e.g., by lavishly celebrating major individual achievements. Ego has a self and face of his own regardless of seemingly faceless identification with kinfolk. Individuality is also recognized in the personal name system. Among his own lineal kin, a person's individuality is explicitly recognized by strict avoidance of duplication of his personal name. However, this applies mainly to living lineal kin; the name of a dead relative or ancestor

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[20]As Bascom rightly points out in *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 11, the importance of this myth in politics is demonstrated by the founding of *Ẹgbẹ́ Ọmọ Odùduwà* "The Society of the Children of Odùduwà" in 1948 "to unite the various clans in Yorubaland" and its association with the Action Group, a political party which was established three years later. In contemporary Nigerian politics, it was this same party which formed the kernel of the present UPN, a political party which won all the major elections in all Yoruba speaking states in 1979.

can be given to a new baby either to commemorate the dead person and significant events associated with his/her name, or to ensure that his/her soul lives on in the newborn child. Similarly, the Yoruba system permits the naming of a child after a famous person or someone whom the parents want as a model for their child. Beyond the living lineal kin boundary, most Yoruba personal names are duplicated in hundreds and thousands, since the same set of principles is employed in their construction. This again illustrates an interesting paradoxical function of Yoruba personal names: ego's individuality is explicitly recognized through his personal name; yet he is seen as a product and reflection of society, being classified with many others sharing the same name and cultural practices. We have seen how this paradox operates among the Delaware and the Yakima Indians.

The Balinese personal naming system illustrates yet another way in which this paradox operates. Balinese personal names, Geertz reports, are "arbitrarily coined nonsense syllables" and are hardly used in social interaction.[21] The apparent arbitrariness in their coinage makes Balinese personal names unique to specific individuals; and by ritually avoiding their use as address terms, the Balinese are able to focus on alternative naming and address systems: birth order names, kinship terms, and, most especially, teknonyms, some of which are shared even by members of the same family.[22]

We have now seen that, like Delaware naming ceremony, the Yoruba naming ceremony is a symbolic initiation of the baby into society. Though the timing and the details of the ceremony vary between the two societies (and, in fact, within each society), the effects and the goal are similar: the recognition of the child's individuality; its identification with the rest of society and the social order; and the linkage between it and *Olódùmarè* (the Creator). In both societies, the performance and function of name-giving are taken seriously. Experience and superior knowledge are required for the performance of the name-giving role and personal names are used to associate persons with relevant experiences of the namer or the community. In the following section we shall examine in some detail the cultural principles that underly the construction of Yoruba personal names.

IV. THE CULTURAL BASIS OF YORUBA PERSONAL NAMES

Three major considerations constitute the cultural principles underlying

[21]Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 369.

[22]See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*; also, C. Geertz and H. Geertz "Tekonymy in Bali." Also in "The System of Tekonyms and Death-Names of the Penan," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 10 (1954), 416–31, Rodney Needham reports the alternating use of tekonyms, death-names (necronyms), and proper names, with the subsequent loss of focus on proper names.

the construction of Yoruba personal names. Two of these carry major philo-
sophical implications and are each anchored on an important Yoruba prov-
erb.[23] The most important of these considerations is what we shall call the
home context (HC) principle based on the following Yoruba proverb:

    4.   Ilé ni a ń wò kí á tó sọ ọmọ ní orúkọ

           "The condition of the home determines a child's name"

Essentially, this principle specifies the salient sociocultural or circumstantial
context for any personal name. There are four basic types of HC stated as
5a—d below:

    5a. The special circumstances that strictly pertain to the birth of the child
        or its appearance at birth—How was the baby born? For example,
        did it present its leg first rather than the head?

      b. The social, economic, political, and other conditions affecting the
        family, lineage or community into which the baby was born—Was
        there famine, war, or economic boom?

      c. The religious affiliation or deity loyalty of the family—Which divin-
        ity is worshipped and what is His/Her contribution to the welfare of
        the family?

      d. The (traditional) occupation or profession of the parents or the
        family line—Are they hunters, drummers or warriors?

As signalled by the questions in 5a—d above, each HC type usually com-
prises a variety of events, activities or information. The crucial point, howev-
er, is that every personal name must be determined by at least one type of
home context. For example, each name in 6a—d below is primarily deter-
mined by the corresponding HC type in 5a—d respectively:[24]

    6a. Ige   child who presents the legs first rather than the head at
                       birth

      b. Ajewọle   Ajé wọ ilé
                    "Riches have been bestowed on this house"

      c. Fagbamila Ifá gbà mí là
                    "Ifá (God of Divination) helped me through"

      d. Ọdẹyẹmi   Ọdẹ yẹ mí
                    "Hunting befits me (as a profession)"

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[23]For the cultural significance of proverbs among the Yoruba, see Isaac O. Delano, *Ọwe l'Ẹsin Ọ̀rọ̀:
Yoruba Proverbs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); and E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes,
"Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore," *American Anthropologist*, 66 (1964), Part 2,
Special Issue, pp. 70–85. Among the Yoruba, like the Igbo, "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words
are eaten."

