Personal names as a reflection of social relations among the Nzema of Ghana [1]

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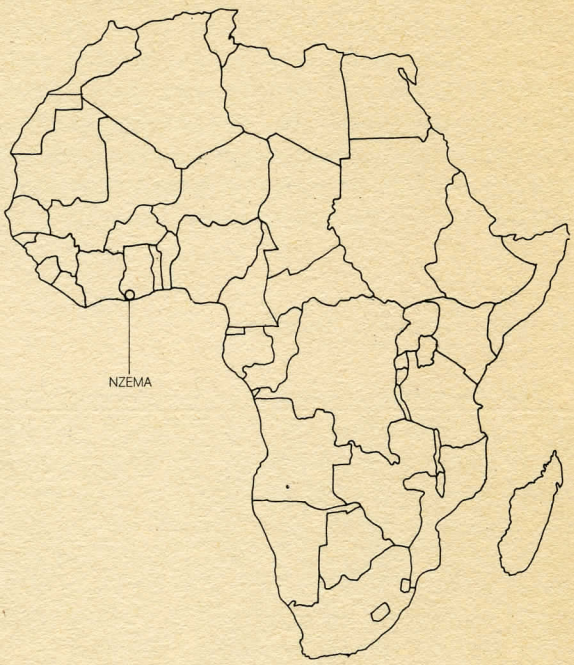

A person's name is at the same time the indispensable label for the individual's permanent or temporary identification, a receptacle of symbolic values, and a key to the network of social and spiritual bonds linking its bearer to his parents or to other kin responsible for naming, as well as to other members of society, living or dead, or to superhuman beings [2].

[1] The present paper is based on fieldwork I carried out in south-western Ghana on eight occasions, from 1954 to 1976-77, in the framework of a team research project sponsored mainly by Italian institutions (Missione Etnologica Italiana in Ghana). A preliminary note on the same topic was published several years ago (Grottanelli 1960); for a fuller appreciation of the cultural background, see Grottanelli Ed. n.d. (2 vols.), now in press. In the transcription of Nzema words. I have followed the official orthography adopted by the Bureau of Ghana Languages.

[2] I deliberately use the adjective 'superhuman' in lieu of its quasi-synonym 'supernatural'. Though much more frequently used in the literature, the latter misrepresents the traditional Akan concept, according to which the deities and other so-called 'spirits' of polytheism, far from being considered above nature, are deeply embedded in it, and indeed form the vital part of it.

No matter how carefully worded, any such definition is necessarily personal and therefore controversial in nature. The one I have just given fits the Nzema, with whom the present paper is concerned, and in a broader sense the Akan nations of West Africa, of which the Nzema represent the southernmost group. They provide a significant, though surely not isolated, example of a people among whom the plurality of names borne by a single man or woman denotes the concomitance of different types of interpersonal bonds referred to in the definition, while demonstrably recent changes in the naming pattern are a reminder of its dynamic nature.

This paper is an attempt to describe and interpret a specific pattern of personal names and naming rules at a strictly monographic level; however, the very complexity of this system makes advisable a brief reference to theoretical and terminological aspects of naming systems in general, as a premise both to the paper's specific conclusions and to badly needed future studies on the subject at large.

1. The General Pattern

Nzema personal names can be grouped into seven distinct categories. They are: 1) *ɛkɛla duma*, or ' soul name ' (pl. *ngɛla aluma*); 2) *awolɛ duma*, or birth name; 3) *ɛze duma* or *selɛ duma*, patronymic; 4) *dumandolɛ* or simply *duma*, bestowed or given name; 5) *mgbayelɛ* or nickname; 6) *ɛzɔnenlɛ duma*, or baptismal name, also referred to as *alɔfolɛ duma*, or European name; 7) surname, following Western usage and regarded as a variety of *ɛze duma*, father's name. Mention will also be made of a further class, *nzabelano*, which could tentatively be described as ' praise appellation ', though names of this type are not strictly speaking ' personal '.

Types 6 and 7 have been introduced in our century as a result of acculturation, and many people do not yet have them. Type 2, though traditional, depends on particular circumstances of birth, so that its presence and use are not universal. But every man and woman normally has a name of the first, third, fourth and fifth class; in other words, each individual is known by at least four different names, which, if used jointly, describe his personal identity without possibility of confusion.

Names of the first three categories are automatically assigned at the moment of birth; those belonging to classes 4 and 5 are assigned as a rule in the early stages of childhood. Together, the five categories provide the traditional set of personal names. They are commonly used in pairs, the most frequent coupling being 3-4 or 3-2, but as everyday term of address one of them (preferably the given name) is used singly. Should cases of homonymy arise, the namesakes (*ndɔma*) are distinguished by suffixing *ekyi* or *-kyi* (' junior ') and *kpanyi* (short for *kpanyinli*, ' senior ') to the habitually used name. If there happen to be three namesakes in the neighbourhood, the middle one in terms of age is distinguished by prefixing *avinli* (' middle ') to his name,

or by appending the name of his village of origin, or more rarely of his clan. (The Nzema are divided into seven agamous dispersed matriclans.)

Names of types 6 and 7 (introduced from the West) may be assumed later in life, even in adulthood, at the person's own initiative. These names are occasionally subject to change, but traditional ones remain unaltered throughout life, except in the case of chiefs, who on accession to the stool acquire a totally different name for the time they remain in office [3]. There is no change of name for women or men at puberty, at marriage, or following the birth of their children, etc.

Soul names, most given names, and of course Christian names, fall into two separate sets, male and female; some birth names and nicknames, and all patronymics and surnames, are ' unisex '. Though the distinction between the seven categories is a clear-cut one, names occasionally pass from one into another — especially from groups 1 and 2 to group 4, and from group 3 to 7 — thus acquiring a slightly different connotation and use.

2. ɛkɛla Duma

The translation of this expression as ' soul name ' is approximate, the Nzema having three distinct terms for what we would loosely define as the immaterial part of man: *sunsum* or *mɔra*, the patrilineally transmitted personality soul; *ɛkɛla*, the God-given life principle; and *nwomenle*, the soul after death. The distinction between these concepts, their arduous definition and their interaction, which I have treated elsewhere [4], are not directly relevant to the present study. Suffice it to say that *ɛkɛla* is understood by the Nzema to be ' something like air ', a divine breath that, according to one opinion, touches the mother's body at the moment of conception. According to others, it is blown or ' breathed ' by God (Nyamenle) onto the embryo, as a prerequisite for its further development. The subtlety of these distinctions is appreciated only by a few sophisticated informants, while the common man and woman are either plainly puzzled by them or give them little thought.

In the practical sphere, at any rate, the *ɛkɛla*'s most obvious and universally recognized aspect is its connection with the days of the week. A baby receives its first name automatically at birth, according to the day on which it happens to come into the world. This name also varies according to sex. As the Nzema, like other Akan peoples, have a seven-day week, there is a fixed set of seven male names, and a corresponding one of female names, as shown in the following table.

[3] Owing to their complex historical and political implications, chiefs' names (' stool names ') are not discussed in this paper.

[4] Grottanelli, Ed. n.d., vol. II. Cf. also Grottanelli 1961, 1965.

These name sets are based on a rigid principle: a Sunday-born boy will always be a Kwasi, a Monday-born girl always an Adwoba, and so on. The only uncertainty that may arise concerns babies born in the middle of the night. The matrons with whom Miss E. Cerulli discussed the problem told her that on clear nights, one looks at the sky. If the Pleiades are still visible above the horizon, the baby is deemed to be born on the day that is about to end. If this star cluster has already set, the baby will be assigned to the following morning and named accordingly. On cloudy nights, during the rainy season, one listens for the call of the *ebelenkwane* or 'clock bird', which is believed to utter its *doo-doo-doo* cry around midnight. My own informants remarked that what with the physiological process of delivery, the severing of the umbilical cord, the washing of the baby, etc., childbirth is a long business; if the cock does not crow in the meantime, it means the child was born before midnight and must be named according to the previous day, say, a Sunday; if the first crowing is heard before the essential operations are over, the baby will be considered Monday-born. But, they added, these are old-fashioned devices, because nowadays there usually is somebody in the compound or among the neighbours who owns a watch.

The use of the same term, *ɛkɛla*, in a different context suggests a possible connection between a person's soul name and his personal fate. The concept of good luck, or propitious fate, is expressed by *ɛkɛla kpalɛ* or *ɛkɛla fufule* (lit. 'good (or white) soul'), that of bad luck by *ɛkɛla ɛtane* or *ɛkɛla bile* ('bad (or black) soul'). Both are patently related to the God-sent breath and to the day of birth, but experience has taught the Nzema that this correspondence works in the most erratic and unpredictable way [5], so that no day can actually be reputed luckier or unluckier than any other for the newborn child.

A child is usually called by its weekday name only until it receives its given name, by which it will henceforth be known both within and outside the compound circle. In adult life, however, there are occasions in which the *ɛkɛla duma* is used in preference to other names. It continues to be used as a sign of intimacy and a term of endearment by relatives who have known

[5] The concept of fate is also rendered by a non-Nzema term, *nkalabea* (plainly derived from Twi *nkrabea*), which was explained to me as follows. God establishes every man's fate at birth (or, others say, at the moment of conception) and always means it to be a propitious one; but it is a loose and unreliable predestination, because it can be altered or even reversed in the course of a person's life by himself or by others. If a man falls from a ladder and breaks his neck, it is *not* according to his fate but rather against it, as a punishment for some mistake or sin not originally included in his destiny. If he suffers from some serious disease, it is not considered foreordained by Design, but rather caused by an ancestor's wrath or by an enemy's bad juju in defiance of that man's fate. Indeed, if one is unsuccessful in all undertakings, one may consult a diviner, who will contrive to reverse the adverse fate, by no means assuming that he is altering God's original plans concerning that person. Such attitudes show that though the weekday of birth and the corresponding personal name are, or used to be, theoretically linked with a person's luck, fate and predestination are fundamentally alien concepts to the Nzema.

the person from early infancy, such as parents, siblings, and grandparents in both lines. It must be uttered by an enemy when pronouncing an incantation or preparing an evil ' medicine ' directed against the person; otherwise a sorcerer's formulas are ineffective, or at least less effective. The *ɛkɛla duma* is also used during funeral obsequies, when the women wail or sing dirges for the deceased.

3. Awolɛ Duma

Personal names of this sort are automatically given to certain children at birth – in addition to the soul name – according to their position in the series of children born to the same mother.

A woman's first two children receive no serial name. But if the mother gives birth to three consecutive males, the third one is known as Mieza; if she has three consecutive females, the third one is called Manza; if she brings forth five consecutive children of the same sex, whether male or female, the firth will be called Anlunli.

If a woman's first two children are males and the third is a female, or vice versa, if the first two are females and the third a male, then the third child will be called Kyɛndɔ irrespective of its sex, and will be considered unlucky. A blessing rite must be performed by the mother at the end of the period of seclusion that follows delivery. A fowl is killed, and some of its blood is mixed with water and herbs in a basin and then sprinkled over the father's feet. The fowl is cooked and eaten by both parents. Then the mother, with the baby on her back, takes the remains of the liquid in the basin and goes around to her own as well as to her husband's kinsfolk in town, sprinkling each of them in turn while saying ' I have brought forth a Kyɛndɔ child, and therefore I am blessing you '. The rite (*ɛnluanlɛ*, lit. ' quenching ') is said to be performed mainly for the mother's sake. If she resumed her normal farm work omitting the rite, disaster would befall her, or her crops would be destroyed by pests. The name Kyɛndɔ is not retained as a term of address for the child.

Each child after the fifth, irrespective of sex, is known by a special name denoting his serial order of birth. The sixth born is Azane; the seventh, Asua; the eighth, Nyamekɛ; the ninth, Nyɔnra; the tenth, Bulu; the eleventh, Eduku; the twelfth, Edunwiɔ; the thirteenth, Edunsa. The list ends here, though cases of women having fourteen children or more are not unknown.

At any given time a woman's youngest child is referred to as Kazima, but this is, of course, a temporary denomination; and as the child grows up, it is not retained as a personal name, unlike the names just listed. If, however, a woman's last-born survives after she has passed child-bearing age, the mother herself will continue to use Kazima as a term of address for this child, even when he or she has reached adulthood.

While Azane (sixth-born) children are generically considered fortunate, there is no special connotation of good or bad luck associated with Asua (seventh-born) ones. The peculiarity concerning the latter is that they, and they alone, should never be born at night. If they are, the event is classed as *munzule*, *i.e.*, dangerous misfortune or disgrace, and a complex purification rite must be performed, in which the mother is the main performer. The rite resembles the one for Kyɛndɔ children, but also includes the sacrifice of a monkey (nowadays sometimes replaced by a sheep) and the use of its blood in the blessing.

Nyamekɛ and Nyɔnra, *i.e.*, eighth- and ninth-born children, are hailed as particularly fortunate. They are said to be ' pure and holy ' children given directly by God himself. Unlike other children, all of whom come from Hades (*ɛbolɔ*), they are exempt from the common risks carried over from the underworld. They are jointly known as *nyangonle mmalɛ*, from the name of a special shrine erected for them in their father's compound. Provided they observe certain taboos, wear the prescribed beads, and that suitable libations and offerings are made every year at the shrine in their honour, the bearers of these serial names are reputed to retain their holiness throughout their lives (though, off the record, these holy persons are said to be spoiled in childhood and have a reputation for being impertinent and troublesome).

In sharp contrast to the two sibilings preceding him, the tenth-born (Bulu) is not merely an unlucky child in the series; he is a ' forbidden ' child and should not be conceived. If a tenth child comes into the world, he must not be reared. Until very recent times, he was drowned or smothered at birth. The rationale of this custom is that if a Bulu child were allowed to survive, one or more adult members of his matrilineage would unfailingly die within a short period. Modern conditions, Ghanaian law, and the growing opposition of fathers, have discouraged this type of infanticide, or at least caused it to be carried out in great secrecy. A current alternative is to entrust the unwelcome baby to the Catholic Sisters of the Eikwe Mission hospital, or to relatives living in a distant area. To my knowledge, the serial name Bulu is not borne by any native Nzema [6].

Twins (*ndalɛ*) are included in the category of *nyangonle mmalɛ* and share

[6] Bulu is included, however, in the list of *given* names. Over the years I have personally met four men bearing it, and have been told of others, but it has proved impossible to ascertain whether, in any of these cases, the forebear after whom the person was named was actually a tenth-born himself, or had in turn been named after an ancestor. One reliable informant suggested that the name may have been derived from patrilateral ancestors of Aowin or Wasa origin, two lesser neighbouring Akan nations, among whom the tenth born child is not tabooed. Another explanation is that the custom of suppressing tenth-born children may be of relatively recent introduction, which would account for the legitimate existence of *bulu* persons in past generations. (There is an unverifiable story attributing the origin of the custom to a *kɛ̃nlamo* or Moslem magician from the north). The Anyi of the Ivory Coast, who practice the same type of infanticide, have found a different solution for the naming of the tenth-born. They call it *blu tɛ* (' the bad tenth one ', who must be smothered), reserving the name of *blu* for the acceptable eleventh-born (Amon d'Aby 1960: 77, 82).

the privileged position of Nyamekɛs and Nyɔnras. While they naturally almost always share the same soul name, they are given special birth names. The Nzema distinguish two sorts of twins, *ɛntelema* (of the same sex) and *takyinenta* (of different sex). In the first case, irrespective of whether they are males or females, the first born is called Ndakpanyi, the second Ndakyia. In the second case, the male is Ndabia, the female Ndabela. The first child born after his mother's twin delivery is called Anlima.

Owing to the relatively high frequency of twin births among the Nzema [7], these names (as serial names generally) are inadequate satisfactorily to identify a person in society at large, unless combined with some other name of a different class; but they are commonly used in the circle of close relatives, even when the child grows up and reaches adulthood: They are *suanu aluma*, home names.

4. ɛze Duma

Another predetermined name, automatically assigned to every male and female at birth and used throughout life, is the patronymic. It precedes the soul name, and later the given name, as a genitive: Aka son of Eboyi is Eboyi Aka.