[24]Since they are based on the rules of the language, most Yoruba personal names are like ordinary
Yoruba sentences (see Ekundayo, "Restrictions on Personal Name Sentences," and Akinnaso, "The
Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names"). In natural conversation, Yoruba contraction and
deletion rules require that a sentence like *Mo bá ọdẹ rin* become *Mo b'ọ́de rin* which, of course, will be

It is not possible to gloss Ige like the other names because it has no literal meaning independent of the special circumstance of the child's birth; this is true of most names motivated by HC type 5a. Thus Ige is the only name that shows that a child was born under the special circumstance described in 6a. Except a limited number of names like Ige in which the correspondence of home context to the constructed personal name is isomorphic, the same home context may motivate a series of different but semantically related names. Thus a single event, 7 below, can motivate any of the names in 8a—d, if the event happened around the time the baby was born and was considered significant by Yoruba value standards.

    7.   Kòkó tí mo ti ń tọ fún ọdún mẹwa ti bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí ní so, ó sì ti ń mú ọ̀pọ̀lọpọ̀ owó wọlé. ''The cocoa plantation I have been nursing for ten years has started bearing fruits and it is already yielding considerable revenue.''

    8a. Ajewọle   see 6b above

      b. Ọmọkọlade Ọmọ kó ọlá dé
                         ''Child brings wealth''

      c. Kọlawole   Kó ọlá wọlé
                         ''Bring wealth into the house''

      d. Owolabi   Owó ni a bí
                         ''We have given birth to 'money' or a wealthy person''

Conversely, the same name may be motivated by many different events. For instance, 10a—d describe different events which can motivate the name in 9.

    9.   Ayọkunle   Ayọ̀ kún ilé
                         ''Happiness abounds in our home''

    10a. A kọ́ ilé a ra mọ́to, a sì tún bí ọmọ ní dédé àkókò kan ná à
        ''We got a house built, bought a car and had a baby about the same time''

      b. A bímọ lẹ́hìn ìgbà tí ọmọ wa kan gba oyè ẹ̀kọ́ gíga
        ''We had a baby just after one of our children obtained a university degree''

      c. Nínú ọdún yí nìkan, kòkó tà, wọ́n fi mí joyè, a sì tún bímọ
        ''Within this year alone, cocoa sold at reasonable price, I was made chief and we had a baby''

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further lumped together in the continuum of speech as *Mobọ́dẹrìn*. This final form is similar to the form of Yoruba personal names. In this paper, Yoruba personal names are represented first by their conventional form on the left, and then by their word-by-word, tone-marked, sentential form on the right of the page. Below this latter form is an English translation which is not necessarily a word-by-word gloss.

d. Lẹ́nu ọjọ́ mẹ́ta yí ẹ̀gbọ́n mí wọlé ìbò, mo ní ìlọsíwájú níbi iṣẹ́, mo sì tún bímọ pẹ̀lú

"Very recently, my brother won a political election, I had a promotion, and had a baby as well."

In each of 10a—d, there are at least two events leading to happiness in the family. This information is conveyed in 9 though the specific nature of the events is not clear from the name alone for reasons we shall soon discuss. But the favorable events in 10a—d do not only lead to happiness, they also bestow honor on the family. While the name in 9 focuses on happiness, it is possible to construct another name which focuses on the multiplicity of honor bestowed on the family. Such a name will be 11 below:

11.   Ọladiipọ   Ọlá di púpọ̀

"Honor is multiplied"

Thus 9 and 11 are personal names motivated by the various events in 10a—d.

However, 10a—d are varieties of the same type of home context, HC 5b. It should be pointed out that a single name may also be motivated by more than one type of home context. For example, 12 below is motivated by three types of home context—5b, c, and d:

12.   Ogunbọdede   Ọgún bá ọdẹ dé

"Ògún (God of Iron) accompanied the hunter (to earth)"

In 12, the hunter is the newborn baby who is seen as a direct gift of *Ògún* (the lineage divinity)—hence *Ògún* accompanied the baby on its arrival to earth. The parents had probably been waiting for an addition to the family hunting team.

It is not possible to make an exhaustive list of all the events that motivate Yoruba personal names partly because the list of Yoruba names, like Yoruba sentences, is infinite, and partly because home context is what the Yoruba regard as such.[25] It is clear, however, that an event must be psychologically, socially, and culturally salient to the Yoruba if it is to meet the home context requirement. Besides, as discussed elsewhere in this paper, certain socially valued attributes like *ayọ̀* "happiness," *ọlá* "honor," *ìfẹ́* "love," *iyì* "dignity," etc., are usually retrievable from the events that can motivate Yoruba personal names or from the linguistic forms of the names themselves. In other words, the tendency is toward positive naming.

But even then, the determination of social value is highly relative. For example, a new house or car may not be accorded high social value by a

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[25]See Akinnaso, "The Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names." See also Ekundayo, "Restrictions on Personal Name Sentences" for an account of the syntactico-semantic factors that restrict the productivity of Yoruba personal name sentences.

family that already has more than enough of these commodities. This means that various social factors like socioeconomic class, sex, age and experience, etc., play an important part in the determination of social value. Consequently, it can be argued that of the following events, 13, 14, 15, and 16, 13 is a potential home context for some, but certainly not all, Yoruba people:

13.   A bímọ lẹ́hìn tí a ra mọ́tò ayọ́kẹ́lẹ́
        "We had a baby just after we bought a car"
14.   A bímọ lẹ́hìn tí a ra rédíò àfàmọ́wọ́
        "We had a baby just after we bought a portable radio"
15.   Mo wo sinimá alárinrin kan ní tẹlifísàn lálẹ́ àná
        "I watched an interesting movie on the TV last night"
16.   A bímọ lẹ́hìn tí a jáde àìsàn ijàmbá mọ́tò
        "We had a baby just after we recovered from a car accident"

On the other hand, 14 and 15 are not potential home contexts at all mainly because a portable radio and a movie are too ephemeral to signal social value. However, 16 will be regarded as a potential home context by all Yoruba people because escape from potential death is highly valued regardless of differential access to power, wealth, and prestige.

For present purposes, the most significant function of the home context principle is ensuring that personal names will reflect certain types of culturally salient events, activities, or information and partially restrict the inventory of Yoruba personal names by excluding a range of events that fail to satisfy the home context requirement. Since this principle underlies the construction of all Yoruba personal names, we can use it as the basis of an obligatory rule:

17.   Rule 1   A personal name is derived from one or more domestic
                      events that satisfy the home context requirement.

Included in 'domestic events' is any event, activity, or information, including family traditions and sentiments, considered culturally and psychologically salient by the family into which a baby is born. Domestic events may apply to the family as a group, or to just an individual member of the group. However, as we shall see shortly, not all events that satisfy the home context requirement can be used in the construction of personal names.

This leads us to the second major principle of Yoruba personal name construction—the positive sanction principle. Any personal name which invokes unpleasant or negatively valued connotations is obligatorily avoided because the Yoruba believe (i) that a child's name plays some part in its development and future career, and consequently (ii) that a child may react to a name having negative social implications. The practice of eliminating socially unacceptable information from personal names is anchored on another proverbial Yoruba statement:

18. Orúkọ ní ń ro ni
      "A person's name directs his actions and behavior"

The application of this principle allows for the elimination of such negatively sanctioned home contexts as witchcraft, disability, criminality, and poverty from personal names. In other words, this principle compels the inclusion of only socially valued information in personal names. It can also be formulated as a rule:

19. Rule 2   All negatively valued home contexts are raised to posi-
                 tively valued status for the purpose of personal name
                 construction.

This rule contrasts with a common Mediterranean principle of avoiding the evil eye and envy by not naming a baby positively.[26]

But the question might be raised: how is a name with positive value constructed from negatively valued home contexts? A satisfactory answer to this question involves yet another principle of Yoruba personal name construction: the principle of generality which allows for the elimination of transient and specific information from personal names. By eliminating ephemeral and specific information, this principle also makes it possible for negatively valued events to be eliminated completely or buried under generalized statement names. Like the other two, this principle can also be stated as an obligatory rule which further redefines events:

20. Rule 3   Any transient and specific event loses its transient and
                 specific properties in the environment of a personal
                 name.

Since home context can be realized as a multiplicity of events statable in several sentences, a rule is required that permits the abstraction from such events of short generalizations which can then be used in personal name construction. Rule 3 satisfies this requirement and it is especially useful in abstracting positively sanctioned generalizations from negatively valued, transient, and specific events.

Suppose, for example, that x had the following experiences shortly before he had a baby:

21a. He lost a court case
   b. He went bankrupt
   c. He was involved in a car accident in which his sister was killed
   d. His benevolent uncle died

These are four unfavorable events which can not be possibly combined into a single personal name for cultural and linguistic reasons. However, Rule 3

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permits x to construct a generalized statement name from which some or all of the specific events in 21a—d are culturally retrievable.[27] Basically, generalized statement names can be constructed through the use of (i) focused and (ii) unfocused generalizations. Names so constructed can be derived from sentences or nominals (simple nouns, nominal compounds, verb (phrase) nominalizations, etc.). Consider 22a—e below which are attested Yoruba personal names motivated by the events described in 21a—d:

22a. Abayọmi   À bá yọ̀ mí
                "I should have been mocked (but God disallowed it)"

 b. Ayegbẹsọ   Ayé gbà ẹsọ
                "Life requires great care"

 c. Kujẹmbọla   Ikú kò jẹ́ (kí) n bá ọlà
                "Death prevented me from achieving greatness"

 d. Ọmọremilẹ-
    kun   Ọmọ́ rẹ̀ mí ní ẹkún
                "The baby stopped me from crying"

 e. Ẹniitan   ẹni + ìtàn
                "person + story"

In its full form, 22a is a proverbial expression (23 below) made up of two parts coordinated by the conjunction *ṣùgbọ́n* "but".