The patronymic is always the legal father's – not the genitor's – given name. If a woman lives in a state of recognized concubinage with a man, he is equated with a husband and transmits his name to the woman's children as long as the two cohabit. Only a love child, whose mother is unmarried and whose genitor is unknown or uncertain, has no patronymic. This places the child, as he grows up, in a condition of slight social inferiority. If at a later date the real or presumed genitor recognizes the child and marries the woman, his name becomes the child's patronymic. This is not the case if the woman marries another man, even if he agrees (as is usually the case) to act as step-father (*dɔmagya*), for the natural father may eventually come forward, claim the child as his own, and belatedly assume the social and financial responsibilities arising from patrifiliation, along with the right to name the child.

[7] A fairly reliable indication is provided by data concerning deliveries at the Eikwe Catholic Mission hospital (Eastern Nzema), carefully recorded by the local German sisters over a period of ten years, April 1959-August 1969. The figures for the whole period are: single births 1,669, twin births 72, triple births 2. This gives an average of 44 twin births per thousand deliveries. During approximately the same years, corresponding Italian averages were 15.7 for Veneto and 9.2 for Sardinia (verbal communication by Prof. V. Correnti).

5. Dumandolɛ

This is the main name (also referred to simply as *duma*), by which a person is known throughout life, whether or not it is associated with his other names. It is chosen by the child's father, usually when the baby begins to crawl and has cut his first two teeth, or – as the Nzema put it – when he has ' passed the grave ', *i.e.*, can be expected to survive.

If the child's paternal grandfather is dead, the choice rests entirely with the father. A first-born male will frequently be named after his father's father, while a female will be named after her father's father's sister or her father's mother. Successive children will be named for their father's other classificatory fathers and mothers, or for other relatives from their father's matrilineage. But if the baby's grandfather is still alive, the father will leave the choice to him, and the name will then probably be drawn from those of an earlier generation. As there is no tabooing of dead people's names, and no objection to namesakes, a child can thus indifferently be given the name of a deceased or of a living forebear.

The preference given to genealogical names, combined with the use of the patronymic, may (and sometimes does) give rise to a regular series of alternating double names, *e.g.*, if a father is Bile Mɔkɛ, his first-born son will be Mɔkɛ Bile, the son's son Bile Mɔkɛ again and so on, potentially perpetuating a strictly patrilineal chain of personal names that cuts across the lineage affiliation; because of the exogamy rule, every man in the chain necessarily belongs to a different lineage from those of both his father and his son. In practice, circumstances often suggest the introduction of a new name into the series, thus interrupting its regularity. At any rate the system, though elastic, ensures a continuous circulation of given names from one matrilineage to another. No lineage or clan is or can become a reservoir of names exclusively its own.

The adoption of genealogical names has another minor consequence in the domestic sphere, the custom of familiarly and half-jokingly calling one's son (man speaking) *egya* or *papa* (' father '), and one's daughter *ɔmɔ* or *mame* (" mother '), etc. For instance, informant MW, who was named after his father's father's younger brother, told me that his father used to call him Papekyi (*papa ekyi*, ' little father '). He in turn named his first-born son after his father's older brother, and addresses the child as Papa Kpanyi. Informant AQ's first-born daughter is named Anlima after his own mother, and he calls her Mamekyi; but AQ's wife, who correctly addresses her mother-in-law as *mehilene*, calls the little girl by the same term.

The naming of children after dead grandparents or other ancestors is not necessarily connected with the idea of reincarnation, a belief followed by the Nzema only in rare and special cases [8]. The choice of genealogical names, they say, is made ' in sign of respect '.

[8] In apparent contrast to the belief of the neighbouring Anyi, for whom every conception is allegedly due to an ancestor's reincarnation (Tauxier, 1932: 225).

Occasionally the given name may be taken from those of the child's matrilateral relatives, living or dead. This happens when a father of many children has exhausted the list of kinsfolk's names that he wishes to perpetuate; or when he is a close friend of some elderly person of his wife's or wife's father's lineages, or endebted to such a person for financial or other assistance. The child's mother may be consulted or suggest a name on her own initiative, but the final decision always rests with the father, who in such cases will have to ' beg the name ' – as the Nzema put it – from his *abusua kpanyinli* (lineage head), *i.e.*, explain the reasons for the choice of a name not drawn from those of his kin and obtain the lineage head's consent. A man will sometimes name his child after a close friend.

Whatever his relationship to the child's parents, the living person for whom the child is named feels honoured by the fact, and is placed in a position comparable to that of a godfather or godmother in our societies. In particular, he or she will have priority over other kin if at a later stage the parents will decide to part with their child in accordance with the common custom of fostering, *adanelilɛ*.

It sometimes happens that the forebear after whom the father wishes to name his child was customarily known in his lifetime by a birth name, such as Nyamekɛ or Ndabela, or even by a soul name. In such a case that name will be assigned to the baby as a bestowed name, and may eventually be passed on as a *dumandolɛ* to the child's future patrilateral descendants. It may even become a surname – a practice that implies no confusion between the various classes of personal names.

If the father dies before the baby is born or shortly thereafter, his lineage kin will see to it that the child is named after him, especially (but not exclusively) if the baby happens to be a male. Likewise, if a woman dies in childbirth and her baby survives, the child, irrespective of sex, may be named for the deceased mother. The custom accounts for the occasional passage of given names from the male list to the female one and vice versa, and for the possibility of namesakes of different sex. If the namesakes happen to reside in the same village or compound, they are distinguished by appending the terms for male (*nrenya*) or female (*raalɛ*) to their common name: *e.g.* Azane-Raalɛ, Bɛneɛ-Nrenya.

When a married woman remains sterile for many years and succeeds in conceiving only after recourse to a *bozonle* (' fetish god '), the child may be named for that god and throughout his life he will have periodical ritual obligations towards the deity.

If a baby is sickly, its naming may be put off for months or even years, until it shows signs of permanent recovery. But if the parents decide not to postpone the event, or if the previous death of one or more of the baby's siblings induces the parents to fear for the present one's survival, a peculiar type of name will be given to it, such as that of a socially inferior person or of a worthless or despicable object. The most common one is Kanra (' slave '), or its equivalents Wangala, Pepe, Bɔgɔbile, Abudu, etc. (referring to labourers from the ' uncivilized ' north). Other such names are Fovolɛ

(' refuse heap '), Tuma (' fish trap ', a cheap object), Ebinli (' excreta '), Kyekyekɔ (' pack and go ', meaning ' you may go anywhere for all we care '), Ayile Ewie (' no more medicine ', *i.e.*, ' we are tired of curing sick children '), Azɛlɛ Ewie (' no more ground ', *i.e.*, ' we have no room left in the cemetery '), and the like. The rationale for the choice of these quaintly derogatory names is the idea, familiar to other peoples well beyond the Akan area, that witches and other hostile beings believed to endanger the child's health will refrain from harming it if led to believe that even in its parents' eyes it is a worthless little creature.

The naming of a child is the occasion for an informal gathering in the compound, to which relatives and friends are invited, usually including both the father's and the child's lineage heads and elders who may be present in town. At the father's request, one of the senior men (preferably the child's paternal grandfather, if still alive, or one of his brothers, likewise classified as a ' grandfather ') pours a libation to the gods and ancestors. He then takes the child in his arms, calls out his *ɛkɛla duma* three times, each time lightly patting its head, and addresses it more or less as follows: " Kofi! Kofi! Kofi! Today thou art being named So-and-so. Thou hast come to stay with us, thou art not to die, but rather to grow up and help us all in making this our village prosperous and respected. Thou shouldst live to beget children in thy turn, and name them after thy father and father's siblings ". Then the man takes a small pinch of salt between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, and a pinch of red pepper, and places them in turn in the child's mouth. The salt and the pepper unfailingly make the child howl and are removed after a few seconds. Then a few drops of the remaining libation drink are poured on the child's tongue. Each of these gestures is accompanied by a comment: " This is salt (or pepper, or rum). When thou seest salt, say it is salt ", etc. Finally, the man drops plain water into the child's mouth: " This is water. When thou seest water, say it is water ". Rum or *nza* (palm wine), or some other alcoholic beverage, is then passed in a calabash among the men. The women get their share too, unless they prefer soft drinks. All the adults pretend to shake the child's hand and press some little present into it, such as P. 10 (pesewas) coins or candy bars.