23.   À bá yọ̀ mí ṣùgbọ́n Ọlọ́run kò jẹ́
                "People should have mocked me but God disallowed it"

Since in natural conversation, the second part of the conjunct in 23 is retrievable from the first part alone, the second part is obligatorily deleted when the proverb serves as a personal name. Since there is no theoretical limit to the variety of events that can motivate this proverb, its use in personal name construction can be regarded as unfocused with regard to events. Similarly, 22b and c are unfocused genralizations about life and death respectively.[28] 22d, however, is clearly focused: it is a direct statement about the function of the new baby in assuaging the pains caused by events 21a—d, though the specific nature of the events is concealed. While the names in

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[27] In the traditional Yoruba village community characterized by face-to-face interaction and closed network ties, many members could possibly recall the specific events that motivated particular personal names in their village. In such a situation where everyone knew everyone else, it was relatively easy to retrieve cultural and semantic information from proverbial and generalized statement names. However, today, the retrieval of such information is limited to immediate kinfolk owing to high urbanization and the subsequent expansion and dilution of network ties.

[28] It is also possible to regard (22c) as focused since two of the events (21c, d), involve death. However, the focus is only partial since attention has been shifted from who died and how he died to the effects of death on the living.

22a—d are derived from sentences, name 22e is a nominal compound. Unlike sentences, nominal compounds do not readily yield to monolithic interpretations because of the wide spread of semantic relations between the two members of a given nominal compound. However, to take one of the possible interpretations of *Eniitan*, the function of 22e is using the new baby both as a buffer and a reminder of past experiences (stories).

Like positive values, the determination of negative values is fairly relative. However, there are certain negative values which all Yoruba consistently condemn, e.g., wretchedness and poverty owing to laziness, self-caused bankruptcy, etc. People who exhibit these characteristics are often nick-named as *òlẹ* "lazy person", *òtòsì* "pauper", or *aláàkísà* "man-of-rags". On the other hand, a hard-working, rich and popular man is often referred to as *olówó* "wealthy man", *ènìyàn pàtàkì* " 'big' man". or *gbajúmọ̀* "popular man". Because of the Yoruba preference for positive expectations and values, the rich man can name his child *Olowogbade* (see 24a below). However, the pauper will not name his child **Òtòsìgbadé* "The pauper gets the crown" or **Òtòsìkògbadé* "The pauper does not get the crown". Rather, he will explore the same personal name principles which emphasize positive expectations and values. Thus he will normally give to his children only names that cover up his basic inadequacies which have generated negatively valued home contexts. One common practice is for such people to focus on the positive values they lacked by making direct use of them in naming their children. Thus there are children of paupers and diehard criminals whose children bear the names in 24 and 25 respectively.

24a. Olowogbade Olówó gba adé
            "The wealthy gets the crown"
   b. Ajenusi   Ajé ní ùsì
            "Wealth epitomizes fame"
25a. Fadare   Ifá dá mi ní àre
            "Ifá pronounced me innocent"
   b. Iwalọla   Ìwà ni ọlá
            "One's behavior is a measure of one's personal honor"

24 and 25 are another example of focused generalization, but this time the focus is more on some desired event or unfulfilled expectations rather than events that have been, or are being experienced. In general, since no event can be included directly and completely in any personal name without some modification, the generality principle underlies the construction of all Yoruba personal names.

We have hitherto identified three major sociocultural principles or rules of Yoruba personal name construction and described their operation. Since all

the three rules are more or less obligatory and operate almost simultaneously, we can collapse them into a single comprehensive rule now stated as 26 below:

26.   For the purpose of personal name construction, home context is ultimately realized as one or more domestic events that have their transient and specific properties removed. If negative, such events are raised to valued status by using language to truncate the facts so as to derive a name that in itself is not negative.

A typology of Yoruba personal names can be made according to the nature and type of the motivating home context. While such a typology will not be attempted here, for lack of space, two broad classes of Yoruba personal names can be recognized. These are (i) *orúkọ àmútọ̀runwá* "name brought from heaven" and (ii) *orúkọ àbísọ* "name given during the naming ceremony." *Àmútọ̀runwá* names are those motivated by unusual or abnormal birth circumstances. The Yoruba consider such names as being brought from heaven because they are obligatorily given to children born under such circumstances as are considered abnormal. *Àmútọ̀runwá* names are thus motivated by home context type 5a, as exemplified by the following:

27a. Ige   "Child born with legs presented first rather than the head"

  b. Ọkẹ   "Child born inside an unbroken membrane"

  c. Dada   "Child born with curly hair"

  d. Ajayi   "Child born face downwards"

Each of these names is made up of a single morpheme and has a unique meaning which corresponds to the special circumstance for which it stands.[29] *Àmútọ̀runwá* names have to be specially learned since they are not often suggestive of the special circumstances to which they refer. They constitute a unique subset of Yoruba personal names and do not admit of additional membership. On the other hand, *àbísọ* names are those motivated by various other types of home context—social, political, religious, occupational, emotional, etc. While *àmútọ̀runwá* names can be given as soon as the baby is born by anybody who can match names with special circumstances, *àbísọ* names can be given only during the naming ceremony. However, regardless of whether it has an *àmútọ̀runwá* name, a baby will still be initiated through the naming ceremony where several *àbísọ* names will be given to it, as usual. In

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[29]A few *àmútọ̀runwá* names are differentiated for sex. For example, a baby born with the umbilical cord twined around its neck is named *Ojo* if it is male, and *Aina* if it is female. But different dialect subgroups among the Yoruba vary considerably in their use of these names. For example, the Ijebu subgroup use *Aina* for both sexes. However, all over Yorubaland, *àmútọ̀runwá* names are regarded as ritually motivated. Their bearers are traditionally classified as special human beings and accorded the status of divinities. Consequently, they are regularly worshipped like recognized divinities.

some cases, an *àbísọ* name may supersede the *àmútọ̀runwá*. This, in fact, is usually the case where there is more than one child with the same *àmútọ̀runwá* name in the family. These two classes of names are also structurally differentiated. *Àbísọ* names are marked for various grammatical processes whereas *àmútọ̀runwá* names are generally unmarked.[30]

There is a significant subset of *àbísọ* names which is traditionally given to a class of unusual children known as *àbíkú*—children who are believed to be predestined to a continual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth by the same woman. The Yoruba believe that such children and their guiding spirits have their primary home in the forest (the spirit world) and so require some ritualized instructions to make them stay and live among normal humans. Such ritualized instructions are always encoded in the personal names given to them, sometimes in the form of imperatives as in 28 below:

28a. Maboogunjẹ Má ṣe ba òògùn jẹ́
                        "Do not render medication ineffective"

   b. Matanmi Má ṣe tàn mí
                        "Do not deceive me"

   c. Durojaye Dúró jẹ ayé
                        "Stay and enjoy life"

   d. Durosimi Dúró [kí o] si mí
                        "Wait, so you can bury me," i.e., "Stay alive and be my survivor"

Thus a child who, on its first existence, defied all medication is instructed (on its 'second coming') not to render medication ineffective: it is appropriately named *Maboogunjẹ* (28a). In addition to being an *àbíkú* name, 28d reflects the cultural importance that the Yoruba attach to children.[31] It is of utmost cultural importance to be survived by some children to ensure proper burial rituals.

When imperative names are not used, the Yoruba sometimes ritually instruct the *àbíkú* not to die by using the negative particle *kò* "not" or a negativizing verb *kọ̀* "reject" in name construction. However, they do this

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[30]See Akinnaso, "The Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names."

[31]There are several Yoruba personal names which deliberately celebrate the importance of children, e.g., a—d below:

   a. Ọmọniyi = Children symbolize dignity
   b. Ọmọlayọ = Children are the source of happiness
   c. Ọmọlere = Children are our gain (profit) on earth
   d. Ọmọlara = Children are our relatives

In view of the traditional value of children among the Yoruba, it is considered an abomination to be an *àgàn* "childless woman." Such a woman is prototypically considered to be wicked and is sometimes accused of witchcraft. Even among literate Yoruba today, childlessness is a culturally validated reason for taking another spouse.

without seriously violating the positive sanction principle. Consider, for example, the following common *abíkú* names:

29a. Kokumọ   Kò kú mọ́
                "It (the child) no longer dies"

   b. Kosọkọ   Kò sí ọkọ́
                "There is no hoe"

30a. Kukọyi   Ikú kọ èyí
                "Death rejected this one"

   b. Igbẹkọyi   Igbó kọ èyí
                "The forest rejected this one"

Culturally, the names in 29 and 30 emphasize the Yoruba positive expectation that the child will not die again. This idea is expressed sometimes indirectly as in 29b which is an oblique statement from the parent to the child that they no longer have any hoe to use in digging a grave in case the child dies again! But, as can be deduced from the indirectness of the statement, there is an implicit undertone of appeal to the *abíkú*. The *abíkú* love to be petted, even when dead. Since lack of a grave will be detested by the *abíkú*, a name like *Kosọkọ* is believed to be able to prevent it from dying. If the *abíkú* eventually dies, its body is sometimes mutilated (as a further mark of humiliation to prevent it from coming back to earth) and thrown into the forest. If the *abíkú* again reincarnates, a name like *Igbẹkọyi* (30b) is used to make it realize that there is no room for it even in the forest where, in Yoruba folk classification, it orginally belonged.

V. A COMMON LOGIC?

Strikingly similar cultural principles motivate surface forms of Yoruba and Delaware personal names. The Delaware names in la—c, it will be recalled, were motivated by a specific experience of the visionary name-giver who in her vision saw a possible solution to the drought plaguing her community. Though the solution to the problem did not quite materialize in her vision, the personal names she constructed on the basis of this experience emphasize positive expectations. While names like Pem-páy-huh-lock (la) do not give the details of community experience, they nevertheless function as useful abstractions from which important events can be retrieved. Thus the home context, positive sanction and generality principles are satisfied by the names in la)c, though the emphasis on any one of these principles may not be the same as with Yoruba personal names.