The patrilateral orientation of child naming hardly needs to be emphasized. Should the father die before the event has taken place, one of his brothers or successors will be responsible for it. In some rare cases, however, the father's prolonged absence, or both parents' remarriage in distant places after divorce, or some other circumstance involving a father's lasting separation from the child, may postpone the child's naming until he reaches adolescence or even maturity. In such cases, the person continues to be known by his *ɛkɛla duma*, preceded by the patronymic when necessary; but this situation is not satisfactory, and must sooner or later be corrected.

Informant JQ reported the case of an acquaintance of his, a man from Anyinasɛɛ known as Amihyia Kwao, who was still in this position at the age of 70. Everybody called him by his soul name, Kwao, and occasionally a friend would tease him: ' Why, thou hast no proper name! It looks as

though thou never hadst a father! '. For many years Kwao patiently bore the mockery, but in his old age he reconsidered the matter and decided to have himself finally named. He went back to the village where his father Amihyia had lived and died some thirty years earlier; he contacted Amihyia's already elderly successors, and asked them to name him. They complied. He went through the same naming rite described above and returned to Anyinasee with his own regular *dumandole*. No one considered his decision at all ridiculous.

A father who by his own fault fails to carry out his essential paternal duties automatically forfeits his right to name the child. The child's *abusua* people (matrilineal kin) are then legitimately entitled to perform the function without consulting the father.

An example of the serious socio-economic consequences to which this abnormal situation may lead is the case of one of our mission's closest collaborators over the years, whom I will call John Ndele. His profligate father, who had soon divorced John's mother and remarried in a distant town, wanted to name him Kyipile after his own father. But John's mother Ayeba and his maternal grandmother, with whom Ayeba and the child were living, objected on the grounds that the absentee father provided no money towards the child's maintenance. Their view was supported by their lineage head, and the boy was eventually named Ndele after his mother's younger brother, who promised to provide financial assistance to Ayeba and to pay the boy's school fees. (Ayeba's older brother was a hopeless drunkard.) News of the boy's matrilateral naming was received very badly by his father, who used it as a pretext for neglecting his son even more completely. When the boy's uncle Ndele died prematurely in 1966, Ayeba having remarried in Takoradi and borne five more children, John was left without any support from his kin.

6. Mgbayele

Nicknames fall into three main classes. A first group corresponds mechanically to the double set of male and female soul names, and is therefore predetermined for each person at the moment of birth and devoid of individual reference. The second group is similar in nature, except for the fact that each nickname of the series is attached to one of the frequently recurring bestowed names and birth names. The third class includes nicknames invented individually by a child's playmates, siblings or other relatives, or even by himself.

Nicknames of the first two types are mostly meaningless words, the origin of which the Nzema are unable to explain. They are either prefixed or suffixed to the name (*e.g.* Ato Kwame, Kwame Ato) as an automatic appendix or instantaneous question-and-answer. Although these names are common knowl-

edge, their use is generally restricted to the small circle of one's kinsfolk and intimate friends, in a spirit of playfulness and endearment.

The first set, with its few variants, is shown in tabular form along with the corresponding soul names (see Table).

Of the second group, some of the most common examples are: ɛnɔ - Abɔm, Kanra - Dɔnkɔ, Aka - Balahua, Nda - Nyamenle, Abuo Bile - Bɔkɛsɔ, ɛzonle - Koate, Mieza - Abelampa, Amaka - Akose, Avo - Okyamvo, Kakukyi - Kangamuye, where the nickname is the second of each pair. A few sobriquets of this class have a meaning, like Kalatua (a kind of cricket) coupled with the given name Mɔkɛ, or Atepepelepe (an allusion to strong will) coupled with ɛza; some consist of a brief sentence, such as Obu bendu sira (' they do not uproot your plantain seedlings '), coupled with Bɛneɛ.

Like the seven clans' praise names, town oaths and mottos, nicknames of important persons – chiefs, *tufuhene*, *asafohene*, lineage heads, etc. – can be rendered in drum language during ceremonies, funerals and official meetings, to greet them when they make their appearance and bid them farewell when they depart. The personage thus honoured answers the musical greeting and is expected to make a small present (a few coins for a drink) to the drummers. There is even a special, rhythmically impressive *mgbayelɛ* for the Nzema nation as a body, *Nzema etwe kɔtɔko*, to which the audience must respond in unison, shouting either *yawake* (' we are here ') or *yooooi!*

Nicknames of the third category, unrelated to other personal names and devised to suit the individual, may express particular moods or feelings of the person who invents them or refer to the bearer's peculiar traits or habits. A lisping man or woman may be nicknamed Abɔlɔme (a variety of lizard proverbially known for its flickering tongue); a child mocked by his friends because of his greediness will be called Aleɛkpole (' food gobbler '); and a girl who often cries is nicknamed Balelile (' whimpering child '). Informant TM, who as a boy used to be constantly sent by his grandfather to buy fowls from village neighbours, was named Akɔlɛ bawie (' chickens will finish '). His sobriquet was subsequently changed to Rafat because of his reputed resemblance to an Egyptian soccer player who came to Accra. The list could be extended indefinitely.

In contrast with these transparent childish epithets, usually dropped if not forgotten in adulthood, nicknames chosen by an adult for a youngster (*e.g.*, by his father) are often obscure. In most cases, they epitomize some striking experience, moral conviction, grief or resentment, often unrelated to the child. These nicknames may be cryptically condensed in short sentences, such as *ɛkɛzebɛ* (' you will know them '), *Mesɛlɛbɛ* (' I beg you '), *Ende wua, ngakula su* (' Ende dies, children weep '). The cathartic significance that these names have for the giver is often unknown to the bearer. If a father dies, or is separated from his child, before he has explained the hidden meaning of the nickname, the child may grow up in total ignorance of it.

On one occasion in 1970, I was conversing with the *tufuhene* of a town in Western Nzema in the presence of about a dozen people, and the topic of *mgbayelɛ* was brought up. The old gentleman – a grave and respected

Table. *Nzema Soul Names and Nicknames of Response* *

WEEKDAY		Females		Males	
		SOUL NAME	NICKNAME	SOUL NAME	NICKNAME
SUN.	Molɛ	Kwasi	Afum	Akasi	Asimokua Ogyile-Kwoyolo-Ehiafo Anloma
MON.	Kenlenzile	Kodwo	Asɛla	Adwoba	Mɔlɛsa
TUE.	Dwɛkɛ	Kabenla	Abuo-Kabenla-Bɛnna-Woso	Abenlema	Kwosia
WED.	Maanle	Kaku	Abaku	Akuba	Obologyi
THU.	Kule	Kwao	ɔgonlo	Yaba	Amele Amelebɔɔ
FRI.	Yalɛ	Kofi	Abu Abukofi	Afiba	Molowie Omolowi
SAT.	Folɛ	Kwame	Ato Abosiabo Asale	Ama	Agyamanladu

* The Nzema double set of soul names corresponds fairly closely to its parallels in Twi (cf. Christaller 1933: 599) and Anyi (Amon d'Aby 1960: 24). For a comparison of response nicknames, materials at my disposal are as yet insufficient. Weekday sets are fairly similar in Nzema and Anyi but do not correspond to Twi ones, in relation to which they curiously appear to have ' slided ' upwards by one step, Nzema/Anyi terms for Monday being comparable to Twi for Sunday, and so on.

person – declared his own nickname, which happened to be Ampueni Asukulpa-lafoɔ. This immediately provoked delighted laughter among the others, because the words meant nothing whatsoever.

It should, incidentally, be noted that names of the allusive type are often given to dogs. Dr. A. Wade-Brown, a member of our mission, collected several dog's names and inquired into their meaning. He was told that in devising them the dogs' masters had been inspired either by longing for their dead relatives or by bitterness and resentment for ingratitude, suspicions and slander from which they were suffering at the time. The allusions condensed in the pet's name were thus at the same time an outlet for repressed emotions and a subtly indirect way of conveying reproach to others (Wade-Brown, 1974).

7. ɛzɔnenlɛ Duma

Baptismal names are of recent introduction. In spite of repeated contacts with Europeans of various nations over the past five centuries, there was no permanent attempt to evangelize the Nzema before the early decades of the 20th century [9], and these endeavours were hindered by local difficulties and by scarcity of preachers. Though the number of nominal Christians appears to be in the order of 60 or 70 % of the population, paganism in still strongly prevalent to this day, and the percentage of people actually bearing and using Christian names is not nearly as high as the one indicated.

The baptismal name, usually received when the person is already known by names of the traditional type listed above, does not replace traditional names, but is combined with them. According to European usage, it is used as a first name, e.g. James K. Amissah, where the middle initial usually stands for the patronymic, and the last name is the *dumandolɛ* (or vice versa, when the patronymic is turned into a surname, *cf.* below).

Not all christened persons use their baptismal names in everyday life. And they still sound foreign to the older and more conservative generation. Some people are tempted to assume a Christian name on their own initiative, possibly apart from the sacrament of baptism. The possession of such a name appeals to progressive young men and women as a mark of literacy and modernity. Whimsical people have been known to change their Christian name during their lifetime.

A parallel, albeit more limited, trend is the equally recent adoption of Moslem names (in their Ghanaian versions, *e.g.*, Amadi, Musa, Yusufi, Dawuda or Dabida, Mariama, Aminata, Fatma, etc.) following conversion to Islam.

8. Surname (*selɛ duma*)

The adoption and use of surnames is a recent, largely though not exclusively post-war custom, due to the evolution of the traditional patrilateral naming system under the influence of modernization trends. As it has numerous parallels in other parts of Africa, it requires only the briefest mention.

The first step in this direction appears to have been, in the early decades of our century and following the Fanti example, the adoption of would-be

[9] In the first quarter of the 16th century there were Portuguese chaplains at Axim (near the eastern border of Nzema), where about 1500 the Portuguese built one of the earliest forts of the Guinea coast. They were briefly followed in that town by French Capuchins (between 1633 and 1638) and by French Dominicans in Assinie, to the west of Nzema (1671-73, 1703-1704). Missionary activity was resumed in Axim at intervals from 1873 onward by Protestants as well as by Catholics, but the first permanent missions on Nzema territory proper were established in 1921 at Awiane (Half Assini) and in 1928 at Eikwe (Wiltgen, 1956; Vogel, 1967). As of January 1977, there were three Catholic priests in the area and no Protestant minister, with a total population of probably over 100,000.

Anglicized versions of vernacular names. Many a Bile accordingly became Blay, ɛkɔbɔ became Cobbold, Asua turned into Essuah or Eshen, Kwame into Quarm, and Kabenla into Cobbinah. Somewhat more capriciously, at a time when no standard spelling existed for Nzema, names that were hard for English tongues, such as Kunwenwa, Anlumgba, and Awia or Ahwia, were changed respectively to Kwanzah, Enimpah, and White. A fairly common given name, ɛlea, first became Elliah and then, to complete the Anglicization, Elliason.

Patrilateral transmission of names was already familiar to the Nzema, but it now began to follow a new pattern, the father's name no longer preceding but following the personal name. Traditionally Awia's son Hoagya would have been called Awia Hoagya, but christened John and spelling his name Whajah, he now became Mr John W. White, entitled to transmit the surname White to his own children and sons' children. Entirely new surnames, such as Johnson or Williams, were adopted by other modern-minded men, and they are now being handed down to their children. This new trend was introduced by the small sophisticated élite of clerks, school teachers, successful traders, and literate people in contact with the outside world, and it is not yet followed by the traditionally-minded majority. It is gaining ground, however, and is likely to introduce lasting changes in the Nzema naming system within the next few decades.

9. Nzabelano

In contrast with the last two classes, which reflect innovation, *nzabelano* names are unmistakably a relic of the past, and their sociocultural meaning and function is all but lost.

There are five such names in all: Abɛlanwo, Amu, Anyaado, ɛsonwo, ɔbele. Each Nzema child, irrespective of sex, receives one at birth – the one borne by his father. As a consequence, each name of this kind is shared by one out of five Nzema, i.e. by an average of some 15-20,000 people. It is never used, either by itself or in combination with other names, to define its bearer's individual identity. In this sense, as noted at the outset, it is not a ' personal ' name. In fact, it is only resorted to by men as a praise appellation on formal occasions, uttered by strangers in the way of introduction on first meeting, and by elders assembling at a funeral or for some other solemn or official purpose.

The form is the following. Two men formally shake hands twice (the first time for greeting and the second for welcoming). One of them asks: *ɛyɛ nzɔne?* (' what art thou? ') and the other replies, say, *meyɛ Amu.* The first man hails him: *ahyie-oooo Amu!*, and is similarly greeted in turn when he announces his own *nzabelano.* Among persons already acquainted with one another, this appellation is used to thank someone for a favour or a drink.

Women cannot transmit this type of name to their offspring and seldom

use it; some women ignore it altogether. Even young men are apt to forget theirs or regard it as unimportant. More surprisingly, men of the older generation, who display wide familiarity with most other traditional aspects of their national culture, are at a loss to explain the functional meaning of such names. Apart from the above description of the formal use of such names, the only other information I was able to glean over the years from countless conversations on the subject [10] can be summed up as follows. The use of *nzabelano* names goes back to the hazy days of ' travelling and suffering ', as the Nzema are wont to describe the remote period of migrations that allegedly brought their forebears to the present country. Five such names are remembered, though there may have been more. They refer to rivers (east of the Ankobra, some say) crossed long ago, the spirits of which were jointly worshipped by fathers and sons. There is no *sɛkɛlɛneɛ* (emblem) for them, as there is for each of the seven Nzema matriclans [11], but some of the *kyibandeɛ* (food interdicts) transmitted in the male line may be connected with these river appellations, *e.g.*, the *alenre* (alligator) taboo observed by persons responding to Anyaado – a connection rejected or questioned by other informants.

Inferences from such scanty data are better left to the final section. It is clear, in any case, that *nzabelano* appellations are distinct from genuine personal names, as they serve a scope of classification – rather than of individual naming – more clearly than any other of the categories listed above. If we accept a customary distinction (Gardiner 1940: 9-10; Swanton 1959: 16), they must be considered a type of general name, προσηγορία, or more specifically, an honorary appellation, as opposed to the ὄνομα κύριον type, *nomen proprium* [12], or personal name proper. Although Lévi-Strauss (1962) maintains that in all naming systems individualization is tantamount to classification [13], Swanton's elementary distinction still holds true.

[10] One of the authorities I interviewed on the subject in 1970 was reputedly the oldest man living in Nzema, an Alɔnwɔba clansman from Anokyi called Kpanyi Aka, said to be over 100 and a grandson of the famous king Kaku Aka. He told me that his royal grandfather was the only man ever known to have changed his *nzabelano* (from Amu to Anyaado), to prove his power as the lord of the East and West. But apart from the king's whim, he added, all these praise appellations are equal in rank and dignity.

[11] Cf. Grottanelli 1962.

[12] We are not of course concerned with the Latin pattern of naming including *praenomen*, *nomen*, and *cognomen*, but I might mention in passing that the well-documented dynamics of the Roman system, and especially the principles underlying the *mutatio nominis*, would repay the attention not only of historians and jurists already well acquainted with the subject, but also of anthropologists interested in the theory of personal names.

[13] " Le choix, semble-t-il, n'est qu'entre identifier l'autre en l'assignant à une classe, ou, sous couvert de lui donner un nom, de s'identifier soi-même à travers lui. On ne nomme donc jamais: on classe l'autre " (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 240); " ... n'importe quel système qui traite l'individuation comme une classification (et nous avons vu que c'est toujours le cas)... " (ibid. 261). The theoretical implications of proper names have been discussed also in recent years by glottologists and semiologists, with the work of whom we cannot concern ourselves here. See, however, ' La guerre des noms propres ' in Derrida, 1967: 157-173, ' Mito-Nome-Coltura ' in Lotman, Uspenskij, 1975: 83-109, and especially ' Nomen-Omen ' in Cardona, 1976: 133-155.

10. Theory and Terminology: Aspects of a General Problem

Before we proceed to the conclusions that can be drawn from our data, it may be worthwhile to look for a moment at the literature on naming systems in general, in hopes of finding new guidelines to interpretation.

The prospect is not altogether encouraging. Discussions of, and generalizations about, the ' personal name ' in the singular are no longer adequate or acceptable. We are now acquainted with too large a number of naming systems in all continents and at a variety of cultural levels in which according to circumstances and stages of life the individual is referred to and/or addressed by a plurality of names. Each of these systems is the unique product of multiple factors – linguistic, ideological, mythological, sociological – peculiar to a culture, a fact that presents methodological obstacles to valid comparison and generalization. Unlike totemism, head-hunting, age-set systems or polyandry, naming systems are found everywhere, so any general statement concerning them presupposes a world-wide analysis conducted along uniform methodological lines. The problem has been tackled by logicians, semiologists and glottologists as well as by anthropologists, the former often ignoring the results of the latter and *vice versa*, in the same way as the Americanist usually took little notice of the vast specialised literature on names among the ancient Semites or in the classical world, and so on.