Consequently, the nature of the exceptions to the application of these principles will be different in the two societies. For example, while the surface forms of Yoruba *abiku* names seem to convey a negative attitude,

thus implying a violation of the positive sanction principle, it is in the surface forms of Delaware nicknames that negative attitude is shown. Besides, differences in the application of the naming principles will depend, in part, on the ritual and/or communicative functions of personal names in the two societies. We have seen that among the Delaware, a person's name defines how he is to be recognized by the Creator and the Spirit Forces. Since personal names are rarely used by the Delaware as address terms, it follows that the emphasis is on their ritual functions. Emphasizing this point, Weslager declares that "a real name among the Delawares was not a device to facilitate interpersonal communication, which could be achieved by a nickname, but was a mark of identity by which the Creator and his Spirit Forces knew the individual."[32]

On the other hand, personal names are the primary address terms among the Yoruba. To address a Yoruba by his personal name not only symbolizes solidarity, it shows intimacy and affection. In other words, the emphasis is on the everyday communicative functions of personal names. This is not to say that personal names do not perform ritual functions among the Yoruba. For example, we have shown that *àbíkú* names are ritually motivated. Besides, most diviners usually call the names of their clients three times for ease of recognition by the appropriate Oracle, God or Goddess (three being a ritually significant number). Furthermore, there are established taboos against calling a person's name at night for fear that evil spirits and enemies might harm the person. However, these special and restrictive uses of personal names are mainly functional and, today, the special taboos have almost totally disappeared. Thus personal names remain the most valuable resource for individual identification in day-to-day interaction.

In general, what we have said so far suggests that in the two societies, personal names serve as a symbolic repository of retrievable information, though the exact nature and range of information stored in a given personal name may not be known to every member of the community. Since personal names are used several times a day in normal routine, they serve as a reminder of dominant social values, important personal concerns, and memorable events. For example, one of my nonliterate informants used his daughter's name, *Ọmọkọlade* "Child brings wealth" (8b), to reconstruct events that happened some twenty years ago. The year in which his daughter was born saw a high increase in the price of cocoa—a valuable Yoruba cash crop—and the completion of his large family compound. Discussing the meaning of his daughter's name, this informant enthusiastically retailed those evets. This chronicles a significant "diary-keeping" function of the

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[32]Weslager, p. 274.

Yoruba personal naming system, especially when we consider the fact that Yoruba culture is a predominantly nonliterate one in which the storage and transmission of information is mainly through the oral medium.

There is abundant evidence to show that the diary-keeping function of personal names is, in fact, shared by many nonliterate societies were personal names constitute a symbolic system. Documented examples include the Maharashtra of India, the Igbo and Ibibio of Nigeria, the Kinyarwanda of Rwanda, the Basotho of Lesotho, the Nyoro and Lugbara of East Africa, etc.[33] In all these societies, the basic principles of name construction considered in this paper apply in varying degrees, reflecting the values and orientations of each.

For example, among the Basotho of Lesotho, there is a proverb which refers to the influence of names on character:

31.   Bitso lebe ke seromo
           "A bad name is ominous"

This proverb is strikingly parallel to the Yoruba proverb in 18 above and functions as the philosophical motivation for such positive Basotho personal names as 32a—d below:

32a. Lerato   "Love"
   b. Nyakallo   "Merriment"
   c. Thabo   "Joy"
   d. Ntshediseng "Console me"

Notice, for example, the correspondence between 32d and the Yoruba *Ọmọ-ẹmilẹkun* (22d) both of which may be motivated by a similar set of events or circumstances. However, despite the proverb and the positive names, the Basotho do give overtly derogatory personal names. The emphasis in such cases is usually on the faithful recording of actual attitudes, unpleasant situations, or disasterous events. Negatively valued Basotho personal names are usually either abiku names (e.g., 33) or names that reflect actual natural calamities (e.g., 34).

33a. Moselantja "Dog's tail"
   b. Nthofeela   "Just-a-thing"
   c. Nakedi   "Skunk"
34a. Kganyapa   "Thunderstorm"
   b. Tladi   "Lightning"
   c. Tsie   "Locust"

[33]See, e.g., Junghare, "Marathi Names;" Mataebere Iwundu, "Igbo Anthroponyms: Linguistic Evidence for Reviewing the Ibo Culture," *Names*, 21 (1973), 47–49; Monday U. Ekpo, "Structure in Ibibio Names," *Names*, 26 (1978), 271–85; Alexandre Kimenyi, "Aspects of Naming in Kinyarwanda," *Anthropological Linguistics*, 20 (1978), 258–71; Mohome, "Naming in Sesotho;" J. Beattie, "Nyoro Personal Names," *Uganda Journal*, 21 (1957), 99–106; and Middleton, "Lugbara Names."