The difficulty of embracing so vast a field accounts for the fact that while a number of accurate, sometimes exhaustive descriptions of single tribal systems have been produced over the last few decades – including Hart's (1930) on the Tiwi, Needham's (1954) on the Penan, Beattie's (1957) on the Nyoro, Ryan's (1958) on the Mendi, Ruud's (1960) on the Malagasy, Houis's (1963) on the Mosi, Calame-Griaule's (1965) on the Dogon – general discussions of the topic at a comparative level have so far proved unconvincing or inconclusive.

Leaving aside the contributions of earlier scholars such as Frazer (1911) and Westermarck (1906-08), who were more interested in the magical implications of personal names than in their sociological significance, the least disappointing of such discussions is Larock's pioneer essay (1932), written in the wake of Lévy-Bruhl's *Fonctions mentales*. It deserves mention if only because it has been rarely read and utilized by later authors. Larock was not wrong in noticing that the two essential aspects of personal names are their sacred value and their social function, but lingering evolutionist prejudices led him to see the two as antithetic and the history of their development as a gradual progress from the former to the latter. The successive stages of this supposed evolution – from a religious to a profane conception of personal names – are represented, in his view, by three societies which he admits (p. 16) having chosen ' arbitrarily ', the Arunta, the BaMpango (a section of the BaKongo), and the Kwakiutl. The first stage is marked by the intense emotional quality of names, rites, prohibitions, etc., characteristic of totemism, revealing ' l'âme collective émanant d'un groupe fortement organisé '; the second by the dissociation of religious and social values;

in the third (Kwakiutl) stage, the sacred value of names is marred and obliterated by the appearance of individualism, and ' se déprécie au profit de la valeur sociale qui y était primairement incluse ' (p. 174).

However insufficient in its documentation and debatable in method, Larock's ' theory ' of personal names is consistent in its anthropological orientation [14]. This is not the case with Sir Alan Gardiner's work on the same subject, which appeared in its final book form a few years later under the more committed title *The Theory of Proper Names* (1940). Written by an Egyptologist as a polemical rejoinder to old-time logicians such as Mill and his followers, and to modern philosophers such as Bertrand Russell [15], this ' controversial essay ' makes practically no reference to anthropological literature, and is therefore surely of greater interest to the linguist than to the ethnologist.

[14] His definition of personal name is characteristic of a certain type and period of ethnological study: " Le nom est plus que le signe sonore d'une individualité, il est plus qu'une simple étiquette: il participe, en quelque sorte, de la personnalité qu'il évoque; aux yeux du groupe, il en est le symbole concret... En outre il représente l'individu vis à vis des puissances occultes, il est en communication avec elles, il participe de leur valeur mystérieuse, il est rempli d'une force qui peut être tour à tour bienfaisante et redoutable; son existence est indépendante de celle de l'homme auquel il est associé et dans lequel il habite... à la manière d'un double ou d'une âme, plus ou moins personnelle, en tout cas distincte " (Larock 1932: 8-9). From the linguist's point of view, the name's essential character is strikingly different. The definition that follows (Gardiner 1940: 43) applies to the whole category of proper names, though the author remarks (p. 47) that within it personal names represent the largest class of all: " A proper name is a word or group of words recognized as indicating or tending to indicate the object or objects to which it refers by virtue of its distinctive sound alone, without regard to any meaning possessed by that sound from the start, or acquired by it through association with the said object or objects ". Not all authors who have written on the subject have deemed it necessary to offer a definition of the personal name, probably taking it for granted that the concept itself was self-evident. But a systematic comparative survey of such definitions would, I am sure, yield interesting results. It would show that definitions vary greatly not only according to the author's professional specialization – as shown by the examples given above – but also following his intellectual inclinations and background and, of course, the varying range of societies he is acquainted with. To some, the existential-conceptual significance of personal names comes first: " [Die Namengebung] ist höchst bedeutungsvoll, weil der Name das innere Wesen, das Sein des Menschen ausdrückt und damit ein Teil von ihm ist " (Dittmer 1954: 67). For others, the sociological function of names is their foremost aspect: according to Radin, the personal name is the first stage in the induction into a status (Radin 1953: 263) and " it may mean so much that it would take a volume to describe it ". For Lévi-Strauss, the scholar who in our generation has devoted more attention both to the formal-structural and to the social meaning of proper names, " le nom propre... joue le rôle d'une véritable métaphore de l'être individuel du fait qu'il transforme celui-ci en personne " (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 280).

[15] The extent to which scholarly discussion of any would-be theory of proper names can become *un dialogue de sourds* is summed up in Gardiner's touchingly sincere admission: " So unfamiliar to me is the philosophical plane upon which Bertrand Russell moves that I am a little nervous about dogmatizing upon the basis of his thought " (Gardiner 1940: 63). This did not prevent the author from declaring (*ibid.*, 57): " assuredly the most fantastic theory of proper names... is that propounded by Bertrand Russell ". The work referred to is a set of lectures on ' The Philosophy of Logical Atomism ' (cf. *The Monist*, 1918: 523-5, modified by Prof. Stebbing, *Introduction to Modern Logic*, London 1933, pp. 23-26).

More recently, Lévi-Strauss (1962, 1974) has devoted to the subject a considerable portion of one of his brilliant volumes, in the course of which he mentions (p. 233), but fails to formulate, a ' theory of proper names '. We are endebted to him, however, for an initial expansion of the taxonomy and nomenclature of the various categories of personal names. Along the line of such already commonly accepted terms as *patronym* and *teknonym*, he suggests the adoption of new terms, such as *necronym* (Needham's ' death name ', a new name bestowed at the death of a kinsman), *autonym* (a proper, ' self ' name, as alternative to, or contrasted with, the former), *andronym* (husband's name assumed by a woman), and *fratronym* (' sibling of so-and-so '). For the latter term, the variant *adelphonym* is also used (Vulcănescu, 1970: 111-112).

The terminological suggestion is stimulating and calls for a series of possible additions. Friendship names as used among the Mendi, *i.e.*, personal names ' exclusive to particular (usually pairs of) individuals ' (Ryan 1958-59: 114-115) can conveniently be termed *philonyms*. Names originating from dreams, such as those bestowed upon a Delaware child in accordance with a dream that had come to his father (Swanton 1959: 16) are plainly *oneironyms*. Secret names, so frequent among American Indians and Australians, and not unknown in Africa (cf. *e.g.* Capron 1962: 149), are obviously *kryptonyms*. The name of a god bestowed upon a child whose conception and birth are attributed to the god's benevolence, as among the Nzema, can correctly be termed *theonym*.

This lexicographic exercise could be continued indefinitely, but the taxonomic accuracy of such neologisms becomes doubtful when we deal with complex single (tribal) systems, and even more with the general comparison of several such systems. The Dogon set of personal names as described by Dieterlen (1956: 112) includes four items associated with the person's ' bodily souls ': a ' nom interdit ', which we can translate *kryptonym*; a ' nom usuel ' or ' nom semence ', *spermonym*; a ' nom de la mère ' or *matronym*; a ' sobriquet ' or nickname, a sort of *eponym* that is also a *philonym*, ' nom d'amitié donné à l'enfant par ses camarades de classe d'âge '. But, to restrict ourselves to the first of these categories, secret or ' forbidden ' names are not prohibited among the Dogon for the same reasons that cause them to be tabooed among the Nambikwara or Australian aborigines; thus, kryptonyms can be regarded as a uniform class only at a very superficial level. Necronyms, as everybody knows, frequently become kryptonyms, a fact accounted for by Lévi-Strauss (1974: 257) with the convincing formula: « on ne prononce pas le nom des morts, *et cela suffit à expliquer la structure du nécronyme* » (emphasis added). But the structuralist revelation is contradicted by other cases of necronyms. To mention only the best-known example, in Tikopia children may not utter the names of their living father and mother but they may do so freely as soon as the parents die (Firth 1957: 182). Among the Nzema, where there is no taboo on a deceased person's name, a first-born child is more likely to be given his paternal grandfather's name if this kinsman is dead than if he is still alive.

In fact, Penan ' death names ' as illustrated by Needham are based on a pattern of customs quite different from those connected with necronyms elsewhere. The mere fact that a young Penan may adopt and replace as many as six or seven necronyms before reaching the age of marriage is unparalleled; and, as Lévi-Strauss points out, these are ' simple indicatifs de classe ', not proper names in the strict sense of the term (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 255). In other words, ' necronym ' is an ambiguous term, embracing several types of ' death names ' or ' names of the dead '. The frequent, though by no means universal, dread of the latter and the prohibition to utter them lead to different solutions. Among a number of Australian groups, " the repugnance to mentioning the names of those who have died lately is carried so far, that persons who bear the same name abandon it, and either adopt temporary names or are known by any others that happen to belong to them ". But the Masai resort to the opposite device: " as soon as a man or a woman dies, they change his or her name, and henceforth speak of him or her by the new name, while the old name falls into oblivion » (Frazer, 1911: 354-355). The second solution is also adopted by the Sakalava (Decary 1951: 29), the Antanosy and other Malagasy (Ruud 1960: 171-180).

However tempting in theory, the adoption of a new general terminology for the multiple categories of personal names entails the risk of ambiguity. What has just been said about necronyms could be applied to matronyms, fratronyms, and other classes. Praise names, for instance, which are so common in West Africa and of which the Nzema *nzabelano* is a clear example, could conveniently be grouped under the general term *epainonyms* (ἔπαινος = ' praise ', ' applause '); but the term would require further specifications if applied to the Dogon naming system, in which a person, in addition to his personal names, bears several such ' devises ', corresponding respectively to his nation, tribe, region, village, ward, and individual *nani* or ancestor (Dieterlen 1956: 112). Again, the endless variety of social factors underlying the naming systems creates taxonomic puzzles. How are we to classify the personal names of Santa Cruz islanders, among whom " each child is given the same name as one of the contributors to his father's brideprice or another selected by him, and each girl is named after the wife of a contributor ", so that " for an anthropologist interested in collecting genealogical information it is impossible to determine after more than two generations whether an individual is a child by birth or by adoption of his named parent " (Davenport 1964: 72-73)? What technical term can describe the type of appellation resorted to by the Yurok in order – it seems – to avoid and replace the use of personal names proper, whereby a man is described by a term indicating both his wife's birthplace or residence and his matrimonial status, while a symmetrical set of terms describes the precise identity of individual women (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 260 n.)?

The difficulty of compiling an exhaustive set of terms for all existing types or classes of names may be of a different order, if a consistent fidelity to Greek roots is desired. The Greeks of classical times used no surnames and therefore had no word for ' surname ' as we understand it. The nearest

equivalent, ἐπωνυμία, was also taken to mean ' nickname ', and in modern Greek ἐπώνυμον covers both meanings. In most other European languages *eponym* has a still different lexical connotation. Here again, then, other terms should be coined: *megaronym* (from μέγαρον) for surname, possibly, and *paronym* (from παρά, ὄνυμα) for nickname [16].

In the concluding remarks that follow, I shall retain the Akan terminology and its traditional English translation and use the corresponding neologisms as merely tentative suggestions.

11. Conclusions

The complex pattern of personal name classes among the Nzema becomes meaningful if we analyse it in the light of the basic principles underlying their conception of physiological/spiritual procreation, which in turn is linked to their system of descent group affiliation, loyalties during life, and succession at death.

Every human being derives his life and personality from three distinct sources. He receives his lasting physical frame, *i.e.*, his bones, from his mother; his ' power of motion ', *i.e.*, his blood and his *sunsum*, or personality soul, from his father; his *ɛkɛla* or life principle from God. His clan and lineage affiliations are traced exclusively through the mother, or as the Nzema say, they ' go with the bones ', and determine most of the person's social and economic rights and obligations. But at the same time the communion of blood and spirit creates a strong bond between father and child, and residence is largely patrilocal and virilocal. At death, the bones prevail: succession is matrilineal. The ideal burial place is the father's lineage's cemetery, but in Hades the ghost joins its matrilateral forebears. The father-given *sunsum* ceases to exist, but the person's *ɛkɛla* returns to the sky God from whom it came. The conceptual pattern is similar to, but not identical with, that of hitherto better known Akan nations.

[16] I am endebted to my learned colleague, Professor Carlo Gallavotti, for suggesting the term ' megaronym ', which we agreed in finding preferable to its obvious synonyms, *domonym* and *oikonym*. It suits the Nzema situation, where the recent habit of deriving surnames from patronyms proper is combined with patrilocal residence, so that ' house name ' and ' father's name ' tend to coincide. For different reasons, it would *e.g.* equally well suit Russian usage, where the first (bestowed) name is followed by the individual patronym in addition to the surname or family name, transmitted in the male line (' autonym-patronym-megaronym ' pattern). It would be ambiguous, however, in any society in which the predominant paternal role in determining, choosing or transmitting the child's name coexisted with matrilocal residence. In other words, if megaronym were to be accepted as a general category, it would have to be divided into a number of more specific sub-categories. ' Paronym ' requires no elucidation, as it derives from classical Greek usage and is therefore, strictly speaking, no neologism. It would also indicate a comprehensive category, covering a larger set of sub-groups than that related to the linguistic process of metonymy, but less ambiguous than the above quoted ' eponym '.

As a person's allegiances throughout life conform consistently with this threefold derivation, so do his names.

The soul name – a *psychonym*, or better a *hebdomadonym* – corresponding to the day of birth is undisputedly God-given; neither parent, nor any other human being or ancestor, can do anything to establish or alter it. The *ɛkɛla duma*'s connection with its bearer's fate, as we have seen, is of the vaguest sort. In everyday life, the fact of bearing one soul name or another is a mere matter of course, and its symbolical or mystical connotations are disregarded. Although there is genuine fear of sorcerers who may use this name to harm its bearer, or of enemies using it to set a curse, this does not lead to any tabooing of the name.

Twins and the other *nyangonle mmalɛ* whose serial names denote their special God-given nature pay little more than lip service to the ' holiness and purity ' revealed by their names, and so do their kin and neighbours. Likewise, the occasional naming of a child after the local god credited with favouring his conception and birth entails some lasting ritual obligations by the child's parents and later by the child himself, but unless the person is chosen as a priest or priestess of that deity, these obligations are no stricter than those customarily observed by other worshippers. In the same way, needless to add, baptized persons show no particular veneration of the saints they are named for and, indeed, have no inkling of their historical existence. In short, personal names of various types are drawn from what could be termed the sphere of faith and confirm the basic religiousness of the Nzema. But the mystical value of the name, its consideration ' not as a mere label, but as a distinct part of man's personality ', its identification with the soul, and similar themes recurring in the literature, are hardly to be detected among the Nzema of our time.

Their birth names or *geneseonyms*, based on the serial order of children or on the eventual presence of twins, are distinctly mother-oriented – a variety or matronyms, though some could be classed as fratronyms (*e.g.* Anlima, a mother's first-born after twins). No attention is paid to whether a child happens to be his father's first, second, or last born; the relevant factor is the order in the series of the mother's deliveries or their plurality.

This is more than counterbalanced by the father's almost exclusive role in determining the main name – the autonym – and of course the patronymic, plus an occasional paronym or nickname. The fact that in a matrilineal society a person's identity is defined by patrilateral names is accounted for by the Nzema themselves as a normal consequence of the mixed nature of the components that combine to form the human being. Thus, while the immediate attribution of the soul name is explained as the acknowledgment of God's role as a dispenser of life and destiny, and while matrilineal descent alone is decisive in determining the child's clan and lineage affiliation and the all-important social and economic ties linked with them, the father's role is predominant in establishing his characteristics as an individual.