33a—c above are *abíkú* names which represent some special kind of ritual insult whose function is to indicate the child's 'worthlessness' and, by so doing, deter evil spirits from bothering to claim it. This compares to the Mediterranean principle of not naming a child positively. The names in 33 should be distinguished from others, equally derogatory, which refer to children of uncertain or illegitimate paternity, e.g., 35 below:

35a. Mohanwe   "Disclaimed one"
  b. Matlakala   "Garbage"
  c. Makgoko-
lotso   "Collected things"

In general, it seems that the encoding of ritual insult in *abíkú* personal names is common practice among societies that believe in the *abíkú* tradition. Christie Achebe offers a good account of this belief system among various cultural groups in Nigeria.[34] But perhaps a more relevant example, for present purposes, is the Maharashtrian society of India where insulting personal names like 36a—c below are given to the appropriate abiku to show *Yama*, the God of death, that the child is of no account and not worthy of His attention.

36a. Gundu   "Stone"
  b. čindyhyā   "Rags"
  c. Punjā   "Heap of dirt"

Personal names may reflect negative values; the direction of the emphasis varies modally from culture to culture. Whether positive or negative, however, the kinds of information encoded in personal names reflect shared sentiments, attitudes, experiences, events, etc., and are based on systematic principles whose application varies both within and across cultures.

VIA. THE VULNERABILITY OF CULTURAL RULES

Names define sociocultural and psychological realities and are in turn defined by these realities. Since social values and cultural realities are always affected by history and ongoing processes of social change, it is normal to expect (i) that new additions will continue to enter the repertoire of personal names within a given population and (ii) that cultural rules relating to naming practices will be highly vulnerable, being subject to social change and the manipulation of the innovative individual.[35] Consequently, all the cultural

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[34]Christie Achebe, "Literary Insights into the Ogbanje Phenomenon." *Journal of African Studies*, 7 (1980), 31–38.

[35]I share Parkin's view of how the individual creatively introduces social change by manipulating base underlying structures (David Parkin, "Straightening the Paths from Wilderness: Simultaneity and Se-

rules discussed in this paper should be viewed as basic underlying structures which can generate various surface forms in response to variation in individual experience, individual creativity, and social change.[36] New personal names can always be generated through new applications or manipulations of underlying cultural rules. In situations of language or culture contact, such new names can take quite different surface forms which may not be readily traceable to the base rules.

The cultural populations discussed in this paper have all witnessed such changes in various forms. For example, because of the adoption of English as the official language, and of Western norms in school-based education, government, and the bureaucracy, it has become fashionable among some Westernized Yoruba to transfer their personal names directly to their children on such analogies as Edward Kennedy, Jr. Such a practice tends to violate the avoidance principle that prevents duplication of personal names among living lineal kin. Sometimes when a foreign religion is adopted, the religion often overrides all other kinds of home context (see 5a—d above). This is essentially true of the Muslim Yoruba—particularly those who are born Muslim (second generation Muslims). Some of them now give Muslim names (often Yoruba adaptations of the Arabic forms) directly to their children without giving them any indigenous Yoruba names and regardless of the circumstances of birth. Similarly, the adoption of Christianity by many Yoruba has led to the adoption of Bible and other English names on baptism. The situation is even further advanced among the Delaware Indians among whom English personal names are now the rule rather than the exception.[37] However, even where such radical changes have not taken place, and where essential cultural traditions have been preserved, it is not always easy to demonstrate a perfect fit between underlying naming principles and the observed data of personal names within a given cultural population.[38]

B. USES OF PERSONAL NAMES AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

In addition to the ritual and communicative functions, personal names

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quencing in Divinatory Speech,'' Typescript). This is not arbitrary creativity since Parkin's innovative individual can do so only by cooperating with at least one other. In other words, creativity, as we use the term, is also governed by conventionality.

[36]In his *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (London: Athlone, 1954); and *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: Athlone, 1961), pp. 1–27, Edmund R. Leach has shown how different surface forms, which may look apparently contradictory, can be generated from the same underlying structure.

[37]Weslager reports that the last Big House Ceremony was held in 1924. Since this ceremony was required for the validation of visionary status, it can be safely assumed that its collapse saw the end of the application of Delaware personal naming principles in their traditional form.

[38]See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), ch. 7.

have other uses which have important implications for research. Because they constitute an important part of the lexicon of any language, personal names offer valuable data for comparative-historical reconstruction. Since in most languages lexical borrowings are usually greater than phonological and syntactic borrowings, a study of changes in the surface forms of personal names within a given community can give important clues about the diffusion of populations and of languages. Such a study can help map the direction and social implications of such diffusion processes.

Junghare offers a good example of such a study.[39] He compares personal names between literate and nonliterate Marathi-speaking Indians and isolates those that indicate borrowings from Sanskrit. He found that, generally, names borrowed earlier from Sanskrit (e.g., rām, sitā, and indirā) have been assimilated into the structure of Marathi while those that represent recent borrowings (e.g., prabhakar, šri, and snehal) retain the structure of Sanskrit. But more importantly, he found a correlate of social stratification in the deployment of Sanskrit names across the population. In particular, he found that names reflecting Sanskrit phonology are generally found among the literate while the nonliterate often change the forms of these names to fit Marathi phonological and morphemic structure.