Nzabelano names, moreover, not only confirm the patrilateral orientation of the naming pattern, but suggest that at one time the rights deriving from

patrifiliation operated at a corporate level, not merely in the sphere of individual father-son relationships. This epainonym's alleged connection with the worship of river gods, its transmission in the male line, and its lingering use as a response to a greeting, leave no doubt as to its close correspondence to the *ntɔrɔ* of the Ashanti, as illustrated by Rattray (1923: 45), Fortes 1950: 264-266), and Busia (1954: 196-200)[17], and to the *egyabosom* of the Fanti, as described by Christensen (1954: 77-96). In contrast with the matrilineal *abusua*, the agnatic groupings based on ' the spirit of the paternal line ' embodied in river or lake gods appear to have become obsolescent in the major Akan nations[18], but the underlying principle persists, and seemed significant enough to Christensen to lead him to speak of double descent among the Fanti.

Whatever the causes, the corresponding Nzema *nzabelano* complex has reached an even more advanced stage of obsolescence. Were it not for the surviving use of praise appellations, the observer would be at pains to detect its existence at all – a reminder, incidentally, of the meaningfulness of names. In our day, groups of persons answering to the same *nzabelano* are not functioning corporate units. They hold no joint meetings, they do not hold or transmit property, they are acephalous, and they are practically ignored by most people. Their evanescent nature is all the more striking when compared with the well-knit, ubiquitous, and actively functioning matrilineal descent groups, or *abusua*.

On these grounds, as well as on the basis of other considerations that cannot be discussed here, I consider it improper to speak of double descent among the Nzema. Following the terminology of Goody's (1961) tentative classification, the Nzema system could be listed, along with those of their Ashanti, Fanti and Anyi neighbours, among ' matrilineal systems with complementary agnatic groups '.

Apart from the controversial choice of such definitions, the analysis of personal names confirms the relevance of social relations arising from patri-

[17] The difficulty of obtaining reliable information on this subject is shown by the patent inconsistencies in such authoritative writers as Christaller (1933: 529) and Herskovits (1937). However, the correspondence referred to is confirmed beyond doubt by the comparison of *nzabelano* names with some of the responses to greetings quoted by Busia (1954: 199): Twi *eson* corresponds to Nzema *ɛsonwu*, Twi *aburu* possibly to Nzema *ɔbele*; *anyaado* is identical in both lists.

[18] Writing over twenty years ago, Busia (1954: 198) remarked: " Owing to the fact that the practices connected with the *Ntorɔ* have ceased to be generally observed, very few Ashanti have clear ideas about it. Though every Ashanti belongs to a *Ntorɔ* category, there are many who cannot answer correctly the question, ' What Ntorɔ do you wash? ' ", and he speaks about it prevalently in the past tense. *Nzabelano* appellations are also known to the Anyi, but according to Amon d'Aby (1960: 84-85) the Anyi equate them with nicknames used in response to personal given names: " *Mgbayàè* et *nzablano* sont deux synonymes pour traduire le mot français surnom. Un même surnom est *mgbayàè* lorsqu'il est prononcé par la voix humaine, et *nzablano* quand il est émis par les tam-tams parleurs ". Quite a few young Nzema, who never use their *nzabelano* and are not interested in old customs, are liable to the same confusion.

filiation in a matrilineal society, the structural pattern of which is strongly reminiscent of that outlined by Fortes (1963) for the Ashanti. The patrilateral leaning is now being emphasized by the incipient adoption of Western-inspired surnames. But the general trend, which Fortes (1950: 269) aptly defined as ' an arrangement of polar relationships ', is clearly rooted in traditional Nzema culture, aiming at the achievement of a positive balance between the dominant and the ' submerged ' line of descent.

The presence or absence of certain categories of names in the Nzema system is indicative of social principles and trends. There are no andronyms: this reflects the largely (though, to be sure, not entirely) independent position of the woman, who assumes a new status at marriage, along with new duties and privileges, but in no way alters her situation vis à vis her matrilineage.

While there is abundance of patronyms and matronyms, there are no teknonyms. Names are intended to manifest the person's relation to his ascendants rather than to his offspring; they are retrospective rather than prospective. This indicates a prevalently conservative attitude, though surely it cannot be said that all societies which use teknonyms are progressive in the common sense of the term.

An even clearer indication of conservatism lies in the fact that naming rules relative to the first five classes of names examined in this paper ensure the persistence of the same names (and of many nicknames) for generations, indeed for centuries, and presumably for a long time to come. Hebdomadonyms, geneseonyms, patronyms-megaronyms, autonyms, the first two types of paronyms, and of course such epainonyms as the *nzabelano*, are constantly drawn from a traditional repertory, the linguistic/historical origin of which cannot be reconstructed by ethnological methods, but which is culturally circumscribed: in a word, they are *palaeonyms*. Their numerical predominance is guaranteed by the dynamic process of tradition, but their perpetual ' recycling ', or ' remise en circulation ', does not exclude a parallel process originating from free individual inventiveness, *i.e.* the occasional creation of entirely new names, such as those I have classified under the third type of *mgbayelɛ*, which can be described as *neonyms*. For the traditionally-minded Nzema, also Christian names – *baptonyms*, of course – are neonyms, though they are not freely invented.

Finally, if we consider the relationship of the naming system to the dominant social structures, the Nzema pattern disproves the fashionable stereotype attributed to clanic societies. Though the Nzema, like the other Akan nations, have clans, and plants or animals as symbolical emblems of each clan (Grottanelli 1962), they do not form their proper names ' starting from clanic appellations ' (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 228), nor does each clan or sub-clan ' possess a set of names the use of which is reserved to its members ' (*ibid.*: 230-231), nor is there a prohibition system applying to individual appellations any more than to collective ones (*ibid.*: 233), nor consequent contamination of personal names and of phonetically connected common words (*ibid.* 234), nor do the Nzema recognize a distinction between sacred

proper names and profane terms of address, connected or not (*ibid.* 242-243) [19]. The loose clan organization, and the still actively functioning lineage solidarity, do not interfere with, or impose limitations on, the naming system, or stand in the way of its graual adaptation to modern conditions.

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[19] Lévi-Strauss admits at one point that the general picture he has drawn does not have a universal validity: " Certes, les coutumes et les procédés que nous venons d'évoquer ne se rencontrent pas dans toutes les sociétés exotiques, ni même dans toutes celles qui désignent leurs segments par des noms animaux et végétaux " (1974: 235).

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P.S. I regret not having read and utilized A. RETEL-LAURENTIN and S. HORVATH, *Les noms de naissance (indicateurs de la situation familiale et sociale en Afrique Noire)*, Paris: SELAF, 1972, which I found cited in a footnote of CARDONA (1976: 139) only after writing the present paper. The bibliography on African names appended to this work (pp. 145-148) might be useful in view of future research.

SOMMARIO

Gli Nzema, la nazione akan che occupa l'estrema zona sud-occidentale del Ghana e parte del territorio ivoriano immediatamente limitrofo, usano diverse specie di nomi personali, che si possono classificare in sette categorie: 1) *ɛkɛla duma* o nome d'anima, 2) *awolɛ duma* o nome di nascita, 3) *ɛze duma* o patronimico, 4) *dumandolɛ* o semplicemente *duma*, nome assegnato, 4) *mgbayelɛ* o soprannome, 6) *ɛzonenlɛ duma* o nome di battesimo, detto anche *alofolɛ duma* o nome europeo, 7) cognome o casato secondo l'uso occidentale. Una categoria a parte è rappresentata dallo *nzabelano*, appellazione laudativa che ogni individuo eredita dal proprio padre e che viene annunciata formalmente in occasione di riunioni, a titolo di ringraziamento, di presentazioni, ecc.

La pluralità di tali nomi, usati singolarmente o aggruppati secondo le circostanze per designare l'individuo o come allocutivi, si presta a essere interpretata in funzione delle concezioni nzema circa gli agenti ' datori di vita ', e dei rapporti che legano la persona ai suoi ascendenti e altri congiunti. L'A. analizza le norme che regolano la scelta o l'attribuzione automatica dei diversi tipi di nomi, le relazioni sociali e le credenze religiose che stanno alla loro base, i riti che talora ne accompagnano l'assegnazione, le innovazioni di recente introdotte nel sistema dietro influsso europeo. Il quadro generale conferma l'importanza strutturale dei rapporti di patrifiliazione in una società in cui la discendenza matrilineare conserva la sua priorità nell'ambito socio-economico.

L'esame del sistema nzema di nomi personali suggerisce all'A. alcune considerazioni sullo stato poco incoraggiante degli studi teorici e comparativi in argomento, e sulla possibile adozione di una terminologia tecnica più precisa delle diverse categorie di nomi.