The stratificational function of personal names is widely recognized. In Britain, for example, Farmers were historically farmers, Carpenters were carpenters and Cooks were cooks, though these names are no longer neces-sarily indicative of occupational affiliation.[40] Among the Yoruba, personal names continue to index occupational, religious, regional, and social align-ments. No one can be named *Fagbamila* (6c) unless *Ifá* (God of divination) is worshipped in his family or *Odeyemi* (6d) unless the (grand)parents are hunters. Members of royal families all over Yorubaland are often identifiable by the inclusion of the word *adé* "crown" in their names. However, unlike the above British names which communicate no more than occupational affiliation, there is no theoretical limit to the amount of information Yoruba names can communicate *in addition* to occupational, religious, and social roles.

Name change indexes cultural and sociopolitical change and its study can give useful insights into the socio-psychological mechanism of language change. For example, the Nazi name decrees of the 1930's were among "the measures by which certain aliens and national "undesirables" were to be

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[39]Junghare, "Marathi Names."

[40]For a detailed account of evolution of British occupational names, see J. R. Dolan, *English Ancestral Names: The Evolution of the Surname from Medieval Occupations* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1972).

distinguished from "true Aryans" in order to facilitate the discriminatory treatment to which the former were soon to be subjected."[41] Similarly, in a study of Hindi personal names in India, Mehrotra demonstrates the implications of name change for macro-sociological changes in ethnic/class membership, religious affiliation, cultural norms, social customs, occupational and social roles, etc.[42]

Surnames constitute a significant subset of personal names and have been extensively used in human population biology to estimate rates of inbreeding, biological relationship, and population migration.[43] Commenting on the research utility of surnames, Lasker claims that "since surnames came into general use during specific periods of human history, they can be used to trace trends over known spans of centuries."[44]

Surnames apart, the use of personal names has a very long history whose origin is not certain, though Christian and other creation myths suggest that they accompanied creation. Consequently, in tracing such trends as indicated by Lasker, written documents, etymologies, oral tradition, and the views of contemporary informants on the meanings and uses of personal names can provide a useful resource for the reconstruction of man's historical past and of man's view about the relationship between the individual and the social order. More importantly, such study enables us to discover the sociohistorical importance of personal names and the cognitive universals that underly personal naming principles and their application. Such findings can be useful in further exploring the psychic unity of mankind.

C. NAMING AS A SYMBOLIC SYSTEM

Research by ethnosemanticists has shown that the naming of objects (e.g., color, botanical life forms, etc.) is precipitated on a universal cognitive system.[45] For example, it has been shown that color and plant naming follows

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[41]Robert M. Rennick, "The Nazi Name Decrees of the Nineteenth Thirties," *Names*, 18 (1970), p. 65.

[42]R. R. Mehrotra, "Name Change in Hindi: Some Sociocultural Dimensions," *Anthropological Linguistics*, 21 (1979), 205–10.

[43]For example, see James F. Crow and Arthur P. Mange, "Measurement of Inbreeding from the Frequency of Marriages between Persons of the Same Surname," *Eugenics Quarterly*, 12 (1965), 199–203; Bernice A. Kaplan, Gabriel W. Lasker, and Brunetto Chieralli, "Communality of Surnames: A Measure of Biological Interrelationships among Thirty-One Settlements in Upper Val Variata in the Italian Alps," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 49 (1978), 251–56; and Gabriel W. Lasker, "Surnames in the Study of Human Biology," *American Anthropologist*, 82 (1980), 525–38.

[44]Lasker, p. 525.

[45]See, e.g., Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); and Brent Berlin, "Speculations on the Growth of Ethnobotanical Nomenclature," *Language in Society*, 1 (1972), 51–86.

a systematic and fairly predictable pattern. Similarly, structuralist anthropologists have shown that the naming of certain categories of animals is governed by certain underlying principles.[46] But perhaps because of received notions about the arbitrariness of personal names, few attempts have been made to uncover the principles underlying their construction. Though Levi-Strauss sets out to achieve such analysis, his reconsideration of Needham's and other data concludes unsatisfactorily that proper names mainly classify the individual as a species:

> proper names always appear as terms which are generalized or have a generalizing function. In this respect they do not differ fundamentally from the names of species, as is shown by the popular tendency to attribute names of human beings to birds in accordance with their respective species.[47]

In this paper, we have shown that among populations that are neither historically nor linguistically related, personal names are based on some systematic cultural principles whose application is fairly predictable. It has also been shown that in these societies, personal names do not only identify individuals; they also convey information about the persons named as well as the namers, their community and their past. Viewed from this perspective, personal names can be seen to constitute a symbolic system. Like every aspect of culture, such a symbolic system is usually historically constructed, socially maintained, and based on shared assumptions and expectations of a particular community. Thus the nature and content of the system will vary, to a greater or lesser extent, from culture to culture. But beneath this cultural variability, it should be possible to detect the universal aspects of the system, answering the old question, 'What's in a name?' This paper indicates the form such answers might take.

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[46]See Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*; and E. R. Leach, *Claude Levi-Strauss* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973).

[47]Levi-Strauss, p. 200.